Listen and answer the questions.

1. What is the more urgent question for US schools right now during COVID-19? Why?

The more urgent question may be whether students are eating. About 30 million American kids depend on their schools for free or low-cost meals. But many aren't getting them.

2. Can all the students get the free meals they are qualified for? Why?

Only 10% of the free meals are served. As more and more parents and caregivers have returned to work, it's become much harder for them or their kids to get to the sites to get meals.

3. What foods can students get from their schools for free?

They can get everyday lunch and breakfast for free or at a low cost.

4. What do schools do to ensure that students can get free foods when the schools are closed during the pandemic?

Some schools are actually trying to pack and freeze a whole week's worth of meals into just one pickup. And then put meals on school buses and then trying to meet students at dozens of bus stops each day.

5. What is Pandemic EBT?

It is a program created by Congress or the government. It basically took the value of the school meals that kids weren't getting in the spring and it put it - usually in a lump sum of a few hundred dollars - onto a debit card that families could use directly at the grocery store. It kept between 2 1/2 and 3 1/2 million children out of hunger this summer.

6. What does it mean by the phrase “the wildcard in this whole equation”? What is the wildcard?

It means the uncertainty in this whole situation. But by Labor Day, the debit card is expired now in 33 states. And only Congress can renew it. And that doesn't seem likely to happen anytime soon - at least, not at the moment.

Listen and fill in the blanks.

'Children Are Going Hungry': Why Schools Are Struggling To Feed Students

https://www.npr.org/transcripts/908442609

NOEL KING, HOST:

Are kids forced by COVID to do school from home actually learning? This is a big question right now. But a more urgent question may be whether they're eating. About 30 million American kids depend on their schools for free or low-cost meals. And a new analysis says many aren't getting them. NPR's education correspondent Cory Turner has been following this one. Hey, Cory.

CORY TURNER, BYLINE: Hey, Noel.

KING: How many kids are we talking about who may not be getting food?

TURNER: You know, well, I spoke with Lauren Bauer at the Brookings Institution. And she's been studying the results of this new household survey from the Census Bureau. And she found that among low-income households with kids who qualify for either free or low-cost school meals, only about 15% have recently been getting them. And, you know, I heard something similar when I got on the phone with school leaders all across the country. So for example, in Tucson, Ariz., the schools' Food Services Director Lindsay Aguilar, she told me they're now reaching just a small fraction of their kids.

LINDSAY AGUILAR: Every day that goes by is the day that we're serving 10% of our normal amount of meals. And that's the disheartening part is because in our district, 70% of our families qualify for free or reduced. So I know there's a need.

TURNER: Aguilar's now trying to meet that need, Noel, by actually putting meals on school buses and then trying to meet students at dozens of bus stops each day.

KING: Oh, wow. So that is a lot of logistics. How common is that?

TURNER: Yeah.

KING: Are other schools trying things like this?

TURNER: Well, so the standard here when the pandemic began, at least, and schools closed is that families would generally have to show up at a daily designated pickup site, like a school, to grab a bagged lunch and, usually, a breakfast for the next morning. But as more and more parents and caregivers have returned to work, it's become much harder for them or their kids to get to these sites. And that's why school districts are, right now, really trying to improvise.

In Fulton County, Ga., I spoke with Alyssia Wright. She heads the school nutrition program there. She told me since lots of people just can't show up every day, she's been trying to pack and freeze a whole week's worth of meals into just one pickup. And now she's doing what Tucson's doing. She's trying to figure out how to fit all of this food onto their school buses. And she told me she is constantly worrying about hungry students.

ALYSSIA WRIGHT: Every day. I worry about them every day. I think about it every night. We come up with ways every week to find a new way to get meals to our kids.

TURNER: But this is really important, Noel. As they're trying to find these new ways, many meal programs - in fact, the majority - appear to be losing money. And some are even at risk of having to lay off staff soon.

KING: And in the meantime, 30 million kids rely on this. Can the federal government do anything?

TURNER: Well, I want to focus on one really interesting wildcard in this whole equation. In the spring, Congress created something called Pandemic EBT. It basically took the value of the school meals that kids weren't getting in the spring and it put it - usually in a lump sum of a few hundred dollars - onto a debit card that families could use directly at the grocery store. Now, Lauren Bauer, the researcher at Brookings, she studied this program. And she says it kept between 2 1/2 and 3 1/2 million children out of hunger this summer. But by Labor Day, it's expired now in 33 states. And only Congress can renew it. And that doesn't seem likely to happen anytime soon - at least, not at the moment.

KING: NPR education correspondent Cory Turner. Thanks for your reporting on this, Cory.

TURNER: Thank you, Noel.