Attachment A

Superintendent’s Memo #057-22

March 11, 2022



# LEARNFARE COORDINATOR'S GUIDE FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

## Introduction

The Learnfare system is a means by which local school divisions can be made aware of those pupils whose families receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, in order to allow the schools to monitor attendance and report truancy among these students to the local department of social services. The information is delivered to each school division via email. Each email has an encrypted file attached that contains detailed Learnfare information for that school division. Each school division has been advised, via secure mail, of their pass-phrase that will allow them to decrypt (unlock) these encrypted email attachments. Once the files are decrypted, they may be viewed, printed, or imported to Excel or other spreadsheet software products.

## Learnfare Coordinators at Local School Divisions

In August 1999, each school division was asked to designate a Learnfare Coordinator to whom emailed TANF data would be sent each month by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), Home Office, in Richmond.

Learnfare Coordinators are responsible for receiving the Learnfare information and making it available to staff in their school divisions who monitor attendance. The primary contact for the Virginia Department of Social Services is **Michele Atkinson** at (804) 726-7929. Her email address is Michele.Atkinson@dss.virginia.gov. The secondary contact is **Cynthia Adams** at (804) 726-7144. Her email address is Cynthia Adams@dss.virginia.gov. These two contacts maintain a registry of all Learnfare contacts at the school divisions. This registry includes the name, position, telephone number, email address, and other contact information for each Learnfare Coordinator. This registry is the basis for identifying the email address to be used when the Learnfare data is emailed monthly. Therefore, it is imperative that the school divisions notify them anytime that there is a change in the person or contact information of their local Learnfare Coordinator. In addition, you should contact them if you encounter any technical problems or have questions about Learnfare policy. The information contained in the Learnfare data files is to be used according to policies and procedures established and agreed upon by each local school division and local department of social services (LDSS) in their locality.

## The Learnfare Information

The Learnfare data is produced monthly from information contained in the current TANF records of the VDSS. This information is separated by what VDSS calls Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) codes. This three-digit code identifies the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) in which each child resides. The FIPS codes have been mapped to the appropriate school divisions, so that each school division will receive information only on school-aged children in their area.

Each Learnfare file adheres to the following format:

Locality FIPS Code 3 characters numeric

TANF case number 12 characters numeric

LDSS worker number 4 characters numberic

TANF case name 39 characters alpha (parent)

SSN (child) 9 characters numberic

Child’s name 39 characters alpha

Date of Birth (child) YYYY/MM/DD

Address 1 28 characters alpha/numeric

Address 2 24 characters alpha/numeric

City 15 characters alpha

State 2 characters alpha

Zip code 9 characters numeric

A note for programmers out there: Each field in the file is alpha/numeric, regardless of the representation stated above.

Each file is a snapshot of current TANF cases at the time the file is extracted. Therefore, each new file supersedes all previous files. The files are extracted monthly, usually on the first day of each month. Emails containing the encrypted files should arrive at the school divisions by the fifth of each month.

## Encryption of the Learnfare Data and Privacy Act Notification

In order to assure security of the private information contained in the Learnfare data files, the files are encrypted prior to being sent across the Internet as an attachment to an email message. Simply stated, the files are "logically" scrambled so that any unauthorized person attempting to read/access/intercept the files will see only garbled lines. Each Learnfare Coordinator has access to a "pass-phrase" key that will decrypt (unlock) the messages and render the files viewable. This pass-phrase is an integral part of the system's security and must be kept confidential.

Information contained in the Learnfare files is protected by Virginia statute.

Accordingly, the following privacy notice will accompany each file.

**The following client information is released subject to the requirements of the *Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act.* Pursuant to that *Act and* the provisions of Title 63.2-102 of the *Code of Virginia*, the information provided is to be safeguarded and utilized only for the following purposes as specified by Virginia Department of Social Services.**

## PURPOSE OF RELEASE

This information is released for the purpose of determining if a truant child is receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and must be reported to the local department of social services.

Date of Release: **August 1, 2017**

This data is not to be released outside your school division, or your local social service agency, without express authorization from the Virginia Department of Social Services. Unauthorized use or dissemination of this client information will constitute a violation of the *Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act*.

If you have questions about Learnfare, need to report a change in Coordinator or email address, or need assistance accessing the Learnfare file, please call:

Michele Atkinson, Division of Benefit Programs Virginia Department of Social Services

801 East Main Street, 9th floor Richmond, VA 23219

Phone: (804) 726-7929

Fax: (804) 819-7184

Email: Michele.Atkinson@dss.virginia.gov

Cynthia Adams, Division of Benefit Programs Virginia Department of Social Services

801 East Main Street, 9th floor Richmond, VA 23219

Phone: (804) 726-7144

Fax: (804) 819-7184

Email: Cynthia.Adams@dss.virginia.gov

## Download of Learnfare Data Files

As stated earlier, the Learnfare data file arrives as an encrypted, compressed attachment to an email message. The process to download the file to your PC is relatively simple. However, with the myriad of web-based email systems installed, explaining the extraction process is a challenge. To keep things simple, we will base our extraction process on the use of Microsoft's OUTLOOK email system. Coordinators using other email support systems may need to consult their local email support personnel to translate these instructions for their particular software environment.

The encrypted files are sent as .zip files. This means that a zip tool will be needed to decompress the file.

If you do not already have zip/unzip software, there are many utilities available for gaining access to .zip files. Follow the directions included with the software downloaded to extract and decrypt the Learnfare data. Some of them can be found and downloaded through the following: the [XYZ](https://dac.gen.xyz/cart2.html?tld=.xyz&sld=download) webpage.

### **Step 1: You Have Mail**

Around the first of each month, you will receive an email from learnfare@dss.state.va.us.

Double-click on the message to view it.

You will see the privacy notice in the body of the email, and you will see that there are two files attached to the email, a .zip and a .txt file. You are only concerned with the

.zip file. The .txt file can be ignored.

### **Step 2: The download process**

Double-click on the .zip file attachment.

A dialog box will appear, entitled "Opening Mail Attachment”. The box requests you to select one of two options: OPEN the file or SAVE it to disk. You are not required to save the file to disk. When saving the file, save it as **All Files**. You may want to rename the file at that time to distinguish it from other months’ files.

### **Step 3: The decryption process**

Using your zip software, unzip (extract) the file. When the "Password" dialog box appears, enter your pass-phrase just as it was mailed to you. There should be two words with a hyphen between them.

## Viewing the Learnfare Data File via WordPad or Word

The Learnfare data files can be easily viewed using WordPad. Do NOT attempt to use Notepad to view the file, as the records will not line up correctly using this tool.

## Viewing the File via a Spreadsheet Program

The file is viewable via MS Excel and by other common spreadsheet solutions. The source file is a comma delimited file. You will need to know that when opening the file with your spreadsheet program.

With Excel, the large number fields, TANF case number and SSN, appear to be garbled. To fix that, select the entire column and reformat the field to number, with no decimal positions. That corrects the problem within Excel.

## Identifying Truant TANF Recipients

Because school attendance is a program requirement for TANF recipient households, each Virginia school system is requested to compare the emailed TANF recipient file against truancy records. Any truant child in a TANF recipient household should be identified and communicated to their local Department of Social Services office.

You can go to the following link for a list of the local offices: [Virginia Department of Social Services](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/).