

USDA Food and Nutrition Service: Child Nutrition Programs

Community Eligibility Provision



Overview

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal service option that allows schools and school districts located in high poverty

areas to offer breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students. CEP was authorized by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA, Public Law 111-296; December 13, 2010).

Rather than collecting school meal applications to make individual student eligibility determinations, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students who automatically qualify for free meals based on their household's participation in specific means-tested programs; or their status as a foster, homeless, migrant, or runaway child; or Head Start enrollee.

Benefits

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| Students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases access to nutritious school meals at no cost to students. Increases student participation. Improves the learning environment. Eliminates social stigma. |
| Households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminates paperwork. No need to submit applications for students to receive free or reduced price school meals. No meal charges. |
| Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eases administrative burden and improves program efficiency. Eliminates unpaid meal balances. |

Eligibility

School districts, groups of schools or individual schools may participate.



To be eligible, they must:

- Ensure that at least 25 percent of enrolled students are identified students (≥ 25 percent) as of April 1 in the prior school year.
- Participate in both the NSLP and SBP.
- Offer lunches and breakfasts to all students at no charge.

- Notify their State agency of their intent to participate in CEP by June 30.

Identified Students = Those certified for free meals without the use of household applications (for example, those directly certified through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)).

Once elected, schools operate SBP and NSLP using CEP for a four-year cycle.

Calculating the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) & Claiming Percentage

$$\text{ISP} = \frac{\# \text{ Identified Students}}{\# \text{ Enrolled Students}} \times 100$$

Claiming Percentage = The ISP is multiplied by a factor of 1.6 to determine the total percentage of meals reimbursed at the Federal FREE rate; the remaining meals (up to 100%) are reimbursed at the Federal PAID rate. No reduced-price meals are claimed by CEP schools.

$$\% \text{ Free} = \text{ISP} \times 1.6$$

Financial Considerations

Participation in CEP is a local decision and one that requires careful consideration of many factors by local educational agencies (LEAs), including financial viability. Eligible LEAs and schools must consider their ability to provide meals at no cost and cover their operating costs with Federal assistance and any other available funds, including State and/or local funds.

Learn More!

CEP Resources:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/community-eligibility-provision>

Contact your State for more information:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/program-contacts>