

FRAC FACTS

Community Eligibility Provision

An Amazing New Opportunity

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows high-poverty schools to offer both breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students while eliminating the traditional school meal application process.

Schools across the country have successfully implemented this new option and are seeing the many benefits of ensuring that all of their students have access to healthy school meals.

Benefits of the Community Eligibility Provision

- Lessens administrative work—schools no longer have to collect and verify school meal applications and can focus on feeding children.
- Increases participation—in the initial pilot states, schools that implemented the provision for two years increased breakfast participation by 25 percent and lunch participation by 13 percent.
- Facilitates implementation of alternative breakfast service models—when schools don't have to collect fees or count each meal served by fee category, it simplifies implementation of breakfast in the classroom and “grab and go” service models that can boost participation further.
- Improves the financial viability of school nutrition programs—when participation increases, school districts can take advantage of economies of scale, and reinvest additional revenue to improve nutrition quality and provide staff training.
- Eliminates unpaid meal fees—when all children eat at no charge, the school district does not have to collect unpaid fees from families.



An Unequivocal Success in the First Year of Nationwide Availability

- CEP has been phased in a few states at a time since the 2011-2012 school year. In the 2014-2015 school year, the first year of nationwide availability:
- More than 14,000 high poverty schools are participating, roughly half of all eligible schools and 1 in 10 schools nationwide;
- More than 2,200 school districts have adopted the provision, about 1 in 7 districts nationwide; and
- As a result, more than 6 million children in these schools have access to two healthy meals at school each day.¹

Who Should Participate?

- Any school with 40 percent or more “identified students” can participate in CEP. Identified students include children who are directly certified (through data matching) for free meals because they live in households that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), as well as children who are certified for free school meals without

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Take Up of Community Eligibility This School Year: More Than 6 Million Children Have Better Access to School Meals*, <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=5273>

submitting a school meal application because of their status as being in foster care, enrolled in Head Start, homeless, runaway, or migrant students.

- Typically, schools with 75 percent or more free and reduced-price certified students will meet the 40 percent identified student requirement. School districts with 40 percent or more identified students may participate district-wide or may group schools together to reach the 40 percent identified student threshold.
- Reimbursements are calculated by multiplying the percentage of identified students by 1.6 to determine the percent of meals that will be reimbursed at the free rate. For example, a school with 50 percent identified students would be reimbursed for 80 percent of the breakfasts and lunches eaten at the free reimbursement rate and the remaining 20 percent at the paid rate.

Increases School Meal Participation

In schools that implemented CEP in the 2011-2012 school year in Illinois, Kentucky and Michigan:

- Breakfast participation increased 25 percent, from 44 percent in October 2010 to 56 percent in October 2012; and
- Lunch participation increased 13 percent, from 69 percent in October 2010 to 78 percent in October 2012.²

For school districts that implement CEP district-wide, like Detroit Public Schools, the effect is further amplified. In Detroit, during the 2011-2012 school year, compared to the previous school year:

- Breakfast participation increased by 15 percent, or 7,400 additional students per day; and
- Lunch participation increased by 30 percent, or nearly 14,000 additional students per day.

Improves the Financial Viability of School Breakfast and Lunch Programs

As a result of expanded student participation and reductions in administrative work, many CEP schools have reported increased revenues, resulting in stronger school nutrition programs overall.

- “Our department’s main goal is to feed students healthy meals so that they are ready to learn. Providing breakfast and lunch free of charge to all students through community eligibility has boosted participation by removing barriers like household applications and collecting fees from students. By feeding more children we are benefiting our school, our students, and our community.” – *Leslie Fowler; Executive Director of Nutrition Support Services, Chicago Public Schools, Illinois*
- “Community eligibility has strengthened our school nutrition program financially by expanding participation and increasing revenue. We now have children eating who never ate school meals before, with an increase of approximately 1 million additional meals served over the school year. We have been able to use the increased revenue to improve school nutrition infrastructure and the quality of the food served to our children.” – *Brenda Fish; Director of School Nutrition, Floyd County Schools, Kentucky*

Eliminating Unpaid Meal Fees

Offering meals at no charge to all students means that schools no longer have to go about collecting unpaid meal fees from families or foot the bill for meals served when children do not have money to pay. Removing this dynamic between families and schools allows school nutrition staff to focus on preparing and serving healthy meals to children and eliminates a significant financial burden for school districts and families.

For more resources, visit FRAC’s Community Eligibility Page – www.frac.org/community-eligibility

² FRAC and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Community Eligibility: Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free, http://frac.org/pdf/community_eligibility_report_2013.pdf