

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)



CEP is a federal reimbursement option that allows high-poverty schools and districts to provide breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. Schools do not process school meal applications, track meals by fee category (i.e. free, reduced-price, paid) or collect fees; they simply count the total number of meals served.

Eligibility

Any school district, group of schools in a district, or individual school with 40 percent or more “identified students”—children eligible for free school meals who are identified by means other than an individual household application—can participate.

Identified students include:

- Children who are directly certified for free school meals because their household participates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and in certain instances, Medicaid.
- Children who are certified for free school meals without an application because they are experiencing homelessness, are considered a runaway, certified as migrant, in foster care, or enrolled in Head Start.

Calculating Reimbursements

Under CEP, all meals are served to students at no cost to them. Meals are still reimbursed by the USDA and state agencies, but CEP schools use a more streamlined approach to counting and claiming.

Reimbursement for meals is calculated using an Identified Student Percentage (ISP). The ISP is determined by the number of students certified for free school meals by means other than a household application, compared to the total school district’s/group of schools’/individual school’s enrollment as of April 1.

The percentage of meals reimbursed at the free rate is determined by multiplying the ISP by 1.6. For example, a school with 50% identified students would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80% (50 x 1.6) of the breakfasts and lunches served, and at the paid rate for the remaining 20%.

Households with students attending CEP schools were nearly

3x less likely to be food insecure

than households with students attending a school eligible for, but not participating in CEP.

CEP Benefits Students and Schools:

- Reduces the administrative burden—schools no longer collect fees or verify school meal applications
- Eliminates the stigma—ending the perception that school breakfast and lunch are just for “poor kids”
- Boosts participation—allowing more kids to experience the educational and health benefits linked to eating school meals
- Simplifies counting and claiming—optimizing the impact of offering Breakfast After the Bell
- Eliminates unpaid school meal debt—schools no longer have to foot the bill for unpaid meal fees or try to collect them from families

Increasing the ISP

School districts should implement strong direct certification practices throughout the school year to increase the district's ISP. Strong direct certification practices not only help your district accurately reflect the poverty within the school, but also can both improve your school's chances of qualifying for CEP and ensure the highest reimbursement rate once enrolled in CEP. Learn more about direct certification best practices from our [tip sheet](#).

Applying for CEP

Eligible school districts must declare their intent to implement CEP in a school or group of schools for the upcoming school year by June 30. This requires applying to the New York State Education Department, Child Nutrition Program Administration.

Eligibility is based on the ISP calculated using April 1 enrollment and the current school year's direct certification data.

The application and instructions can be found at: cn.nysed.gov/content/CEP

We Can Help

Hunger Solutions New York works with schools, government leaders, and organizations to expand the implementation of CEP. We work one-on-one with districts to:

- Help administrators understand CEP eligibility and the application process;
- Provide strategies to improve local direct certification processes to maximize CEP reimbursement;
- Explain CEP implementation and reimbursement;
- Connect schools considering CEP implementation with CEP schools with similar demographics, helping administrators better understand CEP finances;
- Connect schools with community partners and programs to maximize the impact of CEP.



“Before CEP, we were struggling getting lunch forms back from families that we knew had to fill [them] out. I felt that impacted our numbers. I don't think it reflected our true poverty level. ... I'm very grateful and appreciative of what we have in place now.”

*—Dr. Roberto Padilla, Superintendent,
Newburgh Enlarged City School District*

Additional Resources:

[No Kid Hungry's CEP Calculator](#)

[Promoting Educational Equity with the Community Eligibility Provision](#)

[Community Eligibility: Making it Work with Lower ISPs](#)

**For more information, contact Jessica Pino-Goodspeed
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