

## Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) School Food Service

Section 104a of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act provides an alternative to household applications for free and reduced price meals. Community Eligibility Provision allows schools, a group of schools, or a district with high numbers of low-income children to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting school meal applications. This potentially increases participation in school meal programs and decreases school food service administration costs.

### Requirements:

- Community Eligibility is available to public, private and tribal schools.
- LEAs or schools must have an identified student percentage of at least 40%, which is the percent of student enrollment listed in the Direct Certification list. (based on data from April 1st of the school year prior to implementing CEP).
- Can enter CEP or end CEP at any time with State Agency notification

### Reimbursement school Lunch and other grants:

- The CEP uses Direct Certification percentages to qualify sites for participation.
- Schools participating in CEP will never collect meal eligibility applications, complete the Verification Process, or categorize the meals as free, reduced-price, or paid when serving the meals.
- Identified students are those who are directly certified for meals at no cost on the basis of their participation in SNAP, TANF, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, and the extension of these benefits go to students within the same household. Also included are students certified as homeless, migrant, foster, runaway, or participating in the Head Start program.
- The Identified Student Percentage (ISP) is determined by dividing the number of identified students, as of April 1 of the SY prior to starting the CEP, by the number of enrolled students as of the same date, and multiplying the quotient by 100, round to two decimal positions.
- Schools may qualify individually or as a group to reach the ISP threshold of 40 percent.
- The reimbursement rate for both lunch and breakfast is determined by multiplying the ISP by a factor of 1.6, round to two decimal positions. The resulting number is the percent of meals reimbursed at the free reimbursement rate, with the remaining meals reimbursed at the paid rate. No meals are reimbursed at the reduced-price rate while sites participate in the CEP. For example, a school with an ISP of 50 percent would be reimbursed at the free rate of 80 percent of the breakfasts and lunches it served ( $50 \text{ percent} \times 1.6 = 80 \text{ percent}$ ) and the remaining 20 percent would be reimbursed at the paid rate.
- Schools, or a group of schools, with an ISP of 62.5 percent or higher may be eligible to be reimbursed at the free meal rate for **all** meals served.
- Participating schools use the same CEP reimbursement percent (or a higher rate if the level of direct certification increases) for 4 years.
- If the ISP increases in years two through four, a school may apply for their reimbursement to be paid based on the higher ISP.
- If the ISP decreases in years two through four, the reimbursement rate will be paid based on the ISP determined in year one.
- If the ISP decreases at a site to lower than 40 percent but is at least 30 percent in year four, the school can qualify for a grace year and continue with the CEP for a fifth year. Reimbursements in the grace year will be paid based on the ISP rate as of April 1 of year four.
- No later than June 30, the Maine DOE must receive applications to participate in the CEP.

### Benefits of Community Eligibility Provision:

- All students receive meals at no charge.
- All students receive the benefits of nutritious school meals.
- Improves student's academic success.

- Decreases hunger related illnesses and behaviors.
- More USDA food to offset Food budget.
- Decreases paperwork for schools with no applications to process and eliminates the verification process for School Nutrition Programs.\*
- Improves economies of scale and reduces labor per meal costs.
- Frees up money for other educational resources.
- No uncollected student bills.
- Improves breakfast and lunch participation – national studies project a 25% increase in breakfast participation and a 13% increase in lunch participation.
- Provides more time for student to eat and less time in line.
- Improves attendance at the school, less absenteeism.

To find the list of eligible districts/schools visit the DOE website

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition/programs/nslp/specialprovisions>

Contact Child Nutrition Office David Hartley 624-6878 [david.hartley@maine.gov](mailto:david.hartley@maine.gov)

\*There may be other state programs that require student economic status that require use of the optional economic status form.