



WHAT IS COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY?

The Community Eligibility Provision (or CEP) is an alternative approach for offering school meals at no cost to all students in a school. CEP is an opportunity for schools with high percentages of low-income children to provide universal meals - free breakfast and lunch to all students.

A school is eligible if 40% of their enrolled students qualify for SNAP, TANF, foster care, Head Start, or are a homeless youth.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- The Identified Student Percentage (ISP) is multiplied by 1.6 to estimate the number of students who would be approved for free or reduced price meals. This percentage is applicable for a 4-year cycle.
- Schools that have an ISP of 62.5% or higher would have 100% of their meals reimbursed.
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has created a simple CEP calculator that schools can utilize to approximate their revenue under the new provision.

www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- All school students receive two healthy school meals at no cost
 - CEP helps to build a better educational environment for students.
 - CEP increases attendance and student retention.
 - Having access to a healthy breakfast and lunch helps students learn and remain focused throughout the day.
 - Students with reliable access to better nutrition eat better and perform better academically.
 - CEP decreases hunger-related behavioral incidents and visits to the school nurse.
- Reduces Stigma
 - CEP ensures that all students experience the educational, social and health benefits of participating in the school meal programs.
 - CEP increases meal participation for all students.
 - Offering meals at no charge to all students reduces stigma often associated with eating school meals or being identified as receiving a free or reduced price meal. By offering meals free to all students you overcome the participation barriers often associated with school meals.

Increases Efficiencies

- There is less administrative burden on schools. Schools no longer have to collect free and reduced meal applications.
- CEP eliminates paperwork; electronic data gathered is more accurate than depending on a paper application that may get waylaid in a student's backpack.
- At CEP schools, food service staff no longer handles payment in the food line because there are no fees to collect.
- Children spend less time waiting in line and have more time to eat.
- Food Service Directors no longer have to collect debt that students haven't paid.
- The alleviation of administrative burden helps schools focus their efforts and resources on improving the quality of meals and service.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

- Schools that have fewer than 40% of their enrolled students that qualify for SNAP, TANF, foster care, Head Start, or are a homeless youth, DO NOT qualify for CEP.
- For schools that have 60% or higher of enrolled students who qualify for SNAP, TANF, foster care, Head Start, or are a homeless youth, it's a no brainer. These schools are guaranteed to receive maximum reimbursement.
- For schools that fall between 40-60% of enrolled students eligible SNAP, TANF, foster care, Head Start, or are a homeless youth often hesitate to adopt CEP. The first year's budget can be difficult to manage because in order to remain budget neutral the school needs to increase participation. Not knowing what the participation increases will be can be too risky for some schools without additional funding to cover a deficit. Although CEP universally increases participation and many schools in Maine in the 40-60% range have successfully adopted CEP, even increased their budgets by adopting CEP, the unknowns of the first year can be daunting. Schools can always opt in or out at anytime.

THE RESULTS!



Community Eligibility is the gold standard for ending hunger in schools.



Schools in Oxford County that adopted CEP have seen their participation rates double.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Full Plates Full Potential advocates for sustainable, systemic solutions to end hunger. To learn about CEP and Summer Meals email us at info@fullplates.org.