

# **Community Eligibility Provision**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Kansas State Department of Education, Child Nutrition & Wellness**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Community Eligibility Provision is a new, innovative provision that allows high need schools to serve free meals to all students while alleviating some administrative burden. Community eligibility allows for a healthier student body and a healthier school meal budget. Below are just a few of the advantages:

1. Community eligibility will increase participation of children in the school meal programs.
2. Community eligibility will reduce administrative costs related to tracking students based on their meal eligibility status. As a result of expanded student participation and reductions in administrative work, there will be stronger school nutrition programs overall.
3. Community eligibility will afford schools the ability to no longer collect payments or use swipe cards or other systems during the meal service.
4. Community eligibility requires schools to serve universal free school breakfast, and it is a great way to facilitate the adoption of innovative breakfast models, such as Breakfast in the Classroom.
5. Community eligibility can reduce stigma because all students are eating meals at no charge, regardless of their income status. And, studies show that well-nourished children are able to focus in class and ultimately do better in school.

#### ***What is Community Eligibility Provision or CEP?***

Section 104(a) of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Act) amended section 11(a)(1) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to provide an alternative that eliminates the need for household applications for free and reduced-price meals in high-poverty Sponsors and schools. This alternative, which is now part of the NSLP, is referred to as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

To be eligible, Sponsors and/or schools must meet a minimum level of “identified students” for free meals in the year prior to implementing Community Eligibility; agree to serve free breakfasts and lunches to all students; and agree to cover with non-Federal funds any costs of providing free meals to students above the amounts provided by Federal assistance. Reimbursement for each Sponsor or school is based on claiming percentages derived from the percentage of identified students, i.e., students certified for free meals through means other than individual household applications. The claiming percentages established in the first year for a Sponsor or school may be used for four school years and may be increased if the percentage of identified students rises for the Sponsor or school.

This program requires schools to offer breakfast and lunch, but will allow individual schools to count and claim meals without the normal free and reduced application process. Schools that participate in CEP will no longer be required to collect Free and Reduced Price School Meals Family Applications to determine student eligibility for free meals. Meals will still need to be counted at the Point of Service (POS), but just the total meals, not meals by category.

### ***How can a district qualify?***

Any school building that has a percentage of “identified students” of 40 percent or more, according to the data reported as of April 1, 2014, will be eligible to participate.

The percentage is calculated by taking all “Identified students” including students directly certified through FA, TANF, FDPIR, Foster; children experiencing homelessness and on the local liaison’s list; Head Start children; migrant youth; runaways; and non-applicants approved by local officials. Districts can participate in a variety of ways: by individual school building direct certification rate, groups of schools’ direct certification rate, or by an entire district’s direct certification rate.

### ***How can a district prepare for the 2014-2015 school year?***

Agree to accurately determine the identified student percentage for the Sponsor or each eligible school or group(s) of schools as of **April 1, 2014** for the upcoming school year and if eligible to participate complete the CEP application in KN-CLAIM to participate on or before **June 30, 2014**.

### ***Do districts need to re-apply every year?***

Once a Sponsor or school is approved, it may participate in the program for the duration of four consecutive years without having to reapply. However, if a Sponsor or school is not at 100 percent free reimbursement, it may provide a new set of direct certification numbers to KSDE for approval each year to increase the reimbursement percentage.

### ***What if a district wants to opt out?***

If approved and accepted into the CEP program, Sponsors and schools are required to participate for the entire school year. If a Sponsor or school decides the program is not beneficial to them, they may opt out of the program on June 30th for the following school year.

## **DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY**

### ***What is direct certification?***

Direct certification means determining children eligible for free meals benefits based on documentation obtained directly from the appropriate State or local agency or other authorized individual. In most situations, direct certification of a child’s eligibility status should not involve the household. The communication exchange should be between an appropriate agency and the Sponsor/school.

### ***What are the methods for calculating the Identified Student Percentage rate for a district, school, and group of schools within a Sponsor?***

The “identified students” rate is calculated by taking the total number directly certified students (plus migrant, homeless, runaway, head start and foster students, if not already included in the direct certification list) and dividing that number by the number of students with access to school lunch or breakfast (in most cases, equal to enrollment).

Districts can report the entire district, a single school, group(s) of schools or any combination of single schools and group(s) of schools. If it is a group or the entire district, the rate is the aggregate of the buildings.

## COUNTING, CLAIMING, AND REIMBURSEMENT

### *How will Sponsors be reimbursed for meals if the calculated participation rate is less than 100%?*

For the 2014-15 school year, schools will be reimbursed by multiplying their “identified student” rate by the USDA authorized factor of 1.6 to determine the percentage of free meals. If the percentage is less than 100 percent, the remaining percentage will be reimbursed at the paid rate.

#### **CEP Claiming Example:**

A school with 50 percent Identified Students would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80 percent of the breakfasts and lunches it served ( $50\% \times 1.6 = 80\%$ ) and the remaining 20 percent would be reimbursed at the paid rate.

Districts with direct certification rates between 40 and 62 percent may be required to pay, from sources other than federal funds, the costs of serving breakfasts and lunches that are in excess of the federal assistance received, including federal cash reimbursement.

## OTHER FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDING

Most local school officials are aware that a number of federal and state programs use eligibility for free and reduced price meals under the NSLP as the basis for low income enrollment status. Districts adopting the Community Eligibility Provision will need to make some reporting adjustments to ensure that they continue to receive their full entitlements under these programs.

- For Title I funding, the US Department of Education has issued detailed guidance on options available to local districts for calculating low income enrollment. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP19-2014os.pdf>.
- For IDEA funding, detailed guidance is expected to be forthcoming from USED.
- **For State At-Risk funding, Sponsors will need to collect the Application for State At Risk Funds for those students not on the Direct Certification list.**