

# Community Eligibility

Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free



# Community Eligibility: Everything You Want to Know but Were Afraid to Ask

Today's Moderator

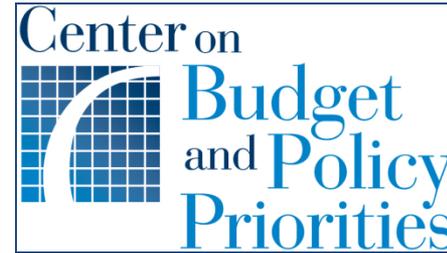


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# Today's Panelists



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# Today's Panelists



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## What is the Community Eligibility Provision?

- Allows schools with a high percentage of needy children to serve free meals to all enrolled students for **four** consecutive school years
- Individual schools, groups of schools, or entire school districts may elect CEP



## What Makes CEP Different?

- School meal programs usually require schools to determine children's eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals via household application
- CEP does not require applications and eliminates the need to collect money from students
- Other "universal free" provisions offered by USDA still require occasional collection of applications; CEP instead relies on data matching from the rolls of other assistance programs, like SNAP and TANF

# Benefits



**Students** enjoy free, healthy meals at school, and with universal meal service, there is no stigma attached.



**Parents** don't have to fill out individual household applications.



**Schools** reduce paperwork and administrative costs, and enjoy a streamlined meal service operation. Students spend less time waiting in lines and more time eating, they are less likely to discard food and come to class better nourished and ready to learn.



## Eligibility

A school district or school must meet the following basic criteria to be eligible to participate in CEP:

- Must participate in, or agree to participate in, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) **and** School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Must already certify at least 40% of students for free meal benefits through means other than household applications
- History of compliance with Program regulations

# How do we Enroll in CEP?

1

- Interested schools and districts must notify their State agency by June 30<sup>th</sup> that they would like to participate (**deadline extended to August 31<sup>st</sup> for SY 2014-15**)

2

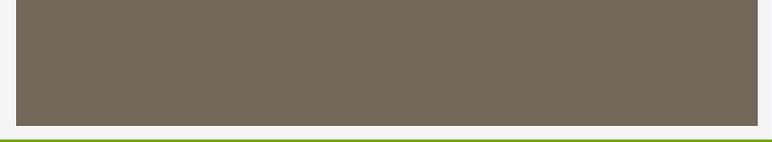
- The State agency will review the documentation to ensure the school/district:
  - Meets the 40% direct certification requirement
  - Participates in both the NSLP and SBP
  - Has a record of administering the meal program in accordance with program regulations

3

- The State agency will facilitate necessary training and technical assistance

4

- Ideally, CEP implementation will be completed before the start of the academic year to ensure that students receive free meals starting on day 1



# How Does Federal Reimbursement Work Under CEP?

- The daily meal count is reimbursed at two rates: “free” and “paid”
- The identified student percentage multiplied by a factor of 1.6 equals the % of total meals reimbursed at the Federal free rate
- The remaining % of total meals is reimbursed at the Federal paid rate
- Meal costs in excess of the total Federal reimbursement must be covered through non-Federal sources

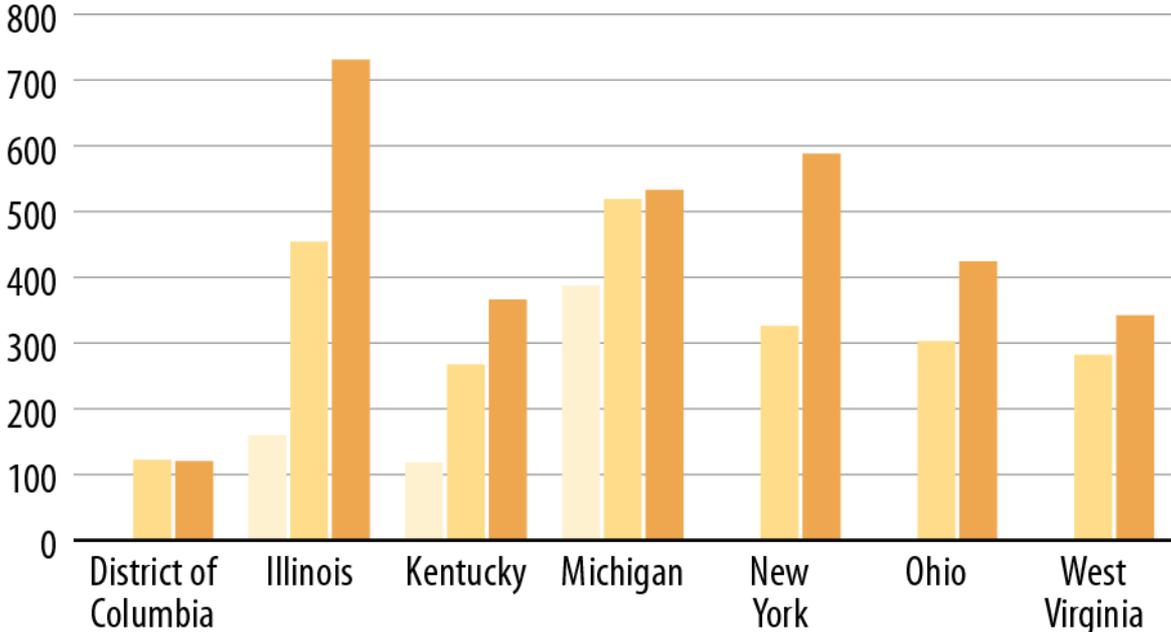
# CEP is Flexible

- Schools or Districts can stop participating in CEP and return to normal procedures should they find it more financially viable to do so
- Even though a CEP cycle lasts four years, eligibility data may be updated on an annual basis if doing so would result in more cash reimbursement from the Federal government
- Participating schools/LEAs that continue to meet the eligibility requirements may choose to sign on for another four years when their CEP cycle is complete

# CEP: Tried, Tested, Already Delivering Results

- Response to CEP has been overwhelmingly **positive**:
  - CEP has operated in more than 4,000 schools in 11 States
  - Participating LEAs of all sizes have generally enjoyed increases in both program participation and revenues after implementing CEP, while experiencing fewer payment errors
  - USDA-DOE guidance outlines alternate ways to allocate formula funding calculations (like Title I dollars and E-Rate discounts) in the absence of individual free and reduced price eligibility data

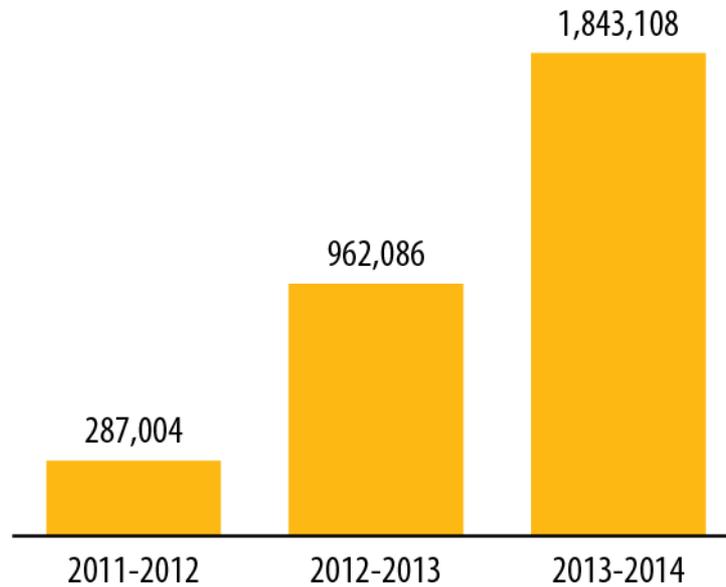
# More Schools Have Adopted Community Eligibility Each Year



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of USDA administrative data

## Community Eligibility Already Helps 1.8 Million Children

Number of children attending community eligibility schools



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of USDA administrative data

## Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free

# COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY

The new community eligibility provision within the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs allows schools in high-poverty areas to offer nutritious meals to all students at no charge. Community eligibility is a proven tool to make sure children in high-poverty schools are fueled up and ready to learn.

### POTENTIAL REACH



Nearly **16 million American children** live in households that struggle against hunger.



More than **28,000 high-poverty schools** can now offer meals at no charge to all students; that's more than one in five schools nationwide.

### WHO IT HELPS



**LOW-INCOME CHILDREN**  
They can count on getting healthy meals at school without any stigma.



**FAMILIES**  
Parents can count on their children getting two nutritious meals at school each day.



**SCHOOLS**  
Research shows that increasing school breakfast participation not only improves students' diets, but also their behavior and achievement.

### WE KNOW IT WORKS

Community eligibility has been rolled out in 11 states and becomes available nationwide for the 2014-2015 school year. The program frees up resources and staff that can be devoted to other educational priorities.

About **4,000 schools** already successfully offer community eligibility.



Lunch participation has risen by **13%**.



Breakfast participation has increased **25%**.

### HOW COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY WORKS

- Schools do not process meal applications or collect fees.
- Schools do not have to track eligibility in the lunch line. Schools just count the total number of breakfasts and lunches they serve.
- Schools are reimbursed based on highly reliable data from other programs that identify which students are low-income or at risk of hunger.
- School districts can use community eligibility in individual schools, a group of schools, or district-wide.
- Once a district chooses community eligibility, it is guaranteed eligibility for four years with no decline in its reimbursement rate.

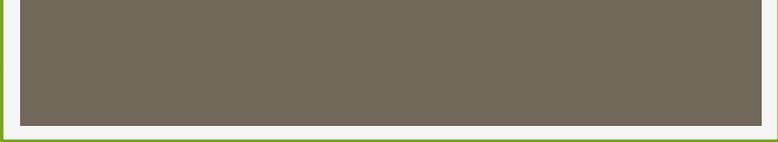
These are neighborhoods where children arrive at school hungry. **These children need healthy school meals to be ready to learn.**

For more information about community eligibility go to:  
[www.cbpp.org/thisisnotanoption](http://www.cbpp.org/thisisnotanoption) or  
[www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision](http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision)

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# Key Activities to Promote Community Eligibility

- Meet with leaders in eligible school districts
- Provide a presentation for school boards, superintendents, and/or parent associations
- Write a letter to eligible school districts
- Submit an op-ed
- Publish a blog post or use social media
- Engage public officials
- Contact CBPP or FRAC for more suggestions



# USDA Resources

- Proposed rule
- Q&As
- Title I and E-Rate Guidance
- Evaluation
- Estimator Tool

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>

# Community Eligibility Resources

## Joint FRAC /CBPP MATERIALS

- *Community Eligibility: Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free*
- Report Summary - A Powerful Tool in the Fight Against Child Hunger
- *The Community Eligibility Provision: Alternatives to School Meal Applications*
- Sample School Board presentation
- Sample op-ed

## OTHER MATERIALS

- Links to State web pages and materials
- Fact Sheets and Issue Briefs



Materials Now Available at <http://frac.org/community-eligibility/>