



IDENTIFIED STUDENT PERCENTAGE (ISP) MANAGEMENT: INCREASING & MAXIMIZING YOUR DISTRICT'S ISP

Increasing your Identified Student Percentage (ISP) can be one of the most effective ways to boost your school nutrition budget revenue because the percent of meals reimbursed at the free rate equals your ISP multiplied by 1.6. Below are several options to help you raise your ISP by capturing every eligible student in your district and leverage grouping to expand the reach of Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and reimbursement to your district.

Increase Your ISP

Find out what student data your state includes in their direct certification system. Students are categorically eligible for free school meals and should be included in your ISP calculation if they are:

- Enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), Medicaid,¹ or if they live in a household where another student is enrolled in one of these programs (this is referred to as 'extended eligibility' or a 'sibling match' as outlined below).
- Homeless, migrant, runaway, in foster care, or enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start.
 - Important note! These categories do **not** confer eligibility to other students in the household.

Utilize connections with social workers and homeless liaisons. Your district's homeless liaison or social worker is responsible for supporting homeless, migrant, runaway, and foster care students.

- Liaisons and social workers will have the most current information regarding categorically eligible students.
- Check-in weekly or monthly to ensure that you capture students who may be categorically eligible and include them in your ISP.

¹ Certain states (not all states) use Medicaid data to determine categorical eligibility for free school meals: Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Don't forget early childcare programs and alternative agreement schools. If your district has a Head Start, Early Head Start, or service agreements with other schools, those students may be able to be directly certified. To find out what can and cannot contribute to your district's ISP, check out No Kid Hungry's [Calculating ISP Using Early Childhood Program and Alternative Agreement School Data](#).

Examine all possible direct certification matches. Simple errors between datasets can prevent students from being directly certified, such as misspelled names, partial social security numbers, or incorrect birthdays.

- Many state agencies will share lists of students who were not matched in the direct certification process but are likely to be matches if further investigated. Obtain those lists from your state agency and compare them with your student rosters to decide whether they are, in fact, matches.
- Add any students to your ISP that you can identify. Notify your state agency of the new directly certified students, and share any patterns that caused categorically eligible students to go unmatched so that the state direct certification system can be improved in the future.

Quick Tip: *Keep documentation of all certified students for administrative reviews. You must be able to show how each student included in your ISP was certified.*

Conduct direct certification as often as possible. The more you conduct direct certification, the more likely you are to identify students who temporarily enroll in categorically eligible benefits.

- Even if a student only receives SNAP benefits for one month, that student will remain directly certified all year if you keep records of their initial enrollment.
- Depending on the sophistication of your state's direct certification process, some districts can conduct direct certification daily or weekly. Districts report finding significant benefits in directly certifying students at least monthly.
- Always use clean data noting transferred, new, and withdrawn students.
- If you have a large student population, you may consider hiring temporary workers to help with this process, but first, make sure that you comply with all confidentiality guidelines by talking to your state agency.

Quick Tip: *Even if you are mid-cycle, you can work with your state agency to start a new 4-year CEP cycle if you demonstrate an increase in ISP, establishing a higher reimbursement rate for another four years.*

Transfer Students – Do's and Don'ts

When students transfer from a school that does not use CEP, they are automatically and immediately able to access free meals at the CEP school. No further information is needed from the family. When a student leaves a CEP school, they will retain free meal status for 30 calendar days. Nutrition departments have that time to either directly certify the student or collect a free or reduced-price meal application from the family. If at the end of the 30 days neither one applies, the student changes to full-price status.

Promote SNAP outreach in your schools. The more eligible families enrolled in SNAP, the higher your ISP. Check out No Kid Hungry's [SNAP in Schools webpage](#) to learn more!

- Consider including the link to your state's SNAP application on your website.
- Promote and assist families with SNAP applications at your school events. Your school's social worker or homelessness liaison may be able to support this. If not, consider reaching out to non-profit organizations that might provide SNAP application services.

Maximize Your ISP

Schools, or groups of schools, must have an ISP of 25%* or greater to operate CEP. The 25% threshold can be met by:

- An individual school,
- A group of schools within the district, or
- All schools in the district.

Schools can maximize their reimbursement by testing different grouping scenarios. Grouping high enrollment, high ISP schools with lower enrollment, lower ISP schools can increase the number of schools enrolled in CEP in your district in addition to your reimbursement.

A CEP grouping's ISP is not the average of the schools' ISPs. **A grouping's ISP is calculated by dividing the sum of identified students by the sum of enrolled students multiplied by 100%.**

Example Grouping Scenario

	Identified Students	Enrollment	ISP	Free Meal Claim Rate (ISP x 1.6)
School A	60	120	50%	80%
School B	24	100	24%	38%
School C	150	200	75%	100%
GROUP OF SCHOOLS	234	420	56%	89%

In the example grouping scenario, Schools A and C are eligible to participate in CEP but School B is not. Also, School C's free claim rate (ISP x 1.6) is greater than 100%. The maximum reimbursement rate is 100%, so School C has "extra" ISP that can be "shared" with Schools A and B.

To calculate the group's ISP, add together the number of identified students (60+24+150 = 234) divide by the total number of enrolled students (120+100+200 = 420) and multiply by 100% (**234 / 420 x 100% = 56%**). Together as a group, the schools have an ISP of 56%, a free meal claim rate of 89%, and all three schools can participate in CEP.

Keep reading to learn about free online grouping tools!

* Effective October 26, 2023, USDA reduced the ISP threshold for CEP participation from 40 percent to 25 percent.

Grouping Tools

Many tools are available to assist your district with finding the optimal grouping based on reimbursement and school participation. Two highlighted in this resource include:

- No Kid Hungry's CEP Calculator
- MealsCount.com

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

The No Kid Hungry CEP Calculator enables school nutrition staff to:

1. Compare side-by-side your district's expected annual revenue under both CEP and standard NSLP (standard counting and claiming)
2. Compare side-by-side each school's expected annual revenue under both CEP and standard NSLP
3. Customize your financial analysis by manipulating expected breakfast and lunch participation rates by school, and see the impacts on revenue in real-time
4. Optimize your revenue with CEP by using strategic grouping, powered by the CEP grouping tool, [Meals Count](#). It's built right into the calculator!

For step-by-step guidance on how to use the CEP Calculator, view the webinar and demo [on our website](#).

[MealsCount.com](#)

The Meals Count web tool is a great way to quickly look at potential groupings and many districts' data is pre-loaded onto the site. So, you can just search for your district and add your average daily participation to run the grouping analysis. However, there is less of a financial analysis with MealsCount.com. So, if you are looking for a detailed analysis, consider using [the NKH CEP Calculator](#).

Want to learn more about CEP? Check out all of No Kid Hungry's resources at bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/cep. Don't forget to share this resource with a friend or co-worker!

