TIPS FOR MAKING SITE-BASED/PARTIAL COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION (CEP) WORK

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a school meal funding option that allows eligible schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. CEP can be implemented by:

- All schools within a district

- A group or groups of schools within a district

- An individual school within a district

CEP benefits students and schools. Even if your district cannot implement CEP at all schools, you might consider implementing the program at some schools. This is often referred to as site-based CEP or partial CEP and is a great option to realize the benefits of CEP in your district.

Benefits of Implementing Site-Based CEP

At the school(s) where CEP is implemented:

- All students receive free meals

- School meal debt is eliminated and stigma is reduced

- Administrative burden is reduced

- Student participation increases

- Implementing alternative breakfast models like breakfast in the classroom is streamlined

CEP is a valuable option for students and families, regardless of whether the entire district qualifies for CEP. Check out CEP Benefits Students, Families, and Schools to learn more!

Check out all of No Kid Hungry's CEP Resources at bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/cep

Strategies for Implementing Site-Based CEP

Communicate with families

Families may have questions regarding why some schools offer free meals and others do not, especially if families have children enrolled in multiple schools within the district. Communicate to families the reasoning behind site-based CEP, including the eligibility requirements for schools. It can be helpful to explain that all schools in the district have special benefits. For instance, some schools offer free meals while other schools offer a variety of sports teams and clubs or advanced academic options. Getting communication support from district administration can also be helpful. Clear communication and transparency are key to gaining families' understanding and trust in the meal programs.

Note: Depending on your state, schools implementing CEP may need to collect alternative income forms while schools implementing traditional counting and claiming will need to collect free and reduced-price meal applications. Contact your state agency to learn the requirements for your state.

Consider offering CEP and meal pricing information in multiple ways including on the school website, via email and/or mailed information to families, and in public press releases. Also, remember to provide translated materials as appropriate for families. Be sure to include these important pieces of information:

For CEP schools

- The school is participating in the Community Eligibility Provision, which provides breakfast and lunch at no charge to all enrolled students each day

- Information on alternative income forms *(required in certain states, contact your state agency to learn more)*

    - Include an attached/hyperlinked form with a deadline for completion and submission
    - Information on why completing the forms is important (e.g., "By filling out this form, you help ensure that your student's school continues to get full education funding, including computers, books, school supplies, etc.)

- Any schools not participating in CEP are not currently eligible but will be reevaluated annually and added if they qualify in future years

- School nutrition contact information for questions or assistance completing forms

For non-CEP schools using traditional counting and claiming

- Information on meal pricing

- The availability of free and reduced-priced meals and federal income eligibility guidelines

- How to apply for free or reduced-priced meals

    - Include attached/hyperlinked free or reduced-price meal application
    - Categorical eligibility (e.g., SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, children in foster care, those experiencing homelessness, etc.)
    - Contact information for the school social worker or liaison

- Frequently asked questions, examples include:

    - My child's application was approved last year, do I need to fill out a new one?
    - If I don't qualify now, can I apply later?
    - Can I apply if someone in my household is not a U.S. citizen? Etc.

- Any schools not participating in CEP are not currently eligible but will be reevaluated annually and added if they qualify in future years

- School nutrition contact information for questions or assistance completing forms

Maximize your ISP

Assess your identified student percentage (ISP), as there may be room for improvement. Maximizing a school's ISP not only brings more students into the program, but it also may push a near eligible (30-40% ISP) school to eligibility (40% or higher ISP) and make CEP more financially viable for schools. Some strategies to increase ISP include:

- Extend student status by using sibling/household matching. Eligibility can be extended to all students in a household where at least one student is directly certified through SNAP, TANF, and FDPIR (and Medicaid in some states).

  - Be aware of cultural naming conventions. *For example, some Korean names are written with the last name first and some Spanish-speaking cultures have a two-part last name using the father's last name followed by the mother's last name.*

  - Check addresses and phone numbers – they may not always be accurate.

  - Consult teachers and social workers with questions.

- Consider students in foster care, families experiencing homelessness, migrant workers, and students with runaway status. Again, social workers, counselors, and teachers can be great resources to help identify eligible students. *Reminder: Every school district is required to have a McKinney-Vento Liaison to connect with students and families experiencing homelessness.*

- Conduct outreach for SNAP, formerly Food Stamps, to connect families with additional benefits and increase access to school meals. *Reminder: Children who live in households that receive SNAP (also TANF or FDPIR benefits, as well as children who are migrant, homeless, in foster care, or enrolled in Head Start) are considered "categorically eligible" for free school meals and can be directly certified without submitting any application.* Consider including SNAP application information in communications with families or work with a community partner to conduct outreach.

Check out No Kid Hungry's Strategies for Finding Success with CEP to learn more!

Leverage grouping

An individual school or a group of schools can participate in CEP so long as the group's ISP is greater than or equal to 40%. A district can also have multiple groupings. So, a school with a low ISP can be paired with a high ISP school so that both can be included in CEP. The No Kid Hungry CEP Calculator and MealsCount are both great tools to assist with grouping.

Consider using a mix of Provision 2 and CEP

Provision 2 is another option to ensure all students receive free meals at school. Any school can participate in Provision 2, while only schools (or a group of schools) with an ISP greater than or equal to 40% can participate in CEP. Provision 2 is a four-year meal funding option where schools collect meal applications and track student meal participation in the first year, called the Base Year. The Base Year claiming percentages are then used in years two through four. A district can use a mix of CEP, Provision 2, and traditional counting and claiming to meet the needs of their district. *Check out this short video to learn more about the considerations of each program type.*

Read on for examples from districts across the country, and don't forget to share this resource with a friend or coworker!

Districts Making it Happen

Redlands Unified School District – Redlands, California

Redlands Unified School District began using CEP in the 2018-2019 school year at 7 out of 25 schools. The next year, they increased to 16 out of 25 schools, and in the 2020-2021 school year they were able to implement district-wide CEP at all 25 schools. They were able to accomplish this by maximizing ISPs and leveraging grouping. The Redlands USD child nutrition website was key to successful implementation of site-based CEP. Families would visit the website and select their child's school which would direct them to either the alternative income form used at CEP schools or the free and reduced-price meal form used at non-CEP schools. They also sent specific CEP or non-CEP packets of information to each household to explain what type of meal claiming is used at their child's school.

Cadillac Area Public Schools – Cadillac, Michigan

Cadillac Area Public Schools uses CEP at 4 out of 6 of their schools. The district first implemented CEP during the 2018-2019 school year. Michigan requires CEP schools to collect alternative income forms, so Cadillac has in place a detailed meal form collection policy that outlines what form each school needs to collect and prioritizes communication with families to avoid confusion. Cadillac also works hard to capture as many students as possible through direct certification by using sibling/household matching to maximize their ISP and reimbursement claim rates.

Pinellas County Schools – Largo, Florida

Pinellas County Schools began their CEP journey in the 2013-2014 school year. Pinellas includes 147 schools, with 93 using CEP. Pinellas is unable to implement district-wide CEP as many schools are not eligible. However, by leveraging site-based CEP, 93 schools reap the benefits of serving meals free to all students, and the district can cut down on paper and online applications saving time and labor for processing, filing, and storage. Site-based CEP also decreases the verification required as CEP schools are excluded from the verification process.