IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Community Eligibility Provision in the School Nutrition Programs

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. Schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students that qualify for free meals by direct certification or by categorical eligibility.

➔ What does this mean for School Nutrition Programs

If a school building qualifies, it means all students eat at no charge and there is no longer a need to have a Free and Reduced (F/R) Price Meal application in those school buildings. Here are some points when considering CEP:

- As of April 1, each year, school buildings must have at least 40% of students (only those with access to a meal) who are qualified for free meals through a method other than income application. This is called the "Identified Student Percentage" (ISP) and includes students approved by the following methods:

  o Directly certified students eligible for Food Assistance and Family Investment Program (FIP) and other household members qualified through the extension of direct certification benefits.

  o Directly Certified students eligible for Other Free on the download and other household members qualified through the extension of direct certification benefits (new in Iowa March 2018).

  o Directly certified students identified through the ELook-up process.

  o Students listed on a "Free Lunch" Department of Human Service (DHS) letter

  o Directly certified foster children

  o Homeless students certified as such by the district liaison

  o Migrant students verified on a Certificate of Eligibility approved by the state

  o Runaway youth certified by local officials

  o Head Start students

  o Pre-K Even Start students

- It is a requirement to offer breakfast in a CEP building.

- The Nutrition Department may not process household applications or economic surveys for schools implementing CEP. For CEP buildings, there will only be a list of students directly certified for free meals.

- Breakfast and lunch must be available for all students in CEP buildings at no charge.

A multiplier of 1.6 is applied to the ISP determines the Free Reimbursement Percent. The total percent after the 1.6 factor is applied represents the percent of reimbursable meal claims that are paid at the free rate. The maximum is 100 percent. If the multiplied number is less than 100 percent the difference is reimbursed at the paid rate. Each claiming group (individual building or a group of buildings) participating must meet the 40 percent ISP minimum. Any number of buildings may be grouped to improve the reimbursement rates of those with lower ISPs—for example, one building has an ISP of 75 percent and one building has an ISP of 55 percent. When the identified students and enrollment numbers are combined and the ISP is calculated for the group, all reimbursable student meals at both buildings are reimbursed at the free rate. Chart on back of page.

	Enrollment (access to meal)	Identified Students	ISP	Multiplier	Percent of reimbursable meals at free rate/paid rate
School A	354	266	75.1%	1.6	120% = 100% free / 0% paid
School B	375	210	56%	1.6	89.6% free / 16% paid
School A & B	729	476	65.2%	1.6	104% = 100% free / 0% paid

➔ **What does this mean for other district functions that rely on the Free/Reduced Price Meal Eligibility list?**

Buildings that participate in CEP will no longer get a list of students qualified for Free/Reduced Price meals and consequently, the ability of districts/nonpublic schools to "know" which students are in the low-SES subgroup is impacted by the decision to move to CEP. The list of programs or processes impacted includes, but is not limited to:
Local granting of fee waivers

- Low-SES subgroups in the ESSA accountability plan
- Title I – within district targeting of funds
- At-risk and Dropout Prevention qualified students
- E-rate
- Loan forgiveness for teachers

The Nutrition Department may continue to provide the downloaded list of directly certified students provided by the Department of Education. In most cases, the current direct certification number or ISP will not match the current list of students on the F/R list. To that end, the Department of Education has developed an alternate process that should provide the district/nonpublic school with the ability to identify which students are in the low-SES subgroups in CEP buildings.

The Department of Education is requiring that CEP buildings use a simple income eligibility form in an attempt to identify qualified students that are not already identified on the ISP list. On the website are several examples of the Household Economic Surveys that districts can choose from and can be provided at registration or by other locally-determined means. This form is simpler than the prior Free/Reduced Price Meal Application form, allowing the school/district to gather SES data.

The Department still requires districts to identify in their student information system for reporting purposes those students that are considered in the low-SES subgroup. This subgroup is determined by using all students on the ISP list, plus any additional students that submit the general income eligibility form. Once the district has a firm low-SES list of students, that list can be used for all of the purposes previously supported by the Free/Reduced Price Lunch list.

➔ **How do we elect to participate?**

Districts and qualified school buildings will need to apply by June 30 and be approved to participate. Send notice of intent to Patti Harding at patti.harding@iowa.gov.

A list of all buildings that qualify is posted on the Department of Education website at Link to Department of Education Community Eligibility Provision web page by May 1, of each year. Buildings that fall between 30 and 39.9 percent ISP will also be listed.

Sample Household Economic Surveys, evaluation key, and Decision Tree, click here

Additional resources, including the Community Eligibility Provision: Planning and Implementation Guidance are available at USDA's Community Eligibility Provision Resource Center, click here