

The Community Eligibility Provision

CEP

Serving Up Success



Virginia Hunger Solutions

An initiative of the Virginia Poverty Law Center and Food Research and Action Center

What is the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)?

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a powerful tool that allows high poverty schools and school divisions to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge. In addition, the measure streamlines school meal operations by eliminating the need to collect and process school meal applications.

Eligibility

Any school that has 40 percent or more “identified students” can participate in CEP. Identified students include children who are directly certified (through data matching) for free meals because they are in foster care, in Head Start, in Evenstart, are homeless, are migrant, are runaways, or are living in households that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

By May 1 of each year, the Virginia Department of Education must publish a list of all schools that are eligible for CEP and all schools that are near-eligible.

Participation

A school division may implement CEP in one school, a group of schools, or division-wide. School divisions that are interested in implementing the option will want to calculate its impact on their federal reimbursements and food service revenue.

Federal reimbursements for both lunch and breakfast are determined by multiplying the percentage of identified students by 1.6. The resulting number is the percentage of meals reimbursed at the “free” reimbursement rate, with the rest being reimbursed at the “paid” rate.

Example: ABC Elementary School has an identified student percentage of 50. Therefore, 80 percent of its breakfasts and lunches would be reimbursed at the free rate ($50\% \times 1.6 = 80\%$), and the remaining 20 percent of breakfasts and lunches would be reimbursed at the paid rate ($100\% - 80\% = 20\%$).

Schools that participate in CEP are guaranteed to receive the same meal reimbursement rate for 4 years. (The rate could even increase if the identified student percentage increased.)

The Virginia Department of Education is available to assist schools with estimating reimbursements under CEP.

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Meal Reimbursements with the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

Percentage of Identified Students	Percentage Reimbursed at the Free Rate	Percentage Reimbursed at the Paid Rate
40%	64%	36%
45%	72%	28%
50%	80%	20%
55%	88%	12%
60%	96%	4%
62.5%+	100%	0%



Many CEP schools have reported increased revenues, resulting in stronger school nutrition programs overall.

Why Choose CEP?

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools to feed many more children, and to realize administrative cost savings, thereby making it cost-effective to provide all meals at no charge. Under CEP, paper applications are completely eliminated. Instead, schools are reimbursed through a formula based on the number of “Identified Students” – those certified for free school meals without paper applications.

CEP offers multiple benefits. The option...

Helps low-income students and families

- Parents are assured that students are getting two healthy, nutrient-dense meals a day at school.
- Families’ financial burden is eased when students eat school meals.
- Families don’t face language, literacy, or other issues with access due to application barriers.
- Students that have access to better nutrition tend to perform better academically.

Increases efficiency and school meal participation

- Lunch lines move more quickly because students no longer have to enter codes or swipe school ID cards, which results in more students eating and helps overcome challenges caused by short lunch periods.
- Stigma attached to free school meals is eliminated, encouraging more students to participate in breakfast and lunch.
- Implementing alternative service models, such as breakfast in the classroom, becomes easier.

Reduces administrative costs

- Staff no longer collect, certify, or verify applications.
- Counting and claiming is simplified because staff no longer have to categorize each meal served as paid, reduced-price, or free.
- Staff no longer need to handle payments or track uncollected fees when students can’t afford to pay for meals.



[Adopting] CEP was a no-brainer decision.”

“If you’re sitting in a classroom and your stomach is growling and you haven’t eaten, that’s another distractor; that’s another challenge for the teacher when it comes to engaging our students and making sure that they are... ready to learn.”

Dr. Dana T. Bedden, Former Superintendent
Richmond City Public Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

► **What is the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)?**

CEP is an option created by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 that allows high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge without collecting school meal applications.

► **How can school divisions participate in CEP?**

A school division may implement CEP in one school, a group of schools, or division-wide. School divisions that are interested in implementing the option will want to calculate its impact on their federal reimbursements and school nutrition programs revenue.

Note: If federal reimbursements are insufficient to cover the cost of providing meals at no charge to all students, then non-federal funds must be used to offset the difference.

► **What are the eligibility requirements for participating in CEP?**

A school, group of schools, or school division must have 40 percent or more "Identified Students" in order to participate in CEP.

► **Can schools be randomly grouped together to become eligible for CEP?**

Yes, as long as the schools are in the same school division.

► **Who are "Identified Students"?**

Identified Students are children who are certified for free meals without submitting a school meal application because they live in households that participate in:

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or
- The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

Identified Students also includes children who are certified for free meals without submitting a school meal application because they are:

- in foster care
- in Head Start
- in Evenstart
- homeless
- migrant, or
- runaways

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► **How is the Identified Student percentage determined for groups of schools electing CEP?**

The Identified Student Percentage for a group of schools within a school division is calculated by taking the sum of the Identified Students for the entire group of schools divided by the sum of the total student enrollment for the entire group of schools.

► **How are federal reimbursements calculated under CEP?**

Federal reimbursements for both breakfast and lunch are determined by multiplying the Identified Student Percentage by 1.6. The resulting number is the percentage of meals reimbursed at the "free" reimbursement rate, with the rest being reimbursed at the "paid" rate. Similar to Provision 2 and 3, the use of non-Federal funds is only necessary if the total amount of Federal reimbursement through CEP does not cover the costs of serving free meals to all students.

Note: The Virginia Department of Education is available to assist schools with estimating reimbursements under CEP.

► **How long does the federal reimbursement rate remain in effect?**

CEP schools are guaranteed to receive the same reimbursement rate (or a higher one if the Identified Student Percentage increases) for a four year cycle.

► **Will schools that implement CEP lose Title I funding?**

No, the U.S. Department of Education has provided a number of options for divisions participating in CEP to determine Title I funding allocations to schools.

Note: The Title I Coordinators for local school divisions and the Virginia Department of Education are available to answer questions about Title I funding.

► **How do schools participating in CEP calculate the discount rate divisions receive through the Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries (E-Rate)?**

In July 2014, the Federal Communications Commission adopted new rules for the E-rate program, including rules specifying how school districts with CEP schools should calculate their discount rates beginning in School Year 2015-16 (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP08-2015os.pdf>).

► **Helpful CEP Resources**

- Virginia Department of Education (<http://doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/index.shtml>)
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service (www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision)
- Virginia Hunger Solutions (www.vahungersolutions.org/cep)
- Food Research and Action Center (www.frac.org/community-eligibility)

Key Dates

June 1

Identified Student data as of June 1st determines eligibility to participate in CEP

June 15

School divisions submit school level eligibility information to the Virginia Department of Education for review and analysis

July 31

School divisions must submit an application to the Virginia Department of Education if they intend to participate in CEP

CEP and Alternative Breakfast Service Models

Participation in the School Breakfast Program lags behind school lunch participation across the nation. With the Community Eligibility Provision, the universal free meals and the simplified meal counting and claiming make it easier to offer breakfast in the classroom and other alternative breakfast service methods that encourage participation.

A wide body of research shows that implementing an alternative breakfast model is the most effective means to increase participation and achieve the gains in academic success linked to school breakfast consumption. Schools can use a variety of methods, including breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and breakfast after first period. Allowing students to eat in the classroom makes it convenient and accessible to all, and incorporating breakfast into the school day helps families whose early morning schedules make it difficult to fit in breakfast at home. Also, it alleviates the problem of students missing breakfast in the cafeteria for any number of reasons, including school bus schedules or long school security lines.

Alternative Breakfast Service Models

Breakfast in the Classroom: Students eat breakfast in their classrooms, either at the beginning of the school day or early during the day. Typically, breakfast is brought to classrooms from the cafeteria in containers or served from carts in the hallways by school nutrition staff.

“Grab and Go”: All the components of school breakfast are conveniently packaged so students can easily grab a reimbursable meal quickly from the cafeteria line or from carts elsewhere on school grounds. Depending on the school’s rules, students can eat in the classroom, or somewhere else on campus.

Breakfast after First Period or “Second Chance Breakfast”: Usually implemented in middle and high schools, this method allows students time after their first period to obtain breakfast from the cafeteria or carts in the hallway, or to eat in the classroom or cafeteria. Computerized systems ensure that children receive only one breakfast each day.

School Breakfast Participation

2018-2019 School Year

	Ratio of Free and Reduced-Price Students Participating in the School Breakfast Program to those Participating in the National School Lunch Program*	Rank among States
Virginia	61.9	13
United States	57.5	–

*The number of free and reduced-price students participating in the School Breakfast Program per 100 participating in the National School Lunch Program.

Source: Food Research and Action Center’s School Breakfast Scorecard: 2018-2019 School Year

The Benefits of Universal Free School Meals

The school nutrition programs offer students two meals that meet federal nutrition standards each school day, helping ensure that students are able to start their school day ready to learn and can continue learning into the afternoon.

- School meals make for healthy kids. Kids who participate in school meals are more likely to eat fruits, vegetables, and milk. These nutrient dense foods contribute to a healthier Body Mass Index (BMI) and lower childhood obesity.
- When nutrient dense meals are offered to all children, school meal participation increases and the healthy benefits are particularly more pronounced among low income students.
- Traditional approval for free and reduced price meals , through paper applications, can yield errors and some children who need meals are not certified. Universal breakfast eliminates the paper application process, yielding no errors, and all children eat meals.
- Universal meals eliminates the need for students to pay a cashier and allows students more time to eat during short lunch periods.
- Families with tight food budgets can rest assured that their child is getting two nutritious meals at school, reducing financial strain at home.

Source: Food Research and Action Center. Universal Free School Meals: Ensuring that All Children Are Able to Learn. Available at: <https://courses.povertylaw.org/clearinghouse/articles/meals>

Research shows not only that a nourished child is a better learner but also that the child is a better test-taker and participant in school.



The Community Eligibility Provision: *Serving Up Success*

Schools across Virginia have an opportunity to feed all their students at no cost to families with CEP



Nearly
250,000

Virginia kids live in households that struggle to provide healthy meals each day



241,056

students are enrolled in CEP schools




511

schools in Virginia have adopted CEP



56%

increase in divisionwide CEP from 2018-19



67 divisions in Virginia have adopted CEP

Virginia Hunger Solutions gratefully acknowledges support of its work to expand the Community Eligibility Provision from *Nourishing Neighbors*, a program of Albertsons Companies Foundation.

Learn more at www.vahungersolutions.org