

School meals are one of the most important tools in the fight against childhood hunger and ensuring future student success. Students who participate in school meals benefit from improved health outcomes, better test scores, fewer school absences, and less behavioral referrals.

School meal programs are critical to Kansas kids' educational success and overall well-being, especially with childhood hunger rapidly increasing. In Kansas, 1 in 5 children do not know where their next meal is coming from. Over 130,000 children in the state face food insecurity. However, many children who depend on school meals are unable to receive them due to barriers like cost and limited eligibility for meal-assistance programs.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a federal program that provides free meals to all students in any school in a district with a 25% or more identified student percent (ISP). CEP provides much needed nutritious meals and eases the financial burden for their families.

CEP Benefits for Your Students and School

- Students who participate in school meals benefit from improved health outcomes, better test scores, fewer school absences, and less behavioral referrals.
- Increases participation in school meal programs.
- Reduces stigma as all students receive meals at no charge, regardless of income status.
- Lowers administrative costs by eliminating tracking of meal eligibility and processing free/reduced meal applications.
 - Families no longer need to complete free and reduced-price meal applications.
 - Instead, utilize alternative income forms (such as household economic surveys) to collect data from all students that you would have otherwise collected on a meal application.
 - Alternative income forms can be required by the district (unlike meal applications), but must not be associated with school meal programs.
- Eliminates most unpaid school meals debt.
- Streamlines meal service, with no need for payments, swipe cards, or other systems during service.
- Supports innovative breakfast models, such as Breakfast in the Classroom.

Identified Student Percentage (ISP)

CEP provides free meals to all students in any school, group of schools, or school district with a 25% or more identified student percentage (ISP). The ISP is calculated through the percentage of children eligible for free school meals through direct certification due to their participation in other means-tested programs, such as TANF, SNAP, and certain Medicaid programs, in place of free/reduced meal applications.

The "identified students" rate is calculated by taking the total number directly certified students (plus migrant, homeless, runaway, Head Start and foster students, if not already included in the direct certification list) and dividing that number by the number of students with access to school lunch or breakfast (in most cases, equal to enrollment).

of students identified through direct certification

of total enrolled students with access
to school meals

X 100 = Identified Student Percentage

School/Site Eligibility and Application for CEP

CEP is an option that districts must elect to adopt through KSDE. To be eligible, sponsors and/or schools must:

- Meet a minimum level of 25% of “identified students” for free meals in the year prior to implementing Community Eligibility;
- Agree to serve free breakfasts and lunches to all students;
- Agree to cover with non-Federal funds any costs of providing free meals to students above the amounts provided by Federal assistance.
- Schools can qualify individually, in groups, or by district. They must accurately determine their identified student percentage as of April 1st and complete the CEP application with KSDE by June 30th.
- Once approved, schools can participate for four consecutive years without reapplying. Sites can provide new direct certification numbers annually to increase the reimbursement percentage if not at 100% free reimbursement.

Reimbursement

The ISP of the district determines federal reimbursements to schools that qualify for CEP (25% ISP or higher). To calculate reimbursement, the school’s ISP is multiplied by 1.6.

Example: A school that has a 50% ISP would be reimbursed by the federal government for 80% of the meals they serve at the federal free rate, with the remaining 20% of meals served reimbursed at the lower federal “paid meal” reimbursement rate ($50\% \times 1.6 = 80\%$).

This means any site with an ISP under 62.5% will not be fully reimbursed for the meals they serve and would have to pay the difference in cost. Any sites with an ISP of 62.5% or higher would be fully reimbursed at the “free meal” reimbursement rate (capped at 100%).

[Utilize USDA’s CEP Slider Tool to calculate your potential reimbursement rates.](#)

Considerations for Implementation

- CEP may open up cafeteria flow and serving lines.
- Offer choice where you can. Use displays and signage to encourage healthy choices, which may help limit food waste.
- Allow more time for students to eat and adjust timing of recess or other activities to reduce rushing and food waste.
- Address staffing constraints by using CEP to shift tasks or free up time previously spent on administrative activities that are no longer needed.