

Community Eligibility

Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free



The Link Between Nutrition and Education

- When a child's nutritional needs are met, the child is more attentive in class and has better attendance and fewer disciplinary problems.
- The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs meet the nutritional needs of children by providing nutritionally balanced meals that together contain more than half of the nutrients children need each day.
- USDA research indicates that children who participate in the National School Lunch Program have superior nutritional intakes compared to those who bring lunch from home or otherwise do not participate.
- Low-income children who eat school breakfast have better overall diet quality than those who eat breakfast elsewhere or skip breakfast.

What Is Community Eligibility?

- It doesn't make sense for high-poverty schools to go through the standard application process to identify the few children who do *not* qualify for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 included community eligibility as a new option to allow high-poverty schools to feed more students and focus on meal quality rather than on paperwork.
- Community eligibility is designed to be extremely easy for a school or district to adopt and became available nationwide in the 2014-2015 school year.

Benefits of Community Eligibility

- **Lessens administrative work** — schools no longer have to collect and verify school meal applications and can focus on feeding children.
- **Increases participation** — when all children can eat at no charge, stigma is eliminated and more children participate.
- **Facilitates implementation of breakfast after the bell** — schools don't have to collect fees or count each meal served by fee category, simplifying implementation of service models that boost participation.
- **Improves the financial viability of school nutrition programs** — when participation increases, school districts can take advantage of economies of scale, and reinvest additional revenue to improve meal quality.
- **Eliminates unpaid meal fees** — when all children eat at no charge, the school district does not have to collect unpaid fees from families.

Community Eligibility Implementation

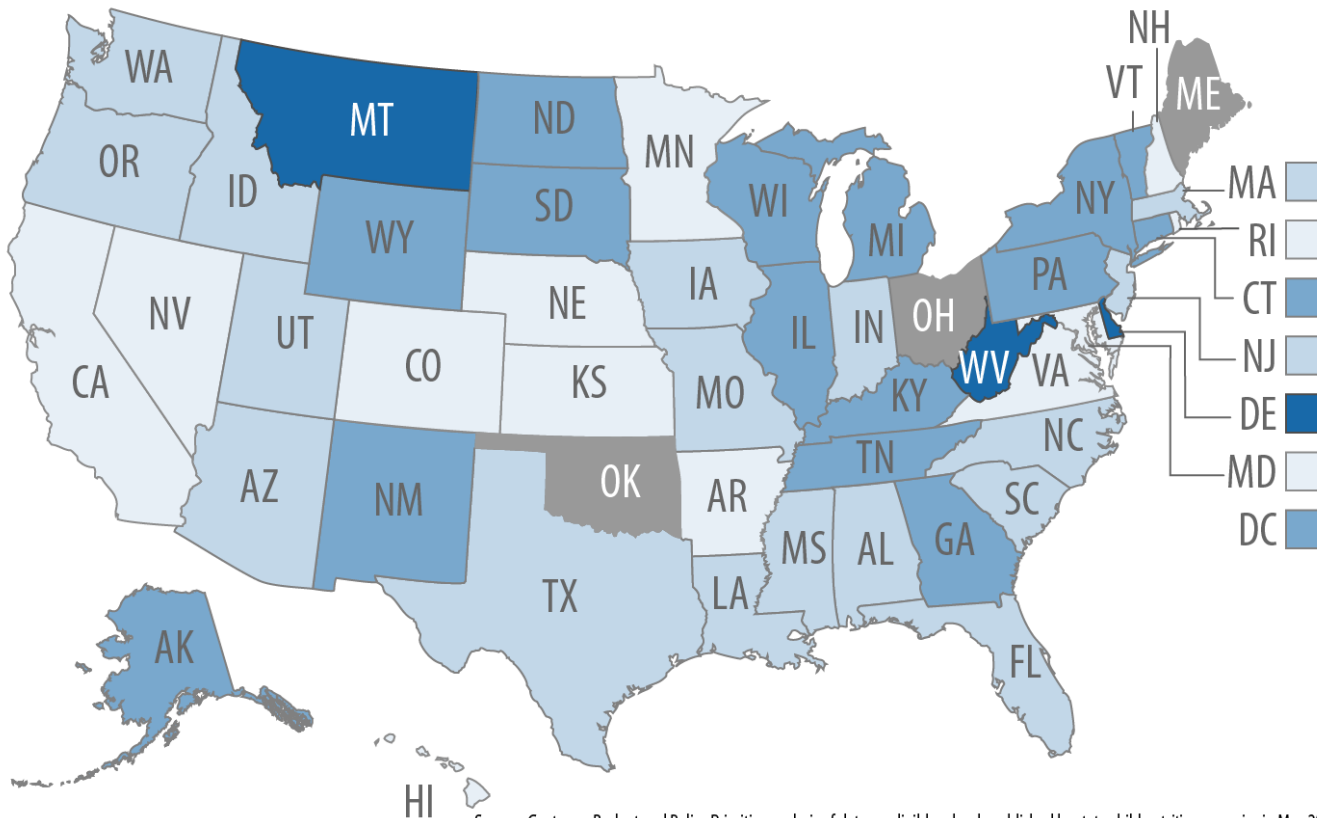
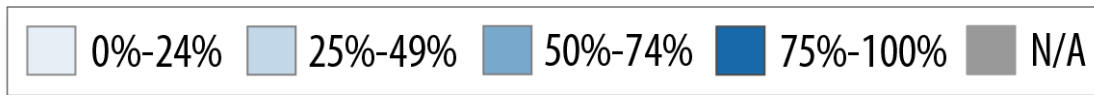
In the 2014-2015 school year, the first year of nationwide availability:

- More than 2,200 school districts are participating (1 in 7 districts nationwide).
- More than 14,000 schools are participating (roughly half of all eligible schools and 1 in 10 schools nationwide).
- More than 7,000 of the highest-poverty schools are participating (roughly 3 in 5 of the eligible highest-poverty schools).
- As a result, 6.6 million children have access to two healthy meals at school each day (1 in 9 school children nationwide).

There was tremendous variation in the extent to which states implemented community eligibility.

Map: Percentage of Eligible Schools Adopting Community Eligibility

Percentage of Eligible Schools Adopting Community Eligibility Provision



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of data on eligible schools published by state child nutrition agencies in May 2014 and data on schools adopting CEP collected directly from state child nutrition agencies from September 2014 through January 2015.

Community Eligibility Implementation in [YOUR STATE] in SY 2014-2015

In [Your state]:

- _____ of _____ eligible **schools** adopted community eligibility
- _____ of _____ eligible **school districts** adopted community eligibility
- _____ of _____ eligible **highest-poverty schools** adopted community eligibility
- _____ students attend community eligibility schools

[Note: to find the number of schools that have adopted community eligibility and the number of schools eligible in your state visit:

<http://www.cbpp.org/files/2-25-15fa.pdf>]

How Community Eligibility Works

- High-poverty schools provide free breakfasts and lunches to all students without collecting applications.
- Any school district can use this option if at least one of its schools has 40 percent or more students certified for free meals without application (called “Identified Students”).
- Schools with a 40 percent Identified Student Percentage often have 75 percent or more of their students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals.
- The district may implement community eligibility in one school, a group of schools or district-wide.
- By May 1, 2015, states must publish lists of all schools that are eligible for community eligibility and all schools that are near-eligible.
- To participate for the 2015-2016 school year, school districts must notify their state agency by August 31, 2015.

Who Are “Identified Students”?

Children certified for free meals without submitting a school meal application

Includes children who are directly certified (through data matching) for free meals because they live in households that participate in the

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Cash Assistance (TANF)
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or
- Medicaid (in districts participating in USDA’s demonstration project)

Includes children who are certified for free meals without application because they are

- in foster care
- in Head Start
- are homeless or
- are migrant

Reimbursements Under Community Eligibility

- % Identified Students $\times 1.6 =$ % meals reimbursed at “free” rate; the rest are reimbursed at “paid” rate.
- Example: a school with 50 percent Identified Students would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80 percent of the breakfasts and lunches it served ($50\% \times 1.6 = 80\%$) and the remaining 20 percent would be reimbursed at the paid rate.
- Participating schools are guaranteed to receive the same reimbursement rate (or a higher one if the Identified Student Percentage increases) for 4 years.
- Therefore, the higher the poverty level (Identified Student Percentage), the higher the reimbursement rate.

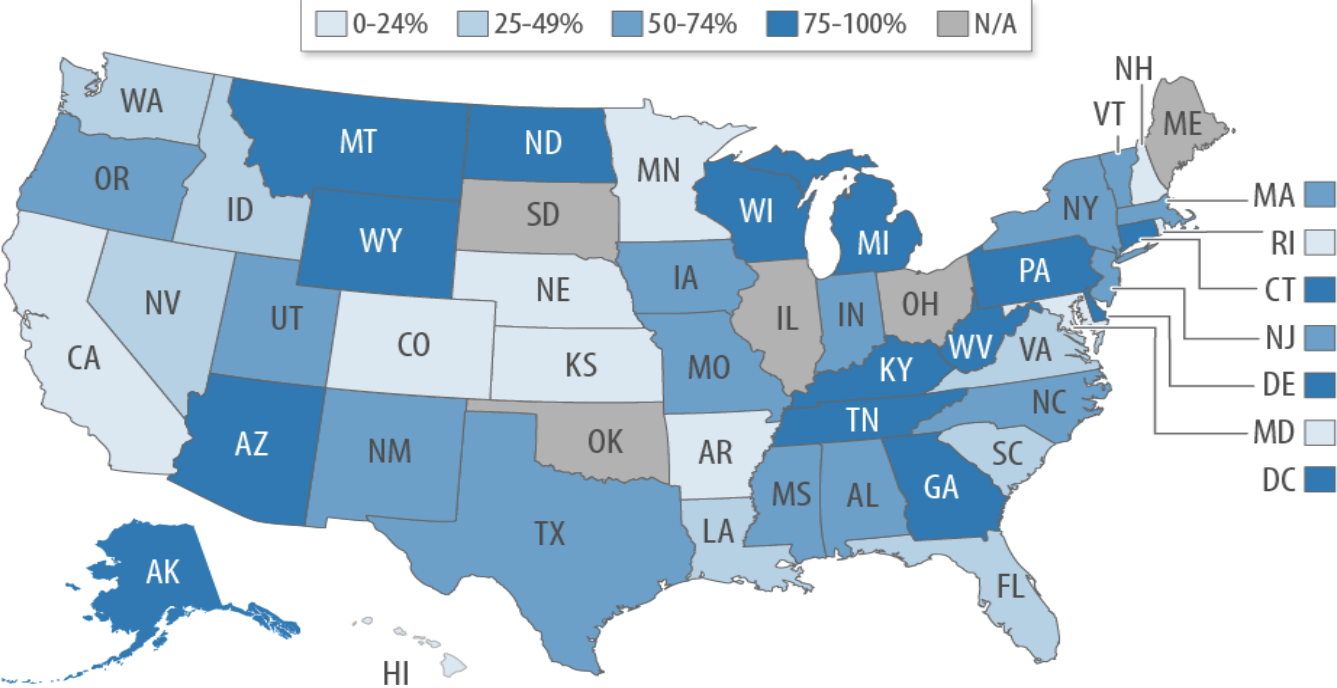
Meal Reimbursements with Community Eligibility

The reimbursement rate for both lunch and breakfast is determined by multiplying the percent of Identified Students by a 1.6 multiplier. The resulting number is the percent of meals reimbursed at the “free” reimbursement rate, with the rest reimbursed at the “paid” rate.

Percentage Identified Students	Percentage Free	Paid
40%	64%	36%
45%	72%	28%
50%	80%	20%
55%	88%	12%
60%	96%	4%
65%	100%	0

Community Eligibility Take-up is Greater in the Highest-Poverty Schools

Percentage of Highest Poverty Schools Adopting Community Eligibility



Highest poverty schools = schools in which the Identified Student Percentage (ISP), or the share of students who qualify automatically for free school meals, is at least 60%.

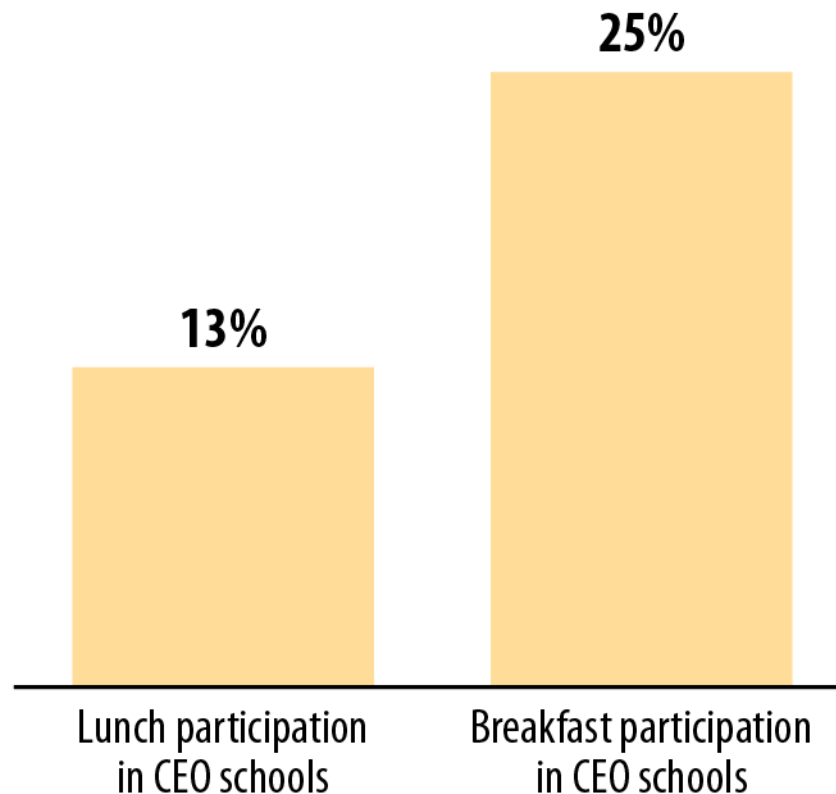
Source: CBPP analysis of data on eligible schools published by state child nutrition agencies in May 2014 and data on schools adopting community eligibility collected directly from state child nutrition agencies September 2014–January 2015.

How School Districts Can Participate

- **By individual school**
 - Individual schools with 40% or more Identified Students participate in community eligibility.
- **By group**
 - Districts may choose to group schools any way they wish and calculate the free claiming percentage for the group of schools as a whole, using their combined enrollment and total number of Identified Students, as long as the percentage is 40% or higher.
 - There is no limit to the number of groups.
 - Within the same school district, some schools can participate individually and some can participate as a group.
- **By school district**
 - All schools in the district participate as a single group with the same free claiming percentage as long as it is 40% or higher.

Lunch And Breakfast Participation Increase Under Community Eligibility

Increase in participation between October 2010 and October 2012 in schools that operated under community eligibility for two years



Feedback From Community Eligibility Schools

- All school districts that implemented the option the first year and were surveyed by FRAC would recommend community eligibility to high poverty schools like their own.
- School districts report positive feedback from parents and school staff.
- Increased ability to feed more students.
- Some districts report an increase in revenue.



Breakfast In The Classroom

Community eligibility helps schools build stronger breakfast in the classroom programs by making it easier for schools implementing alternative service models — like “grab and go” — to offer breakfast to all students at no charge.

- West Virginia requires all community eligibility schools to implement at least one innovative breakfast strategy — breakfast after the bell, breakfast in the classroom, or “grab and go” breakfast — participation increased by 10 percent.
- Breakfast participation doubled in Floyd County, KY when it implemented community eligibility and breakfast in the classroom simultaneously.
- When Detroit, Michigan adopted community eligibility, even though it had already implemented breakfast in the classroom in all K-8 schools, breakfast participation increased by 15 percent.



Community Eligibility Resources

Key Materials

<http://frac.org/community-eligibility/>

USDA Materials

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>

Community Eligibility: An Amazing New Option for Schools

http://frac.org/pdf/community_eligibility_amazing_new_option_schools.pdf

Database of Eligible Schools and Policy Resources

www.cbpp.org/childnutrition

Community Eligibility: A Powerful Tool in the Fight Against Child Hunger

http://frac.org/pdf/community_eligibility_report_summary_2013.pdf

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