Dear Superintendent,

Our district has the opportunity to continue to serve meals at no cost to all students in the 2023-2024 school year by qualifying for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP is a school meal funding option of the National School Lunch Act that enables schools to provide free breakfasts and lunches to all students even after pandemic waivers expire.

CEP promotes equity by allowing our district to continue to serve meals for free to all students eliminating out-of-pocket expenses for families and reducing stigma for students. **The loss of COVID-19 pandemic waivers allowing free school meals for all students has greatly impacted our district this year leading to high rates of school meal debt and financial hardship for families.** Furthermore, a study published in the [Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition](https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/MHKXYFP3X8UHDQKJBAIB/full?target=10.1080%2F19320248.2019.1679318&) finds significant benefits for students attending CEP schools, including higher attendance rates and more students advancing beyond 10th grade.

As we look ahead to the next school year, CEP can also support our school nutrition department as we work to find new ways to feed students. Offering free meals for all students during the pandemic streamlined operations and made it easier to implement meals in the classroom and grab-and-go meal service. By adopting CEP in the 2023-2024 school year, school nutrition staff will no longer have to distribute, collect, and analyze school meals applications, which significantly reduces administrative burden and promotes equity among families. CEP also eliminates any concerns of unpaid school meal debt avoiding potential negative press and protecting the district's budget.

To be eligible to operate CEP, a school must have an “identified student percentage” (ISP) of at least 25%. The ISP is the percentage of the student body automatically certified for free school meals due to their participation in certain federal benefits programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). A school’s ISP is locked in for four years unless the ISP increases and the district can decide to lock in the new, higher ISP. Because the ISP does not account for low-income students who are notparticipating in programs like SNAP, a 1.6 multiplier is applied to the ISP to determine the reimbursement rate for meals served, and to serve as a more accurate proxy for the percentage of low-income students in our schools.

This year, our district is eligible to implement CEP and to provide the important benefits of free school meals to students, families, and our school. I would like to set up a time to discuss how we might bring this new benefit to students and families in our district.

Sincerely,

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