



Four Things to Know About Community Eligibility

One in five kids in America struggles with hunger. Programs like school breakfast help more kids get the healthy meals they need. But only about half of the students in the U.S. who eat a free or reduced-price school lunch are also eating school breakfast. The Community Eligibility Provision helps close this gap, by:

- 1. Allowing schools to cut through red tape.** Community eligibility is about paperwork reduction. Schools in high-need areas spend a lot of time and resources identifying the few students who *aren't* eligible for free meals. Community eligibility enables these schools to serve free meals to all students by better using existing data. Additionally, community eligibility eliminates the need for schools to collect paper applications from each student. Instead, meal reimbursement levels are based on students whose families are participating in other federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps).
- 2. Reducing stigma.** Without applications or payment collection, community eligibility makes it easier for students to get meals while reducing stigma related to underutilized programs like school breakfast. A school food and nutrition service supervisor had this to say, "Community eligibility gave us the ability to provide nutritious meals for free to all children, eliminating the stereotype of the free meal program."
- 3. Increasing the number of children eating breakfast.** Community eligibility also makes it easier for schools to make breakfast a part of the school day by moving it out the cafeteria and into the classroom. In states with community eligibility, breakfast participation among low-income students grew by 5% compared with 2.5% for those states without community eligibility. That means more children starting their day ready to learn, and more federal funds invested into the community.
- 4. Targeting kids in need.** Schools that participate in community eligibility have a large percentage of high-need students. In the schools where community eligibility was first piloted, more than 80% of students qualified for free or reduced-priced school meals. A school food and nutrition service supervisor had this to say, "So many families are struggling to pay for meals even when their income is just above the federal income guidelines. This program helps us to see that those children are well nourished as well."

Community eligibility has been phased in over the past three school years for 10 states and the District of Columbia. It will become a **nationwide program for the 2014-15 school year**, available to any school district that meets the eligibility criteria.

Visit BestPractices.NoKidHungry.org/School-Breakfast to learn more, and find other ways to connect kids to school breakfast.