

COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY



What is community eligibility and how does it work?

Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, community eligibility will be available nationwide. Through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, community eligibility will allow schools where at least 40 percent of students are approved for free meals without an application to **provide free meals to all students**.

Community eligibility does not require schools to collect applications for, or assign students to, an income eligibility category (free, reduced-price and paid), nor must they track students by income in the cafeteria in order to be reimbursed. Instead, community eligible schools serve all breakfasts and lunches at no charge. They are then reimbursed through a formula based on their number of students certified for free meals **without** an application. These students are known as “identified” and are automatically certified if they live in a household that participates in SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), TANF, FDIPIR (Food Distribution Program for Indian Reservations), Medicaid or are in foster care, attend Head Start or are homeless or migrants. As a general rule to use when determining if community eligibility is right for you, most schools with 40 percent of students who qualify as identified for community eligibility have 75 percent or more students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.



How are schools reimbursed?

Schools take the number of identified students times the established multiplier of 1.6. This means if 40 percent of students are identified (based on the community eligibility criteria above), then the school will be reimbursed at the free rate for 64 percent of all students (0.4×1.6). The other 36 percent of students would be reimbursed at the paid rate. That makes 63 percent the magic number, because $0.63 \times 1.6 = 1.008$ – so the school would be reimbursed at the free rate for all students.

Community eligibility is available for an individual school, any grouping of schools or district-wide. This allows you to choose which schools it makes the most sense to group together (if at all) to maximize reimbursement.



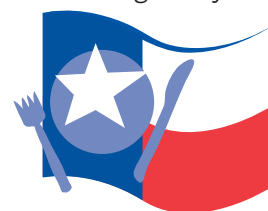
Why choose community eligibility?

Community eligibility helps low-income families, high-poverty schools, and school meals programs by:

- Improving access to free school meals, so parents can count on their children eating two healthy meals each day at school, helping to stretch families' limited food budgets;
- Eliminating school meal applications, freeing up resources that schools can use to improve the quality of school meals and freeing up time that staff can devote to other important educational functions; and
- Making school nutrition operations more efficient, allowing for economies of scale, which strengthens school nutrition programs financially and enables schools to more easily implement alternative service models, such as breakfast in the classroom.

Illinois, Kentucky, and Michigan first implemented the community eligibility option during the 2011-2012 school year. Participating schools report that average daily lunch participation has risen by 13 percent and average daily breakfast participation has increased by 25 percent.

More information regarding the scope and impact of community eligibility, as well as best practices for implementing it, can be found in *Community Eligibility: Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free* at: frac.org/pdf/co.mmunity_eligibility_report_2013.pdf.



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