

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): What It Means for Our District

The **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** is a USDA program that allows eligible school districts with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students to provide **one free breakfast and one free lunch every school day to every enrolled student**, regardless of household income. Instead of requiring families to complete annual free and reduced-price meal applications, eligibility is based on the district's **Identified Student Percentage (ISP)**, which is determined through students who are directly certified for programs such as SNAP, TANF, foster care, migrant services, homelessness, and other qualifying categories.

For Minidoka Joint School District, CEP represents an opportunity to remove financial barriers that prevent some students from participating in school meal programs. When every student receives meals at no cost, participation increases, students are better nourished, and schools create a more inclusive environment by eliminating the stigma sometimes associated with free or reduced-price meals. Research has consistently shown that students who eat nutritious meals at school have improved attendance, better concentration, stronger academic performance, and fewer behavioral issues.

CEP also provides significant benefits for families. Parents no longer have to worry about paying for their child's daily breakfast and lunch, adding money to meal accounts, or completing annual meal applications. This can save families hundreds of dollars each year while ensuring every child has reliable access to healthy meals during the school day.

For the district, CEP reduces administrative work by eliminating thousands of meal applications, reducing paperwork, minimizing unpaid meal collections, and allowing nutrition staff to focus more on serving students and improving meal quality.

It is important for families to understand that CEP provides **one reimbursable breakfast and one reimbursable lunch per student each school day**. Students who choose to purchase a **second meal** must pay the **full adult price of \$4.10 for breakfast and \$5.60 for lunch**. Payment for second meals must be made by **cash, check, or credit/debit card** at the time of purchase. **Charging second meals to student accounts will no longer be allowed.**

Additionally, **any negative meal balances that existed before CEP begins remain the responsibility of the family**. While future reimbursable breakfasts and lunches will be free, previous outstanding balances must still be paid. Families who need assistance are encouraged to contact the **Nutrition Department** or their **school kitchen manager** to discuss flexible payment plan options.

The Community Eligibility Provision is more than a meal program; it is an investment in student success. By ensuring every child has access to nutritious meals each day, CEP helps reduce hunger, supports academic achievement, eases financial pressure on families, and strengthens our entire school community.