



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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DATE: March 04, 2015

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SUBJECT: Extension of the Deadline for Local Educational Agencies to Elect the Community Eligibility Provision for School Year 2015-16

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

One important goal of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) is to ensure that children have access to the nutrition they need to grow into healthy adults. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), as authorized by amendments made in HHFKA Section 11(a)(1)(F), of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA), 42 USC 1759a(a)(1)(F), is a powerful tool to ensure children in low income communities have access to healthy school meals. CEP allows participating schools to offer healthy, free lunches and breakfasts to all students without requiring their families to complete individual applications. First rolled out in pilot states beginning in School Year (SY) 2011-2012, CEP became available for nationwide implementation this school year. As a result, in SY 2014-2015, approximately 14,000 schools in more than 2,000 local educational agencies (LEAs) serving more than 6.4 million children elected to participate in the CEP for its ability to both reduce administrative burden and increase access to school meals for children in low income communities.

A 2014 Department of Agriculture (USDA) study of the CEP implementation in the pilot states recognized several benefits. The study provided strong support for the CEP as an error reduction strategy. Participating schools had significantly fewer certification errors than non-CEP schools. The study also indicated that participating schools demonstrated increased participation in their lunch and breakfast programs, experienced revenue gains and decreased administrative costs.

Participation in CEP is a local decision and one that requires careful consideration of many factors by LEAs. For some LEAs, the decision process to elect to participate depends on the approval of governing bodies with administrative control of the LEA. Additionally, LEAs may seek the support of various partners and stakeholders when considering CEP participation. Pursuant to the amendments made by HHFKA, LEAs have until June 30, 2015, to elect to participate in CEP. Because of the multiple benefits of CEP and in light of the unique decision process involved in electing CEP, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is extending the election deadline until August 31, 2015.

Regional Directors

State Directors

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We are encouraged by the remarkable CEP uptake among eligible school districts, and appreciate that about 50% of eligible schools are participating. However, there are still many eligible LEAs and schools that can benefit from CEP participation. FNS is extending the deadline to allow LEAs ample time to determine if CEP is a viable option in their schools. A similar deadline extension for SY 2014-15 facilitated a 22 percent overall increase in CEP elections, significantly increasing children's access to nutritious meals in high need schools.

FNS is committed to serving as a resource to State agencies as LEAs and schools consider CEP in the upcoming months. FNS will continue to support States and LEAs by providing timely guidance, technical assistance, and other resources, including webinars, panel discussions, and outreach sessions to facilitate best practice sharing and address barriers to implementation. FNS encourages LEAs considering CEP to review resources available on the FNS website (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>), including the Department of Education Title I Guidance, Questions and Answer guidance, and an Estimator tool designed to help LEAs with grouping and reimbursement estimates.

State agencies should distribute this memorandum to their LEAs as soon as possible. State agencies may direct any questions concerning this guidance to the appropriate FNS Regional Office. We look forward to working with you in partnership as we strive to reach our common goal to increase access to healthy school meals for our Nation's children.

Original Signed

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Child Nutrition Programs