

A RESOURCE FOR IMPROVING MEASURABLE IMPACT

Community Eligibility Provisions: Combating Food Insecurity



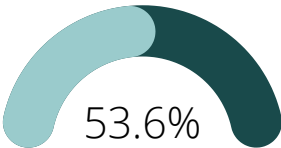
According to Feeding America, approximately **14.8% of U.S. households with children** under 18 experienced food insecurity in 2020. This translates to about 28.3 million people, including 11.7 million children who experienced food insecurity. (1-3)



Models predict that **42 million people (13%), including 13 million children (17%),** would experience food insecurity in 2021 due to COVID-19. (3)

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), developed as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010, is one way to address food insecurity in children and families (4-6). CEP is a meal service option that school districts in lower-income areas can use to provide breakfast and lunch to students at no cost to families. (5,6)

During the 2020-2021 school year, 15.5 million US children in CEP-eligible schools received free meals. (7)



Percentage of Texas CEP eligible schools in Texas who adopted CEP

Children spend a large portion of their waking hours at school, making schools an integral setting for promoting healthy behaviors and providing healthy foods.

They are the ideal environment to provide healthy opportunities for healthier diets and improve access to healthy, nutritious foods at mealtimes. (8,9)

Of the 911 school districts eligible for CEP in Texas, **489 (53.6%) school districts have adopted CEP.**

Comparatively, of 9,719 CEP-eligible school districts in the US, around 5,479 (56.4%) districts participate. (10)

Community Eligibility Provisions leverage already existing resources to help feed Texas children.



CEP participation increases a child's probability of eating lunch by 9.3% and increases school attendance. (11)



To be eligible for CEP participation, a school or group of schools within a district must have 40% or more students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. (12)



Schools that utilize CEP are reimbursed for meals served to students each day based on the percentage of students eligible for free meals, which is determined by family participation in other programs such as the Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and through Census data. (5)



Schools and districts that enroll in CEP help eliminate the stigma around food assistance, reduce food budget stress for families, and improve student outcomes by meeting students' nutritional needs. This program also improves school attendance and results in fewer disciplinary problems. (10,11,13,14)

What Can Interested Schools Do? (15)

1. School districts must meet eligibility requirements.
 - a. Districts must have at least 40% of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch during the prior school year.
2. School districts must serve free breakfast and lunch to all students, regardless of eligibility, during the 4-year CEP cycle.
3. Schools count the total number of breakfasts and lunches served daily to students.
4. Schools cannot collect household applications for school meal programs during the cycle.
5. Schools can determine if additional non-federal funds are needed in order to cover the costs above the USDA's reimbursement rate.

Moving Forward (15)

1. For more information about CEP enrollment, contact the Texas Department of Agriculture at Squaremeals@TexasAgriculture.gov.
2. If your school or district is eligible, submit the required documents to your State Agency.

Recommendations

1. Increase eligible school district participation in CEP through training and technical assistance.
2. Encourage local districts and schools to consider eligibility and participation in CEP.
3. Implement district wellness policies that promote nutrition and school meal consumption. (11)
4. Consider funding universal school meals in the state.

Who Benefits From School Meals?



Administrators and school staff benefit from CEP participation with streamlined meal service operation, reduced paperwork and costs, and reduced tracking of unpaid meal charges. (15)



Universal free meal programs have been shown to reduce the stigma associated with participating in school meals and the shame children feel when they cannot pay for school lunches. (4,15,16)



Universal meal programs help children receive nutritious meals on a consistent basis. Families and parents benefit from school meals by not worrying about school meal accounts or completing paperwork. (15)

TX RPC Network Member Content Experts

Deanna Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LD, CNS, FISBNPA

University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth) School of Public Health in Austin

Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH

University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth) School of Public Health in Austin

Lesli Biediger-Friedman, PhD

Texas State University, Nutrition and Foods Program in the School of Family and Consumer Sciences

Kathryn Janda, PhD, MPH

Baylor University, Department of Public Health

Content development and research for this report was led by Dell Health Scholar Shelby Flores-Thorpe and the TX RPC Project Staff. For further information, please contact

TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.

References

1. Feeding America. The Impact of the Coronavirus on Local Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021. 2021.
2. Feeding America. The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021. 2021
3. The Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project. Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity. <https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/dell/legislative-initiatives/Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Food%20Insecurity-6.28.2022.pdf>. Published 2022. Updated June 28, 2022. Accessed July 28, 2022.
4. Texas Education Agency. Community Eligibility Provision. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://tea.texas.gov/finance-and-grants/grants/essa-program/community-eligibility-provision>.
5. Hecht AA, Pollack Porter KM, Turner L. Impact of the Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on student nutrition, behavior, and academic outcomes: 2011-2019. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2020;110(9):1405-1410.
6. Food and Nutrition Service. Child Nutrition Programs: Community Eligibility Provision. United States Department of Agriculture. Updated April 19, 2019. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/community-eligibility-provision>.
7. Food Research & Action Center. Community Eligibility. Updated 2022. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://frac.org/community-eligibility>.
8. World Health Organization. Food and Nutrition Policy for Schools: A Tool for the Development of School Nutrition Programmes in the European Region. Copenhagen; WHO Regional Office for Europe;2006.
9. Langford R, Bonell CP, Jones HE, et al. The WHO Health Promoting School framework for improving the health and well-being of students and their academic achievement. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews*. 2014(4)
10. Food Research & Action Committee. Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2020-2021. Published June 2021. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Report-2021.pdf>
11. Andreyeva T, Sun X. Universal School Meals in the US: What Can We Learn from the Community Eligibility Provision? *Nutrients*. 2021; 13(8):2634. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13082634>.
12. No Kid Hungry. Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Updated 2022. Accessed August 3, 2022. <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/community-eligibility-provision>
13. No Kid Hungry. CEP Benefits Students & Schools. Accessed March 13, 2022. <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/community-eligibility-provision/benefits-of-cep>
14. Food Research & Action Committee, & Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Community Eligibility: Making High-Poverty Schools Hunger Free. Published October 1, 2013. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/10-1-13fa-ppt.pdf>
15. United States Department of Agriculture. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/cn/CEPfactsheet.pdf>. Published 2015. Accessed August 18, 2022.
16. Fleischhacker S, Campbell E. Ensuring equitable access to school meals. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. 2020; 230(5):893-897.