Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)
Frequently Asked Questions

Identified Student Percentage

1. <u>**How do I know if my schools are eligible for CEP?**</u>

   A contracting entity (CE) uses the participation information about National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP), as reported in the Texas Unified Nutrition Programs System (TX-UNPS), to determine the number of enrolled students who participate in NSLP or SBP who are certified as categorically eligible without application as of April 1 of the year preceding the CEP base year.

   To determine if a school is eligible, the CE will determine the total number of Identified Students who are certified as categorically eligible by the CE without application.

   At least forty percent of students must be identified as categorically eligible without application for the site to qualify. However, a CE may combine sites or establish district wide CEP as described in the *Site Participation* section of this document.

2. <u>**Where do I find the total of Identified Students?**</u>

   Identified Students include those students (1) who are categorically eligible without an application and (2) who participate in or are extended eligibility as of April 1 of the school year prior to the CEP base year in the following categorical programs:[1]

   - Federal assistance programs
     - Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)
     - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
     - Food Distribution Program for Indian Reservations (FDPIR)[2]
   - Early literacy programs
     - Head Start
     - Early Head Start
     - Even Head Start
     - Comparable state–funded pre-kindergarten program
   - Foster
   - Homeless, including runaways and individuals displaced by declared disasters
   - Migrant

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[1] See *Administrator's Reference Manual, Section 4, Determining Eligibility* for additional information on categorical eligibility.

[2] In Texas, there is a small population of children who may qualify under FDPIR. To directly certify a FDPIR eligible child, the CE must reach out to the tribal governing organization or appropriate tribal official to get a list of eligible children.

To maximize the number of Identified Students and therefore the Identified Student Percentage (ISP), the CE will need to reach out to out agencies or organizations and coordinate with them to ensure that every student who can be certified as categorically eligible without application is identified.

3. **Would the April 1 count of total identified students for the prior school year include those students who at one point were in the Direct Certification System in TX-UNPS but have since dropped off?**

Students that are identified by the Direct Certification System are eligible for free meals for the entire school year. Therefore, as long as students are enrolled and determined to be eligible in the Direct Certification System as of April 1 of the prior school year, the students can be included as an Identified Student.

4. **How should we round when determining the identified student and claiming percentages?**

When determining the Identified Student Percentage (ISP), CEs should **NOT** round. The percentage must be at least 40% to be eligible. A percentage of 39.98% does NOT meet the threshold.

5. **When getting our Identified Student Percentage (ISP), do we count our Pre-K Students that go half days?**

CEs must include any students that are enrolled as of April 1 that have access to NSLP or SBP. If they are pre-K students that either arrive or leave at times that do not permit them to participate in NSLP or SBP, they cannot be counted. If they participate in either meal service, they can be counted toward the ISP.

6. **How do you add and drop students during the year?**

Identified Students are determined as of April 1 of the prior school year.

- To establish a base year free claiming percentage, the CE uses enrollment information from the year prior to the first year of operating CEP. Any students that are enrolled in your school after April 1 of previous school year cannot be included as an Identified Student. Any students that are new to your district on or before April 1 of the previous school year should be included.

- For non-base years, an added or dropped student does not change the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for a school operating CEP.

Site Participation

7. **Can you combine a school that is less than 40% categorically eligible with a school that is greater than 40% to create a cluster of qualifying schools?**

   Yes, you can combine schools as long as the group of schools meets an Identified Student Percentage of at least 40%.

   > For example, a CE with 3 schools would like to implement CEP and School A has an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of 38%, School B has an ISP of 52%, and School C has an ISP of 82%.
   >
   > The CE would
   >
   > - add together the number of Identified Students for all 3 schools.
   > - add together the enrollments for all 3 schools.
   > - calculate the ISP for the group by determining the percentage of Identified Students from the combined enrollment of all 3 schools.

   In this example, as long as the ISP for the group of schools is at least 40%, CEP can be implemented at the three schools.

8. **Are new schools able to elect the CEP?**

   If the number of identified students and total enrollment as of April 1 are available before the June 30th application due date prior to the school's first school year, the school may apply for CEP. If the number of identified students and total enrollment are not available by the timeline listed above, then the new school may not elect CEP for its first school year.

9. **Can you add more schools after the first year?**

   CEs can add more schools after the first year. If a CE implements CEP with two schools grouped together yielding one ISP for SY 2012-2013, and for SY 2013-2014 the CE wants to add a third school to the original group to form a group of three schools, then a new ISP must be established for the new grouping.

   However, if the CE wants to add one additional school that will not be grouped with the first group of two schools, the ISP for the original group of two schools remains the same. The new CEP schools will need to establish its own ISP.

10. **If a district qualifies as a whole, but some schools do not elect the option, does the district still qualify?**

    The identified student percentage (ISP) is based only on the schools participating in CEP. Any schools within the district that elect not to participate in CEP should not be included in

the calculation of the district ISP, and the remaining schools electing to participate in CEP must meet the ISP threshold as a group or as an individual schools.

11. **A CE is considering CEP; however, one or more schools will be closing in the subsequent school year? How should this be handled?**

    If a CE has information or an indication that a school may be closing mid-cycle before the group of schools elects to begin CEP, it is recommended that the closing school be excluded from the group of schools electing CEP.

    If a school does shut down mid-cycle without any notice then a determination will have to be made if the students move to schools within the same group or district and if updated data is available for the group of schools to avoid double counting of students. It may be that a group of schools will be able to keep their percentage for the four years, but the impact of a school closing will have to be evaluated in each individual case.

12. **Can schools be randomly grouped together to become eligible for the option?**

    CEs may implement CEP at all schools in the district, at a group of schools, or at an individual school as long as the percentage of enrollment meets the 40% threshold and as long as the schools are in the same CE.

13. **Are adult high schools eligible to participate in the option?**

    Any school that (1) has an agreement with the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program and (2) meets the eligibility criteria to elect CEP may participate.

14. **Can Residential Child Care Centers participate in CEP?**

    No.

15. **A CE decides after implementation that CEP is not a viable option for them. What should they do?**

    A CE has the ability to cease and return to standard certification and counting procedures at any time during the school year. The CE must notify TDA prior to the change.

Implementation of CEP

16. **Is there an application process for participation in CEP?**

Yes, CEs must apply for CEP through TX-UNPS. TX-UNPS is being updated to manage the CEP application. The *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)* and the help text in TX-UNPS are also being updated to provide additional information on this process.

17. **At what percentage does the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) have to be so that 100% of meals are reimbursed at the free rate?**

Currently when the ISP is 62.5% or greater and is then multiplied by the 1.6 factor the free claiming percentage is 100%. Therefore 100% of the meals served would be claimed at the free rate. Keep in mind that the multiplier factor of 1.6 is subject to change on a year to year basis, but a CE keeps the same multiplier factor for all four years of its cycle.

18. **Will the Multiplier Factor change during the 4-year cycle of CEP?**

The CE, group of schools, or individual school participating in CEP is locked into the multiplier factor that was used to establish the free claiming percentage in the CEP base year used for the entire CEP four-year cycle. However, if the CE withdraws a school(s) before the end of that 4-year cycle, the remaining schools participating in CEP must adopt the multiplier factor that the USDA stipulates for that year.

19. **If there is a change in the ISP in years 2, 3, and 4 of the 4-year cycle, what does the CE do?**

The CE can elect to use the higher ISP from either the previous school year or the original ISP from the base year of operating CEP, for years 2, 3, or 4. Schools should track the percentage used for each year of the CEP cycle. A CE is not required to lower its ISP if the CE determines that the ISP has decreased in the second, third, or fourth year.

20. **Are CEs with schools currently operating Provision 2 in a NON BASE year permitted to elect the CEP?**

Provision 2 schools would be required to obtain identified student percentages reflective of April 1st of the school year prior to participation in CEP. If the CE determines that the identified student percentage meets eligibility requirements for these schools, they may participate in CEP the following year.

21. **How would a CE participating in Provision 2 enter the required CEP data into TX-UNPS, even if they are not planning on applying to participate in CEP?**

Provision 2 schools would still be required to obtain and submit their identified student percentages reflective of April 1, 2014 into TX-UNPS by the March 20, 2014 due date.

Notification Requirements

22. <u>If CE's are required to submit CEP data to TDA via TX-UNPS by the March 20th, 2014 due date, how is the data expected to be reflective of the April 1, 2014 reporting date?</u>

CE's are to provide TDA with the most current amount of Identified Students and total enrollment possible within the March 1 – March 20 timeframe in TX-UNPS. Should the CE identify a significant change has, or will occur to the CEP data entered after March 20, the CE should contact TDA.

23. <u>Once a school is approved to implement CEP, what notification must be distributed to the households?</u>

For all approved CEP schools, household notification is encouraged. TDA will be posting sample notification templates at *http://www.squaremeals.org.* CEP approved schools are not required to distribute the direct certification notification letter or household applications.

Verification Report

24. <u>Is the CE required to submit a Verification Report (FND-742) each year?</u>

Yes, the verification summary report will require the number of Identified Students by category (SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, homeless, migrant, runaway, foster, or head start).

Impact on Other Federal Programs

25. <u>What information is available related to United States Department of Education (USDOE), Title I funds and allocations and CEP implementation?</u>

In Texas Title I funding is not based on information from household applications.

26. <u>What information is available related to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) E-Rate Program and CEP participation?</u>

The FCC issued a letter on July 31, 2012 providing guidance regarding the impact of CEP and the E-Rate Program which states, "Pending further guidance, schools utilizing the CEP may use the NSLP eligibility data … for the most recent funding year in which such schools did not participate in CEP to determine discounts on services received under the E-rate program."

The full letter can be found at *http://www.squaremeals.org/Portals/8/files/NSLP/E-Rate%20Letter.pdf*