IDENTIFIED STUDENT PERCENTAGE (ISP) MANAGEMENT: INCREASING & MAXIMIZING YOUR DISTRICT'S ISP

Increasing your Identified Student Percentage (ISP) can be one of the most effective ways to boost your school nutrition budget revenue because the percent of meals reimbursed at the free rate equals your ISP multiplied by 1.6. Below are several options to help you raise your ISP by capturing every eligible student in your district and leverage grouping to expand the reach of CEP and reimbursement to your district.

Increase Your ISP

Students are categorically eligible for free school meals and should be included in your ISP calculation if they are:

- Directly Certified as eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid Free, or if they live in a household where another student is enrolled in one of these programs (this is referred to as 'extended eligibility' or a 'sibling match' as outlined below).

- Recipients of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

- Homeless, migrant, runaway, enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start, or directly certified Foster Children. (Important note! These categories do **not** extend eligibility to other students in the household.)

Extend eligibility. Students living in households with students who have already been directly certified can be automatically added to the ISP. This is referred to as extended eligibility.

- Locate the addresses of directly certified students on your student rosters, and then certify any additional students living at those same addresses who are in the same household.

Use connections with social workers and homeless liaisons. Your district's homeless liaison or social worker is responsible for supporting homeless, migrant, runaway, and foster care students.

- Liaisons and social workers will have the most current information regarding categorically eligible students.

- Check-in weekly or monthly to ensure that you capture students who may be categorically eligible and include them in your ISP.

Don't forget early childcare programs and alternative agreement schools. If your district has a Head Start, Early Head Start, those students may be able to be directly certified. If your district has an alternate agreement with other schools, these students may be included in your total enrollment and direct certification, possibly helping to increase your ISP. To find out what can and cannot contribute to your district's ISP, check out No Kid Hungry's *Calculating ISP Using Early Childhood Program and Alternative Agreement School Data*.

Examine all possible direct certification matches. Simple errors between datasets can prevent students from being directly certified, such as misspelled names, partial social security numbers, or incorrect birthdays. Locate the addresses of directly certified students on your student rosters, and then certify any additional students living at those same addresses.

> *Quick Tip: Keep documentation of all certified students for administrative reviews. You must be able to show how each student included in your ISP was certified.*

Conduct direct certification as often as possible. The more you conduct direct certification, the more likely you are to identify students who temporarily enroll in categorically eligible benefits.

- Even if a student only receives certifiable benefits (e.g. SNAP, TANF, etc.) for one month, that student will remain directly certified all year **if you keep records of their initial enrollment.**

- It is recommended to pull the direct certification report every time there is a refresh and the report must be pulled a minimum of three times each year.

- Always use clean data noting transferred, new, and withdrawn students.

- If you have a large student population, you may consider hiring temporary workers to help with this process, but first, make sure that you comply with all confidentiality guidelines. Districts report finding significant benefits in directly certifying students at least monthly.

  > *Quick Tip: Even if you are mid-cycle, you can start a new 4-year CEP cycle if you demonstrate an increase in ISP, establishing a higher reimbursement rate for another four years.*

Promote SNAP outreach in your schools. The more eligible families enrolled in SNAP, the higher your ISP.

- Consider including the link (https://newmibridges.michigan.gov/) to apply for SNAP and food benefits in Michigan.

- Promote and assist families with mibridges at your school events. Your school's social worker or homeless liaison may be able to support this. If not, consider reaching out to non-profit organizations that might provide mibridges application services.

Student Transfers – Do's and Don'ts

When students transfer from a school that does not use CEP, they are automatically and immediately able to access free meals at the CEP school. No further information is needed from the family. When a student leaves a CEP school, they will retain free meal status for 30 operating days. Nutrition departments have that time to either directly certify the student or collect a free or reduced-price meal application from the family. If at the end of the 30 days neither one applies, the student changes to full-price status.

Maximize Your ISP

Schools, or groups of schools, must have an ISP of 40% or greater to operate CEP. The 40% threshold can be met by:

- An individual school.

- A group of schools within the district, or

- All schools in the district.

Schools can maximize their reimbursement by testing different grouping scenarios. Grouping high enrollment, high ISP schools with lower enrollment, lower ISP schools can increase the number of schools enrolled in CEP in your district in addition to your reimbursement.

Example Grouping Scenario

	Identified Students	Enrollment	ISP	Free Meal Claim Rate (ISP x 1.6)
School A	60	120	50%	80%
School B	38	100	38%	61%
School C	150	200	75%	100%
GROUP OF SCHOOLS	248	420	**59%**	**94%**

Grouping Tools

Many tools are available to assist your district with finding the optimal grouping based on reimbursement and school participation. Two highlighted in this resource include:

No Kid Hungry's CEP Calculator

The NKH CEP Calculator enables school nutrition staff to:

1. Compare side-by-side your district's expected annual revenue under both CEP and standard NSLP (standard counting and claiming)

2. Compare side-by-side each school's expected annual revenue under both CEP and standard NSLP

3. Customize your financial analysis by manipulating expected breakfast and lunch participation rates by school, and see the impacts on revenue in real-time

4. Optimize your revenue with CEP by using strategic grouping, powered by the CEP grouping tool, **Meals Count**. It's built right into the calculator!

For step-by-step guidance on how to use the CEP Calculator, view the webinar and demo **on our website**.

MealsCount.com

The Meals Count web tool is a great way to quickly look at potential groupings and many districts' data is pre-loaded onto the site. So, you can just search for your district and add your average daily participation to run the grouping analysis. However, there is less of a financial analysis with MealsCount.com. So, if you are looking for a detailed analysis, consider using **the NKH CEP Calculator**.

Questions? Need additional support?

Check out bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/CEP for more resources, or email bestpractices@strength.org to get in touch.

Michigan School Nutrition:
MDE-schoolnutrition@michigan.gov

Michigan School Nutrition

Don't forget to share this resource with a friend or co-worker!