

CEP TALKING POINTS

FOR CONVERSATIONS WITH DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS

This resource will prepare you for conversations with district administrators who may be hesitant to adopt or expand CEP. You'll find general talking points and a section titled, "If you hear this, say that!" to help you respond to common questions and concerns from administrators.

Feel free to copy/paste directly from this resource for your communications.



What is CEP? The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows eligible schools to provide meals to all students at no cost to them.

Talking Points

- **CEP will make it easier to serve meals in the classroom.** Under CEP, teachers only need to count the total number of meals served to students in their classroom. Without CEP, teachers will have to be trained to track the number of meals served to students who qualify for free meals, reduced-price meals, or "paid" meals, respectively.
- **CEP means no more school lunch debt.** All meals are served to students at no cost to them. That means, no more school lunch debt, no alternative meals to students who've accrued lunch debt, and no negative press! At a time when school nutrition budgets are facing unprecedented deficits, CEP can prevent schools from falling into further debt.
- **CEP promotes equity by eliminating the out-of-pocket cost of school meals for all students.** School meals become a universal benefit like desks and textbooks.
- **CEP leads to improved student behavior and academic achievement.** A study published in the [Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition](#) finds significant benefits for students attending CEP schools, including higher attendance rates, and more students advancing beyond 10th grade.

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- **CEP reduces stigma around school meals.** Students are never identified as qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, and students are never singled out for having school lunch debt.
- **CEP decreases stress for parents.** Under CEP, parents don't have to complete meal benefit applications or worry about unpaid meal debt.
- **CEP does not impact Title I allocations to the district.** CEP may impact how a district distributes Title I funds to schools within a district, but CEP does not impact the level of funds the district receives overall.
 - Schools electing CEP are required collect alternative income forms each year.
- **CEP can generate revenue for school nutrition budgets.** We know that many school nutrition departments are facing unprecedented debt. Because CEP increases participation in school meals, schools often see a higher financial return under CEP than under traditional counting and claiming by fee category.
 - *Note:* Use this in districts with schools that have ISPs of 55% or higher, and do the math to give context. For example, if a school has an ISP of 55% to give context say, "Our ISP is 55%, which means that 88% of the meals we serve will be reimbursed at the federal free rate (~\$2 per breakfast and ~\$3.50 per lunch), and the remaining 12% will be served at the paid rate (~\$0.31 per breakfast and ~\$0.50 per lunch).



Need help getting the conversation started?

Use our [customizable template letter to school administrators](#). You can download, edit, and use however works best for you.

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If you hear this, say that!

Respond to common questions or concerns from district leaders.

“We don’t want to be labeled as ‘poor.’ This program is for high-poverty schools – not for us.”

Say, “Right now, so many of our families *do* need this, and it’s the right thing to do. Families have lost income and are struggling, and we can help.” *then back it up with reason:*

- We can always go back to traditional meal service if it doesn’t work for us.
- At the end of the day, it’s the same program - just a different reimbursement model.
- Kids who can afford to pack their own lunches, can still do that.
- We can communicate to our families that it’s a benefit we’re offering because of “uncertainty,” for example, “With so much uncertainty this year, our district has decided to provide meals to all students at no cost to you this school year. This will help us streamline meal service and adapt to new learning environments, and we hope it will give your families one less thing to worry about this year.”

“Some of our kids don’t need free meals. Why should we take money from the government to serve free meals to kids whose parents could afford to pay?”

Bring it back to the increased need right now. Say, “I hear you, but right now, we have a lot of families that do need this.” then add:

- Kids who can afford to pack their own lunches, can still do that.
- At the end of the day, it’s the same program - just a different reimbursement model.

“This seems like too much of a risk. What if we lose money?”

Flip this one around with, “It’s too much of a risk not to.” for the following reasons:

- Families have lost income and they may be newly eligible for free or reduced-priced school meals. But if they don’t fill out a meal application, they won’t receive that benefit, and they may accumulate school meal debt. That’s a huge risk we face if we don’t adopt CEP.
- CEP typically increases participation, which could generate more revenue than we would receive if we didn’t adopt CEP. This can help our school nutrition fund recover.
- We can go back to traditional counting and claiming at any time if it doesn’t work.