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School Operations and Management
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2013-14 Community Eligibility Option (CEO)

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) is now accepting applications from districts and schools that want to participate in the Community Eligibility Option (CEO) for the 2013-2014 school year. The CEO enables local education agencies (LEAs) or schools to serve all children breakfast and lunch at no charge for four successive school years, plus a qualifying grace year. The CEO is a wonderful opportunity that eligible LEAs/Districts, groups of schools, or individual schools should consider as it reduces administrative paperwork and costs, while making it easier for children in low income communities to receive meals at no charge in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. It also increases program integrity by relying on data from other means-tested certifications (i.e., SNAP/TANF). Those LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools that qualify to participate agree to cover any excess costs for serving breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students with funds from non-federal sources. In other words, the excess costs must come from the general fund or other alternative sources. If the reimbursement received from CEO covers the cost of serving all meals to all students, no further funds are needed.

The CEO is a viable and valuable alternative for those LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools in high poverty areas. It results in simplified processes and procedures for claiming reimbursable meals and eliminates the need to conduct verification in participating schools, although direct certification data must be reported annually on the Attachment G [School Food Authority (SFA) Verification Collection Report].

Eligibility

For 2013-2014, eligibility is based on the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) certified for free meals by a means other than a household application, compared to total LEA/group of schools/individual school enrollment as of April 1 data. The intent is to identify students directly data matched with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) on April 1, 2013. **An additional file of SNAP/TANF data has been added to the Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP) module on the Child Nutrition Management System (CNMS) that includes eligibility through March 31, 2013. Please download this file to certify additional students and increase your ISP for use in establishing participation in the CEO for the 2013-14 school year.**

The ISP has been expanded to include:

SNAP/TANF recipients identified through electronic direct certification
Extension of eligibility to siblings or household members of SNAP/TANF recipients
Homeless children identified by the Homeless Liaison
Head Start
Pre-K Evenstart
Migrant Youth

Runaways

Foster Children certified directly by means other than a household application

Direct Certification Letters 2012-13 (**Now called Eligibility Letters for Free Meals/Milk**)

*Students who are eligible for free meals based on submission of an application are not included in the ISP, even if the application includes a SNAP/TANF number. We encourage you to check the DCM database to directly match these numbers to electronic enrollment data in order to increase your ISP. It should be noted that if you cannot find the electronic match for an application that includes a SNAP/TANF number, the application must still be taken at face value and the student provided free meal benefits.

Eligible LEAs/group of schools/individual schools must have an ISP of 40 percent or more of its student enrollment that are eligible for free meals by a means other than a self-reported household application. No LEA/group of schools/individual schools with an ISP less than 40 percent is eligible to be included. LEAs may combine groups of schools or the whole LEA may implement CEO if an ISP of 40 percent threshold is met.

Claiming

Meal program claims are based on the percentage of identified students multiplied by a factor of 1.3 - 1.6, as written in regulation. The multiplier for the 2013-14 school year is 1.6. Schools that attain an ISP of 62.5 percent of its students (based on the 1.6 multiplier) will receive 100 percent free reimbursement for all breakfasts and lunches served to students. An LEA or school cannot receive more than 100 percent free reimbursement. However, if, for example, a school attained an ISP of 80 percent, that school's enrollment can be combined with other schools to provide an increased ISP for the entire LEA or group of schools within the LEA.

The claiming percentages established for the LEAs/group of schools/individual schools from the information noted above are guaranteed for a period of four school years, and may be increased if the ISP rises for the LEAs/group of schools/individual schools based on subsequent April 1, data.

The LEAs/group of schools/individual schools must provide to the NYS Education Department their ISP for each April 1 in the four year CEO cycle if, at initiation of the cycle, they were not at an ISP that would yield 100 percent free reimbursement (using the 1.6 multiplier, this percentage is 62.5). If LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools provide an ISP that is greater than the year one ISP, they may choose to increase the ISP in the current CEO cycle, or begin a new four year cycle. If LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools provide an ISP that is less than the year one ISP, the year one ISP will remain in effect through the remainder of the CEO cycle, or until a subsequent percentage increase is reported.

Reimbursement to LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools is based on the percent of eligible students (ISP) times the current multiplier of 1.6. For example, if 40 percent of the students in your LEA or school were identified using the above methods of certification, you would multiply 40 percent x 1.6 which equals 64. You would then receive 64 percent of your reimbursement in the free category and the remaining 36 percent in the paid category. If 55 percent of your students were identified using the above methods of certification, you would receive 88 percent of your reimbursements in the free category and the remaining 12 percent in the paid category (see chart). There is no reduced price reimbursement in the CEO.

% of free eligibles	Claiming Percentages	
40 x 1.6 =	64 free	36 paid
45 x 1.6 =	72 free	28 paid
50 x 1.6 =	80 free	20 paid
55 x 1.6 =	88 free	12 paid
60 x 1.6 =	96 free	4 paid
62.5 x 1.6 =	100 free	0 paid

Since monies are not being collected from the students who receive paid meals, you must either ensure that the CEO reimbursement covers all meal costs or cover those costs from another source. General funds, donations or some other funding would be needed if your costs for implementing the CEO are higher than the reimbursements received for the CEO.

Rather than take a meal count by category for each breakfast and lunch each day, participating schools will take a total count of complete reimbursable meals, by meal (count breakfast discretely from lunch). The closer the school is to attaining an ISP of 62.5 percent, the more attractive this option becomes.

Data Matching

If you have not completed the electronic DCMP with SNAP/TANF data during the 2012-13 school year, it's not too late to go on the CNMS website and conduct the match for the purpose of establishing eligibility for CEO. Ensure that you include all DCMP files (August, October, February, April) in your download. If you received family applications with SNAP/TANF numbers, you should use the DCMP to validate their eligibility and include those you find in your ISP.

All LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools opting to implement CEO must still conduct electronic Direct Certification at least once annually prior to reporting on the Attachment G- SFA Verification Collection Report, but may want to conduct DCMP multiple times to provide data for other federal, State and local funding that use child nutrition data as a proxy for poverty.

In addition to DCMP, you may also collect income information from families you did not directly certify, as this data is used as a proxy for poverty for many purposes in New York State. However, LEAs cannot go out with an application for free and reduced priced meals, since all the meals will be served at no charge. A Family Income Inquiry form that looks very similar to the Free and Reduced Price application is provided for your use. Please note that DCMP efforts may be charged to the Child Nutrition Programs, but the collection and certification of the Family Income Inquiry form is not a chargeable activity as the data collected from these forms is not being used for Child Nutrition Program purposes. These activities must be supported/funded by the General Fund or other alternative funding.

Grace Year

LEAs and schools in year four with an ISP of at least 30 percent are permitted to continue to use the CEO for an additional year, using the initiation year ISP for a fifth grace year. The grace year eligibility must be based on the ISP as of April 1st enrollment of year four.

LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools that have an ISP greater than the ISP from year one, may begin a new four-year cycle in the following school year.

Provision 2

Eligible Provision 2 schools intending to elect CEO for the 2013-14 school year must be able to establish a current ISP. Eligible Provision 2 schools may elect the CEO during base year or non-base years, as long as current (April 1) DCMP is available.

Evaluation by USDA Contractors

USDA has contracted for an extensive evaluation of CEO to assess participation and impact in the eligible LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools in the States selected during the phase-in period. Data collection began in Fall 2012, and will continue through the Spring of 2014. All LEAs, whether implementing CEO or not, are required to cooperate with the evaluation contractors and provide all requested data.

Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs) may not participate in the CEO as they are not included in the purpose of the legislation.

LEAs/groups of schools/individual schools may elect to stop the CEO for the next year by notifying the NYSED Child Nutrition office no later than June 30 of the current school year. This option will be available to all states, LEAs and schools for the 2014-15 school year.

Application Submissions

Applications for the 2013-14 school year must be postmarked by **June 30, 2013**. Please submit your information as soon as possible. Only complete applications will be considered, so ensure you have addressed all attachments prior to submission.

Since the CEO requires significant changes to the counting and claiming process and continues to require the LEA to collect eligibility information for other federal, State and local reporting purposes, a signed CEO Affirmation from the Superintendent or Chief Executive Officer agreeing to the terms must accompany the application.

The CEO application and supporting documentation can be emailed to childnutceo@mail.nysed.gov, please see CEO application instructions for further details. If you have any questions regarding electronic DCMP, please contact Bryan Tusch or Stacey Johnson at 518-474-3279. If you have questions regarding the CEO, please contact Sandra Sheedy or Leigh Goldman at 518-473-8781.