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SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

April 10, 2014

Dear Superintendents and School Administrators:

Beginning in the 2014-15 School Year, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) will be offered an alternative to collecting Household Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications. This alternative is known as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and was enacted with the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 §104(a). Qualifying LEAs may participate in CEP with one, several, or all schools in the LEA.

CEP is a beneficial and streamlined *option* for eligible LEAs and schools that wish to offer free meals to all children in high-poverty schools, thus eliminating the paperwork and frustration that can go along with collecting individual household applications. The benefits of CEP include:

- Increased participation by as much as 25 percent for breakfast and 13 percent for lunch because all students eat for free and the stigma associated with free and reduced eligibility is eliminated.
- Labor savings since there is no processing of Household Applications or money for payment of meals.
- Elimination of student debts since all meals are free.
- Consumption of nutritious meals by more students. Studies show that meals through the NSLP and SBP are of higher nutritional value than meals from home or purchased through other sources. A properly nourished student is a prerequisite for a prepared learner!

In order to qualify for CEP, an LEA, or schools within the LEA, must agree to serve all students breakfast and lunch for free and have an Identified Student Percentage of 40 percent or more. The Identified Student Percentage is composed of students that are eligible for free meals without the need for a Household Application for Free and Reduced Price Meals, through means such as Direct Certification (DC), Homeless/Runaway, Migrant, Foster (through county office), Head Start, Even Start, etc.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition (DFN), has a variety of resources available at www.education.state.pa.us/cep to provide more information about the CEP. Resources include memos and guidance from the U.S. Departments of Education and

Agriculture, PowerPoint presentation, recorded webinar, brochure, resources from other states that have already implemented CEP, and a spreadsheet that identifies potentially eligible schools based on direct certification numbers alone.

Since Household Applications for Free and Reduced Price Meals cannot be collected in CEP schools and there is not individual student free and reduced eligibility available in participating schools, there are key factors to consider along with the benefits listed above. As you are aware, this socioeconomic data is used in a variety of different programs, including Title I, E-rate funding, PIMS data collection, Basic Education Funding formula, and various grant programs. The following summarizes data that will be used in absence of free and reduced eligibility for the above programs.

Title I

LEAs will use the Identified Student Percentage with the multiplier for the individual buildings to determine the distribution of Title I funds. This may cause the distribution of funds to be different than in the past. Refer to www.education.state.pa.us/cep, Title I.

E-rate Funding

LEAs will use free/reduced eligibility from the most recent year that individual student data was collected. Schools opting into CEP for the 2014-15 school year will use free/reduced eligibility data from the 2013-14 fiscal year. Further federal guidance is forthcoming on how this will be collected and determined in future years. Refer to www.education.state.pa.us/cep, E-Rate.

PIMS Data Collection

CEP schools will use poverty data to complete the Economic Disadvantaged Status Code (Field #88) in PIMS. Poverty data sources include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cases, census poor, Medicaid, children living in institutions for the neglected or delinquent, or those supported in foster homes. Please refer to the PIMS User Manual, Volume 1 (Student and Student Snapshot templates) for additional information.

At the local level, LEAs may decide to collect socioeconomic data from families to report in lieu of or in addition to the poverty data for the Economic Disadvantaged Status Code. Any LEA that chooses to collect socioeconomic data may not use the Free and Reduced Price Household Meal Application, must declare to families that the collection of information is not related to the NSLP and SBP, and may not use any funds associated with the NSLP and SBP for the purposes of collecting or processing the socioeconomic data. This includes any funds in the food service account.

I encourage LEAs to be mindful that an objective of CEP is to reduce the collection and processing of paperwork.

Schools not using CEP can use poverty data sources/and or free and reduced eligibility data in the Economic Disadvantaged Status Code.

CEP schools may report 100 percent of the students as free and reduced eligible in the Food Program Eligibility Field (#131).

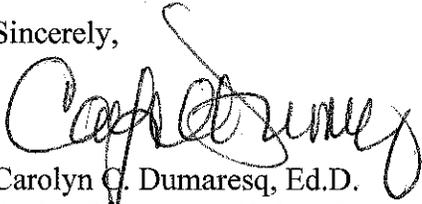
Basic Education Funding Formula

Data from the Economic Disadvantaged Status Code Field from PIMS will now be used in the Basic Education Funding formula calculation for all schools instead of the number of free and reduced eligible students.

The goal is to ensure children have the best possible access to nutritional meals every day and we believe CEP could help reach that goal. Therefore, I highly encourage you to calculate the numbers for the LEA and schools within the LEA and participate if your LEA qualifies.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolyn C. Dumaresq". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Carolyn C. Dumaresq, Ed.D.
Acting Secretary of Education