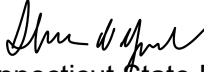




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Sponsors of the National School Lunch Program

FROM: Shannon K. Yearwood, Bureau Chief 
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, Connecticut State Department of Education

DATE: May 11, 2026

SUBJECT: Operational Memorandum No. 09-26
Annual Application Process for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

This memo provides guidance to school food authorities (SFAs) on the CEP application deadlines for school year (SY) 2026-27.

The CEP provides an alternative approach for offering school meals in local educational agencies (LEA) and schools in low-income areas, instead of collecting individual household applications for free and reduced-price school meals. The CEP allows schools that predominantly serve students with low incomes to offer free, nutritious school meals to all students through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

LEAs are eligible to participate in the CEP if the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for the entire district, groups of schools, or an individual school meets or exceeds 25 percent. The ISP is the proportion of identified students (out of all enrolled students) who are directly certified for **free** school meals through a means other than the school meal application (this does **not** include students directly certified for reduced-priced meals, or students with the designation of FE or RE in the Direct Certification S-EBT List). The ISP is calculated by dividing the total number of identified students by the total student enrollment.

Per federal regulations, SFAs are required to determine their ISP with data for each school that operates the NSLP or SBP from **April 1, 2026**. Participation in the CEP is not mandatory, even if a LEA meets eligibility requirements.

LEAs and schools currently participating in CEP are encouraged to review their identified student data annually to determine whether recalculating the ISP may support maintaining or improving their claiming percentage for the remainder of the CEP cycle. While recalculation may not be required for all participants, periodic review may help LEAs and schools assess available options in light of changing economic conditions and potential fluctuations in identified student populations.

Considerations for Participation in the CEP

1. LEAs should use the [CEP Monthly Federal Reimbursement Calculator](#) for SY 2025-26 to help determine if participating in the CEP will be financially viable for the LEA (i.e., generate the same, more, or less federal revenue). The calculator does not take into consideration state funding sources received by the SFA that may be used to support the CEP.
2. If the total amount of federal reimbursement for meals served under the CEP does not cover the LEA's costs, LEAs may use federal and non-federal funding sources from the nonprofit school foodservice account to cover operational costs. Please note that the allowance to use federal and non-federal funding sources in the nonprofit school foodservice account to support CEP is new guidance issued as part of [USDA Memo SP 09-2024](#), *Community Eligibility Provision: Guidance and Updated Q&As*.

Eligible LEAs Interested in Implementing the CEP

LEAs that meet at least one of the criteria below must formally apply to participate in the CEP for SY 2026-27.

- LEAs/schools electing CEP participation for the first time.
- LEAs/schools in the mid-cycle of CEP participation that are requesting changes to their currently approved ISP.
- LEAs/schools that are currently in the fourth year of CEP participation with an ISP greater than or equal to 25 percent and would like to start a new four-year cycle.
- LEAs/schools currently in the fourth year of CEP participation with a new, calculated ISP greater than or equal to 15 percent, but less than 25 percent (eligible for one "grace" year based on the ISP as of April 1, 2026, in year 4 of the current four-year cycle).

Grace Year for LEAs and Schools

Participating LEAs and schools that are in year four of the four-year CEP cycle may continue participating in the CEP for one grace year (a fifth year) if the ISP from April 1, 2026, is at least 15 percent, but less than 25 percent. Reimbursement for schools in a grace year is based on the ISP from April 1, 2026, in year 4 of the current four-year cycle. During a "grace" year, the percentage of meals reimbursed at the free rate is based on the lower ISP, as determined by data from **April 1, 2026**.

LEAs and schools that reach the required 25 percent threshold during the grace year (fifth year) are eligible to begin a new four-year cycle in the following school year. LEAs and schools that do not meet the threshold as of April 1, 2026, of the grace year must elect another special provision option or return to standard counting and claiming, and collect school meal applications, in the following school year.

CEP Notification Requirements

LEAs and schools must notify the CSDE no later than **May 15, 2026**, if they intend to:

- formally apply for the CEP for the next school year;
- continue with their current ISP (for mid-cycle CEP participating LEAs and schools);
- recalculate their ISP;
- withdraw from the CEP and revert to the regular meal counting and claiming process; or
- continue participating in CEP for one grace year (a fifth year) because the calculated ISP from April 1, 2026, is at least 15 percent, but less than 25 percent.

To notify the CSDE about the LEA/school's CEP decisions above, complete the [School Year 2026-27 Community Eligibility Provision Application Survey](#).

CEP Application Processes and Deadlines

The application deadline for formal application for CEP participation (new or recalculating LEAs and schools) in SY 2026-27 is **June 30, 2026**. Eligible LEAs interested in CEP participation must follow the CSDE's guidelines to formally apply for the CEP and must submit all documentation to support ISP calculations from April 1, 2026. The CSDE will validate this data before finalizing and accepting any ISPs for claiming purposes for SY 2026-27.

The CEP application requires uploading three documents to the Connecticut Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs (CNP System). **All documents must draw from April 1, 2026, data.**

1. [CEP participation worksheets](#)
2. [Master student enrollment file](#)
3. [Student identification list](#)

School food authorities must upload all CEP application Excel files to the Connecticut State Department of Education's Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs by the following steps in the [Guidance for Uploading 2026-27 CEP Application Excel Files](#). **Do not email any files to the CSDE.**

Questions may be directed to your CSDE [school nutrition team member](#).

SKY:saa

Important: This is a numbered Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) operational memorandum that contains important program information. Please read carefully and retain for future reference. All CSDE operational memoranda are posted on the CSDE's [Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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