



# FRAC Facts: Community Eligibility

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**Community Eligibility allows schools with high numbers of low-income children to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting school meal applications. This option increases participation by children in the school meal programs, while schools reduce labor costs and increase their federal revenues, allowing for a healthier student body and a healthier school meal budget.**

## How it Works

- Schools in high-poverty areas provide free breakfasts and lunches to all students without collecting applications or tracking eligibility in the cafeteria.
- A formula based on direct certification data is the basis for reimbursements instead of paper applications.
- Any school building with 40 percent or more students directly certified (i.e. children who are certified for free meals without a paper application based on their status as in foster care, Head Start, homeless, migrant, or living in households that receive SNAP/Food Stamps, TANF cash assistance or FDPIR benefits) can use this option.
- The reimbursement rate for both lunch and breakfast is determined by multiplying the percent of students directly certified by 1.6. The resulting number is the percent of meals reimbursed at the “free” reimbursement rate, with the rest being reimbursed at the “paid” rate. For example, a school with 50 percent of its students directly certified would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80 percent of the breakfasts and lunches it served ( $50 \times 1.6 = 80$ ) and the remaining 20 percent would be reimbursed at the paid rate.
- Participating schools are guaranteed to receive the same reimbursement rate (or a higher one if the level of direct certification increases) for 4 years.
- The option is available in Illinois, Kentucky and Michigan beginning in the school year 2011-2012. Four additional states will be added in each of the subsequent two years. Beginning in the 2014 – 2015 school year, schools in any state will be able to participate in this option.

## Benefits

- All students receive all meals at no charge.
- Paperwork for schools and families is dramatically reduced. Families no longer have to complete applications, and schools no longer have to certify individual student eligibility which also eliminates the verification process.
- School meal service is streamlined. School meal staff no longer collect payments or do individual student counting and claiming. They simply count total meals served and assure that each student only receives one meal at the point of service.
- Universal (free) meals make it easier for schools to implement alternative meal service such as “grab and go” and breakfast in the classroom.