

CEP: Best Practices for Alternative Income Form Collection

Call Notes

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Facilitators: Dominika Bednarska, WRO

Jessie Hewens, FRAC

Presenters: School districts from California, Kentucky and FRAC

Recorded by FRAC

FRAC: Overview of CEP

[USDA FNS Community Eligibility Provision Resource Center](#)

[FRAC Community Eligibility Website](#)

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) eliminates school meal applications for qualifying schools. CEP reduces administration burden among school districts, facilitates the implementation of alternative breakfast service models, eliminates issues with unpaid school meal debt, and reduces stigma. CEP eligibility is determined using an Identified Student Percentage (ISP). ISP includes students that are directly certified for school free or reduced price meals. Reimbursement for CEP is based on a formula using the ISP. The deadline to apply to CEP is June 30.

Presentations

California (Sheila White-Oakland Unified)

- Collecting alternative income forms for the past three years.
- The previous year was particularly challenging. Some schools had registration prior to delivery of the alternative income form. This year, the alternative income form will be at the sites prior to registration. Clerical staff will be at the sites that had low return rates last year.
- Receiving the direct certification list in August is problematic for school districts. Some schools send the alternative income form in July and getting the list earlier would be helpful.
- Central staff personnel make school visits to review alternative income forms. Has been a huge help to assist school clerical staff in catching common form errors.

Kentucky (Shanna Lee)

- This is an urban school district with partial implementation of CEP. The school district is in the third year of CEP.
- This year, the school district strategy is to coordinate with back to school events and send alternative income forms in June.
- Including all stakeholders such as administrative staff is helpful in disseminating information about alternative income forms.

- After their first year collecting alternative income forms, this school district created a tool kit for school staff. The toolkit addresses frequently asked questions.
- Currently using paper forms. Working on state approval for online form. This will decrease costs.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned (FRAC)

Spread Awareness and Gain Buy-In

- Include all stakeholders in form collection process (Principals, administration, teachers, and other staff).
- One district was able to collect forms from 99% of households. Superintendent disseminated message to principals.
- Utilize experience of school nutrition personnel that have been collecting school meal applications for years.

Bundle the Form with Other Requirements

- The form can be included with other required registration forms that parent/guardians complete annually.

Meet the Communication Needs of Households

- Provide forms in languages reflective of the community.
- School districts report higher success rate in collecting alternative income forms rather than the school meal application. One reason may be that the alternative income form does not collect social security numbers.
- Consider integrating the alternative income form into an online system.
- Simplify the form, for instance using checkboxes and income ranges.
- Target families that do not have data on file.

Utilize School Events

- Offer hands-on assistance at back to school nights and other events.
- Train school staff to utilize laptops to complete forms at school events.

Utilize Incentives to Encourage School Staff

- One district created a “classroom competition” to encourage form collection.

QA

How do you respond to questions from principals who need information about free and reduced price percentages?

- Direct questions to Calpads. Calpads can report on eligibility for students.

Does anyone have a sample cover letter that they send with alternative income application that they are willing to share?

- Will be disseminated.

WRO: What kinds of incentives have increased form returns?

- One school district hosts a barbecue for the school with the highest return rate of alternative income form. It was successful and improved marketing at the school level.

Besides entering alternative income form information into database, what are the other purposes and uses for the alternative income form?

- It is not federally required for CEP or Title 1; however, there are states that have educational funding formulas that require the student-level information. Some school districts choose to use the forms for Title 1 purposes, although they are not required to do so.
- In Kentucky, the alternative income form is used for fee waiver programs and e-rate discounts.

How are alternative income forms advertised?

- One school district filters out all students that are directly certified. A package is sent to the remaining student households with a prepaid envelope. Additionally, households are directed to an online application. Nutrition services are not utilized for QA from households. During the base year, the school district hosted workshops at 12 different sites. Phone messages direct households to these 12 sites. School staff utilized laptops to assist parents and guardians during the event.
- One school district has forms translated into 6 different languages.
- One school district mails the form to all households. The initial form is mailed in English, but the office can provide the form in 12 different languages.

For questions related to partial CEP-implementation and siblings at CEP and non-CEP schools, refer to [Question #79 in Memo SP 54-2016](#).

How do you make sure guardians or parents understand the purpose of the alternative income form?

- Letter from superintendent is included with the form.
- The form is introduced at school events.

One school district sends a report to principals every 2 weeks to indicate which students have not submitted an alternative income form. How do other districts manage this communication?

- One school district collaborates with IT department to create a master list of non-respondents. This information is sent to the principals at varying frequency. At the beginning, the list is sent once every 2 days. Later, the list is sent every two weeks.

[Samples of LCSF forms](#) are located on the California Department of Education CEP website.