

Community Eligibility Provision

New Jersey Department of Education

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

What is the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)?

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) was created as part of the USDA's National School Lunch Program. It allows schools with high eligibility for free and reduced price lunches to opt in to provide free lunch for all students in the school regardless of income.

Why did my child's school send home a survey about my income and household?

The CEP program allows schools to provide lunch to all students regardless of income, so income surveys are no longer needed to determine eligibility. However, the NJ Department of Education has historically used the number of eligible students to determine, among other things, the amount of state aid for school districts. Generally, a school with more eligible students will receive more state aid. This is why it's important for all families to complete the survey and return it to school.

Will my child receive free or reduced price lunch even if we aren't income-eligible?

All students in the CEP school will receive free lunches regardless of income.

I have more than one child – do I need to fill out more than one form?

You must fill out one form per school. If your children are in the same school, you may list both children on one form (or submit one form per child). If your children are in different schools, you must complete an application for **each** school.

Will all of my children receive free lunch (even in different schools)?

Only the CEP schools will provide free lunches to all students. If you have a child in a school that is not participating in the CEP program, that child will receive free lunch only if you are eligible per the requirements of the free and reduced price lunch program. CEP schools will distribute to all students a NJ household income survey with the state seal, while non-participating schools will continue to distribute the National School Lunch Program's application for free and reduced price lunches.

Why does one of my children get free lunch when another one doesn't?

Students who are not eligible for free and reduced price lunches according to the criteria of the National School Lunch Program only receive free lunch if they attend a CEP-participating school.

What happens if I refuse to fill out the NJ Household Income Survey?

If households fail to complete the CEP income survey, the delivery of programs and services in your child's school may be impacted. Therefore, it is very important that every household accurately completes the form. In addition, failure to complete the form will impact the accuracy of reporting on students' test scores and tracking student achievement.

Will the district share my information?

The information collected in the CEP survey will be protected using the same protocol as the information collected through the NSLP's free and reduced price lunch applications.

Who should I contact with questions about the form or the program?

All questions should first be directed to your child's school administrative office. They can direct you to the appropriate point of contact within your district.