



For Immediate Release:

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Contact: Kelly Donnelly 860.713.6525

New school meal program improves nutrition for all students USDA official visits New Haven to make national announcement

(NEW HAVEN, CT)—USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon joined State Department of Education (SDE) Chief Operating Officer Charlene Russell-Tucker, and New Haven Superintendent Garth Harries today at Ross Woodward Classical Studies School to announce a big change to the nation's school lunch program.

Capping off the final day of activities in recognition of National School Lunch Week, Under Secretary Concannon announced an alternative approach for providing school meal programs called the Community Eligibility Provision, or CEP. The new, optional initiative allows eligible schools to provide free meals to all students at no charge, regardless of family income, while reducing administrative burdens and costs.

"School lunch is an essential part of every child's health, development, and academic success," said USDA Under Secretary Concannon. "The collective improvements USDA has made to the school food environment make the healthy choice the easy choice for America's young people."

The Community Eligibility Provision provides significant benefits for students, families, and districts by providing breakfast and lunch to all students every day at no cost to families through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

"Children cannot be effective learners on an empty stomach, and school nutrition programs are a vital component to student success," said Governor Dannel P. Malloy. "The reduced red tape and lower financial costs of this provision are notable, but the most important benefit is that more young people will be eating balanced, nutritious meals in order to maximize their learning potential."

Pilot states implementing CEP have all shown increased participation in both their breakfast and lunch programs. CEP eliminates stigma for students identified as economically disadvantaged and elevates the nutritional status for all students. It simplifies meal counting and claiming, and enables meal service to occur much more efficiently, leaving more time for children to eat.

"A program that requires less paperwork, costs less, and feeds more young people in some of our most under-served neighborhoods is an easy initiative to support," said Chief Operating Officer Russell-Tucker. "We are encouraged by the early feedback we are hearing from the participating districts in Connecticut and look forward to seeing the year end result of how many more students we were able to reach through this program."

To qualify, at least 40 percent of a school's student population must be identified as low-income children who meet criteria for free school meals. Instead of collecting individual applications for free and reduced price meals, CEP uses information from other programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Temporary Assistance Program for Needy Families (TANF).

"At our national convention this year, AFT passed a resolution in support of healthy and hunger-free schools. It speaks directly to the promise of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to achieve the goal of universal breakfast and lunch for all students in America's public schools," said Steve McKeever, First Vice-President of AFT Connecticut and former high school science teacher in Middletown Public Schools. "We are proud to partner with the Malloy-Wyman administration and cooperate with all stakeholders to expand its implementation in Connecticut. We believe it will help assure that no child goes hungry and that every student has the opportunity to excel."

In New Haven, all schools meet the eligibility requirements and are participating in CEP. The district estimates that it will serve approximately 200,000 more meals over the course of the school year and realize \$1.5 million more in federal reimbursement.

"Students learn best when they are healthy and strong and have nutritious food in their bellies. By streamlining the reporting process and reducing costs, this initiative is allowing us to achieve our goal of producing fresh, healthy meals by our dedicated unionized food workers and feeding more kids," said Superintendent of Schools Garth Harries.

In Connecticut, all schools in Waterbury, New Haven, and New London are participating in CEP. Hartford has 33 schools participating; East Hartford has three; Vernon has one; and Windham has six, along with its early childhood centers in Willimantic and Columbia.

By switching to CEP, the daily average of students in Waterbury eating school breakfast jumped from 4,200 last year to 7,000 this year and the daily average of students eating lunch is up to 15,000 per day.

Preliminary data from East Hartford, which just started CEP in October at three elementary schools, already show an increase overall when compared with last month's numbers.

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CONTACT: Kelly Donnelly
Connecticut State Department of Education
Phone: 860-713-6525
Mobile: 860-983-1550
Email: Kelly.Donnelly@ct.gov