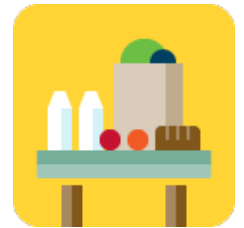


“In It For The Kids”: Insights on the Community Eligibility Provision from Omaha’s Druid Hill Elementary School



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Introduction

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), part of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 became available to all states in the 2014-15 school year. CEP is a great opportunity for schools and school districts with high concentrations of poverty to feed all of their students breakfast and lunch for free. Feeding students in our Nebraska schools is a high priority and CEP helps to ensure more children in our schools are fed and ready to learn.

Druid Hill Elementary in Omaha, Nebraska was one of the earliest adopters of Community Eligibility in Nebraska. In March 2016, we interviewed Principal Cherice Williams and School Counselor Stacey Rawlings to learn about their experience implementing CEP. The following outlines the ways in which CEP has positively impacted student behavior, school hunger, and reduced workload for nutrition staff and parents.

“Anyone who is in this business for kids is going to be for it, is going to promote it, and is going to support it...because that is who it is helping. Us adults had to make some adjustments so that way kids could be fed and learn. There is nothing wrong with that. That is all good.”

Ms. Rawlings

Druid Hill Elementary case study

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows qualifying schools, groups of schools, or school districts in high poverty areas to serve free breakfasts and lunches to all students. CEP allows schools to forego the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) applications that are traditionally required for free and reduced price meals and feed *all* their students for free. Students must be counted at the point of service, but staff will simply count meals served and not meals by reimbursement type – making the process quicker and less costly.



Druid Hill Elementary School, one of the early adopters of CEP, is located in North Omaha. It serves 400 students in Head Start through sixth grade and also offers a Kindergarten to 12th grade behavior skills program, alternative curriculum program, English as a second language, and special education. Druid Hill began using CEP in the spring of 2015 as part of a CEP pilot program of six schools in Omaha Public Schools.

More kids fed and on time for school

Druid Hill experienced an increase in attendance (2%), decrease in tardiness, and more children arriving on time for school ready to learn with the implementation of CEP.

“Students are coming earlier to get breakfast which is why our attendance is increasing and our tardies have decreased...When they arrive into the classroom, their assignment to start off with is already written on the board. They can just get into that mindset of school. To me, that is adding at least a half hour to their day because they can eat, and smoothly transition into the lesson.”

“It’s like Maslow’s hierarchy, when you have those things that you need, you are able to be more successful in more areas. We are not seeing as many hungry students.”

Ms. Rawlings

Positive changes for students

Students increased self-esteem, snuck less “junk food” into the lunchroom, and had fewer behavioral issues in both the lunchroom and the classroom after implementing CEP.

CEP increased self-esteem, because if a child got the cheese sandwich, people would tease them about how much money their family had and things like that. Now we are seeing much less harassment from other students. We also don’t have kids trying to sneak junk food into the cafeteria because they know they are going to eat.”

Ms. Rawlings

Benefits for nutrition staff



Having nutrition staff circulate opened up their capacity to build relationships with the students. Because they are not teachers, their role is less defined and they become more like mentors for the kids...The kids want to do well, and they want to do well the entire day. They get to report to the staff and say they are doing nicely, or things like that.”

Ms. Rawlings

CEP changed the way that nutrition staff interacts with students by opening up more time for them to build relationships with and become mentors for students. They also felt relief in the pocketbooks because CEP eliminated pressure to pay for some students' meals when their accounts were empty. On the business side, CEP eliminated guesswork for food orders and irregularity in their work schedule because the number of students eating meals is more consistent day to day.

"Nutrition staff are able to leave on time. A lot of them are part-time and have second jobs. Without the paperwork and having to collect money and submit it to payroll, they are able to support one another more and work together more efficiently to get to their next job."

Principal Williams

Grab-n-go breakfast model

"[Because of grab-n-go breakfasts], we have seen a decrease in discipline. Prior to grab-and-go and CEP, we would often have to stop arguments about something that happened the day before and carried over into breakfast time. Now, students just come in independently, walk right to cafeteria, take their grab-and-go meals, and head straight to class."

Principal Williams



Implementing the grab-n-go breakfast model through CEP more than doubled the amount of students eating breakfast (from 100 per day to 266 per day). It also created additional transition time for students to get in the school mindset, and gave teachers more time to get to know their students before jumping into curriculum.

Favorable response from parents

Although at first some parents were hesitant or confused about not having to send a check in for lunch, ultimately CEP has decreased parents' concern that their child's meal funds are empty and enabled them to rest assured that their kids will be fed during the school day.

"We saw a decrease in the parents concern. [They used to come in and say things like,] 'Oh my gosh! I owe \$12 for lunch? How did that happen?'"

Principal Williams

Conclusion

Overall, both Principal Williams and Ms. Rawlings highly recommend CEP to any school that is eligible because it alleviates the burden that students, staff, and parents have in worrying whether or not students are well-fed. It opens up more time for instruction and helps to ensure each child that comes to school has an equal opportunity to learn.

"[If a principal asked me whether or their school should take up CEP even if it meant facing a slight loss financially,] I would say yes. Being a pilot and going through the transition, [I have seen that] staff and parents burdens are less. Financial burdens in families are alleviated because they know they can bring their kids to school and not worry if they will be having breakfast or lunch. I would say jump on it, because any service that we can provide outweighs a slight loss in finances."

Principal Williams

"Basic needs are being met so we get to focus on instruction. When we went to college, that is what we wanted to be in this business for - to help kids make it to the next level so that they can achieve their dreams. So I would say absolutely. It is a tool and sometimes you have to pay for tools, but it is worth it!"

Ms. Rawlings

For more information about implementing the Community Eligibility Program, please contact Eric Savaiano at Nebraska Appleseed.