



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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June 17, 2014

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons

FROM: Yut'se O. Thomas
Director, Office of School Finance

SUBJECT: **NSLP Community Eligibility Program and Implications for State Aid**

The Federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 provided that the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) include a new universal meal program, the "Community Eligibility Provision"(CEP) implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Community Eligibility permits eligible schools to provide meal service to all students at no charge, regardless of economic status, while reducing the burden at the household and local levels by eliminating the need to obtain eligibility data from families through a separate data collection. Instead, Community Eligibility schools use only "direct certification" data, such as data from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to determine the Federal cash reimbursement for school lunches provided by USDA. They do not rely on the traditional annual household applications (Free and Reduced Price Lunch) that are generally used to determine eligibility for free and reduced-price meals.

In April, NJ Department of Agriculture notified CEP eligible districts and required them to decide on their participation by June 30, 2014. USDA FNS has now extended the deadline to **August 31, 2014**. We recognize that districts are concerned that participation in CEP could impact NJDOE's ability to collect the enrollment information needed to calculate state aid. Please note that a June 2014 decision to participate in CEP will have no effect on state aid for school year 2014-15 which has been calculated already and which was based on October 2013 enrollment numbers. For fiscal year 2016 and beyond, we are in the process of developing an alternative to the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Application which will be ready in time for use with the October 2014 enrollment count. Districts will have enough time to collect the required information from the population of students that are not "direct certification." Finally, it is our understanding that districts can opt out of CEP at any point in time, but retain CEP eligibility for a four year period once opting in.

We look forward to working with you as we develop a process suitable to all involved. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Office of School Finance at staid@doe.state.nj.us with any questions that you may have.

YOT/ta/Y/OSF/Federal/School Lunch Program CEO/alternative HIS

- c. Members, State Board of Education
- Senior Staff
- Karen Campbell
- Executive County Superintendents
- Executive Directors for Regional Achievement Centers
- Executive County School Business Administrators
- NJ Lee Group
- Garden State Coalition of Schools
- Pam Castellanos