

Introduction. Mission:

To mobilize the community, individuals and resources to provide food for kids in need.

In 2015, schools were encouraged to try a new way of handling free lunch: give it to everyone, no family paperwork required. The hope was that the expanded program would both improve child nutrition and reduce administrative burdens.

The program called Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) succeeded -making students healthier in the process. The students benefited academically from access to breakfast and lunch. Yet, though we are an eligible school we still don't participate in the initiative, raising questions about all the students who are missing out on its benefits.

What about cost? Well, because CEP eliminates the collection of household applications, it can significantly reduce administrative burden. Schools that operate CEP no longer spend money and staff time distributing and processing school meals applications, relying instead on the direct certification of students for free school meals to establish each school's Identified Student Percentage (ISP). According to No Kid Hungry CEP is financially viable for many schools with ISPs above 40% like ours. "CEP reduces per-meal cost, reduces administrative costs, increases school meal participation, and increases federal revenue". Also, because of the recent "lunch shaming laws" food service workers are no longer allowed to tell kids they owe money. This, according to Patty Barber is putting a substantial burden on the department to collect funds. I ask you to think about the administrative costs of time sending out free and reduced lunch forms, calling to get them back, inputting all the data, calling parents for meals owed, mailing out money due notices etc and consider the money spent on time, paper, envelopes, postage etc. That money would be more responsibly spent by participating in CEP and alleviating costs to working families in our district.

And did you know? Our School has a Do Not Charge Form on our website: When a parent fills this out and sends it back according to the JCB kitchen manager they cannot give that child a lunch. (Note how Erin Maxwell's parents did not fill out paperwork for her to get meals and although this is not the same thing, it is scary for me that this could happen again in a way).

<https://www.phoenixcsd.org/cms/lib/NY49000020/Centricity/shared/departments/food%20service/ParentNoChargingform.pdf>

Why aren't we participating? According to our Food Service Director Patty Barber the government does not fully reimburse for the costs of meal so the district would take a financial. I often get asked "how come Fulton has it and we don't?" I urge you to ask for the specifics when it comes to numbers and don't accept the answer that "It's too complicated". It may be complicated, but others have figured out how to do it and so can we! I have had many conversations with Patty Barber about this and she insists that to do this the taxpayers would have to pay. That decision should be up to the taxpayers then, let it go to vote. I have seen this community come together when there is a need and I am certain they would agree to it. I even

asked Patty Barber last year if Erin's Angels could pay off the school lunch debt for the district. Surprisingly it was just under \$500. Ultimately, she would not let me do it because she said it would make it harder to collect money from parents in the future. My research has found that , the federal government's no charge policy best practices guidelines actually encourage districts to accept random acts of kindness and donations.* Therefore, I would like to reiterate the offer for Erin's Angels to pay off the entire districts school lunch debt.

There are Creative ways to make this work. Some ideas from case studies.*

Offer meals after school. The Afterschool Meal and Snack Program through the Child and Adult Care Food Program can help generate additional revenue to support the school district's nonprofit food service account. All meals and snacks are reimbursed at the free rate, with suppers and lunches also receiving commodities or cash in lieu of commodities. Check out the food research action center for more information.

An example of that is school nutrition program director in Maine, also started the Afterschool Meal Program without hiring any additional staff; instead, she adjusted the schedule of three existing staff by 30 minutes. By doing this, RSU #3 generated additional federal revenue to support the school nutrition account, and it also became the first school district in Maine to offer afterschool meals.

Increase Participation. To monitor its meal service, a district in Maryland keeps a detailed spreadsheet that includes daily participation rates, the most popular entrée items for each meal, and current monthly participation rates broken down by individual school, which is compared to monthly participation rates from the year prior. They also use student surveys and focus groups that participate in taste tests to learn about students' meal preferences. By doing this they observed that, for example, when hot food is served in its high schools, breakfast participation increases. Based on monitoring and recording detailed data, the district's nutrition departments makes menu adjustments as needed to increase participation. Another district started an omelet bar to increase breakfast participation. I have even suggested a smoothie bar which would be both nutritious and delicious!

Stop doing things the way they have always been done and try something new.

Lastly, if you have been following the news you know that new SNAP rules are taking effect on April 1st putting hundreds of thousands of people at risk of losing their benefits. When people lose access to SNAP, the children among them will also lose their automatic access to free school meals. Instead, they will have to apply. "Experience tells us that far too many will fall through the cracks. Confusion about eligibility, complex paperwork, human error and stigma all create barriers to filling out paperwork and enrolling.

Please help me stop this madness! *To truly solve the issue of school meal debt and ensure all students receive the nutrition they need to learn and thrive, school meals should be offered to all our students in all our schools at no cost.*

I urge you to research the no kid hungry website which has extensive information about CEP and investigate why our district does not participate in it to help with the vision of Erin's Angels to ensure that hunger does not get in the way of a child's education.

Resources:

*www.bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/about-the-community-eligibility-provision

*<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/LocalChargePolicyRequirement.pdf>