



NEWS RELEASE

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‘Community Eligibility’ Could Help Alabama Schools Fight Child Hunger

Forrister: Option Could Help 900+ Schools Improve Children’s Health, Classroom Performance

More than 900 schools across two-thirds of Alabama’s school districts could use “community eligibility” to provide free school meals to all of their students starting this fall, the state Department of Education said this week. Districts have until June 30 to decide if their schools will participate. Community eligibility helps ensure that low-income children, many of whom live in families struggling to put food on the table, have access to healthy meals at school.

In the 11 states that offered the community eligibility provision as part of the initial rollout, more than 4,000 high-poverty schools participated. This fall, the community eligibility option will be available to qualifying schools in every state. Initial results show community eligibility leads to more children eating school meals and boosts the number of children eating breakfast, an underutilized program that many schools are seeking to expand.

“We’ve seen community eligibility succeed in reaching at-risk children in other states, and it’s exciting that schools in Alabama will be able to take part this year,” ACPP executive director Kimble Forrister said. “One in five households with children in Alabama lack access to adequate food. Community eligibility will help us reach more children who need a nutritious breakfast and lunch. It’ll help kids succeed in the classroom, and it’ll help improve their health and well-being.”

Community eligibility is available to school districts where 40 percent or more of the students are approved for free meals without an application because they have been found eligible by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or another program with a rigorous eligibility determination process. Community eligibility helps schools and districts streamline their operations and reduce paperwork. When more children eat, the per-meal cost of serving meals decreases. These economies of scale help cover the cost of providing meals to all students.

“Schools in Alabama should seize this opportunity,” Forrister said. “Adopting community eligibility could make a real difference in the lives of thousands of children who otherwise might struggle to get enough food to eat each day.”

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Arise Citizens’ Policy Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of 140 congregations and organizations that promote public policies to improve the lives of low-income Alabamians.