Understanding CEP Participation: Data to Inform Policy and Expand Student Access to School Meals

American Heart Association.



What is CEP?

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) enables high-poverty schools to offer free breakfast and lunch without household applications. However, some eligible schools do not participate, resulting in unused federal resources and restricted access to nutritious meals for students.

Why CEP participation matters.

Access to school meals impacts student health, attendance, engagement, and academic success. When eligible schools opt out of the CEP, policymakers lack insights into their reasons. Implementing a reporting requirement could provide data to understand participation trends and identify barriers to utilizing federal funding that otherwise goes unused.



The bottom line:

This is a **low-cost, high-impact** policy that helps policymakers understand CEP participation, identify barriers, maximize available federal funding, and support student achievement across Mississippi. It imposes minimal administrative burden while providing valuable data to inform future education and nutrition policy decisions.



This policy will require schools to report:

- Whether they qualify for CEP participation.
- Whether they currently participate in CEP.
- If not participating, the primary reasons for opting out.
- Any operational, financial, or administrative challenges affecting participation decisions.