

Dearborn Schools Offering Free Lunch, Breakfast To All Students

-All students except preschool now eligible for free meals under special federal guidelines

Dearborn Public Schools is expanding its free lunch programs to all students, regardless of family income.

The District was recently informed by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) that it was eligible to offer free meals across the district based on criteria in the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's school meals program. Previously, free meals under CEP were offered to all kindergarten to 8th grade students at 14 schools in the district. Free meals across the rest of the district started the week of September 10, 2018.

"Any time we can provide our students with resources that will help them be successful in school, such as a nutritious breakfast and or a healthy lunch, that's a positive that we cannot pass up," said Superintendent Dr. Glenn Maleyko.

Studies show that good health, including good nutrition is important to student success.

While students will not need money to buy meals, most schools will continue to offer individual items for sale in their cafeteria such as extra milk, snacks, or a second lunch. **Children would need money in hand or in their student account to buy those items.**

The CEP program will be retroactive to the beginning of the school year. Students who already paid for lunches will have that money refunded to their student accounts or might be eligible for a refund. Any refund details are still being considered, and details will be shared with schools as soon as they are available.

Even with the expansion of the lunch program, the district will still ask families to fill out information about household income, although on a different form. This information is needed for schools to be eligible for other programs, including federal Title 1 funding. Dearborn Public Schools received more than \$12 million in such funding last year. Dearborn Schools will also have to occasionally survey selected families to see if the district still qualifies for CEP.

While not all of Dearborn's schools qualify for CEP on their own, the district used a provision that allows it to average schools together to meet the threshold for all its 36 kindergarten through 12th grade schools. The program is not available to preschool students, so it will not be offered at Cotter School. (Students enrolled in the GSRP program at Cotter can qualify for free or reduced lunch under other federal programs.) Students will also be able to get free breakfasts in the buildings that offer the CEP program. Across Michigan, 652 schools participate in CEP.

CEP was designed to allow schools or districts with a higher percentage of low-income families to streamline the free lunch process. To qualify for the program, the area needs to have 40 percent of students automatically identified for free lunch. Typically, that means the family already receives some other type of assistance such as food stamps or Medicare.

The schools that were already enrolled in CEP include Becker Elementary, Henry Ford Elementary, Lowrey School, Maples Elementary, McCollough Elementary, McDonald Elementary, Miller Elementary, Oakman Elementary, River Oaks Elementary, Salina Elementary and Intermediate, Unis Middle, William Ford Elementary and Woodworth Middle.