

# Success Story

## Free, Nutritious Meals for All Students in Lubec through the Community Eligibility Provision

### SUMMARY

Through efforts of **Maine SNAP-Ed and the local Nutrition Educator**, and with support from families, the **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** is a success to celebrate in Lubec. CEP is a federal program overseen by the Maine Department of Education (DOE) that allows all students in eligible schools to get free meals and snacks. **CEP saves time and money** for families and **provides nutritious, filling meals** to students. The free meal service reduces costs and increases school revenue while reducing the stigma of receiving free lunch, since all students participate.



CEP was approved in the 2016 school year with help from school staff and the Maine DOE, and with the enthusiastic support of parents. Families are happy their children are getting fresh-cooked meals—especially with the option of a salad bar and healthy snacks every day. **CEP impacts close to 70 students and their families at the Lubec Consolidated School.** Now, more students in this Washington County School **eat school lunches than lunches from home.**

### CHALLENGE

In Maine, **14% of households are food-insecure**, and only one in five middle school students report eating enough fruits and vegetables. Lubec is a rural town in Washington County where students have limited access to healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. Approximately 17% of Washington County residents are food-insecure, meaning they are not able to access enough healthy food.



### Maine SNAP-Ed

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a **USDA-funded program** that teaches low-income Mainers skills to make healthier lifestyle choices. By making sustainable changes to the environment, Nutrition Educators are fostering healthy behaviors that aim to **reduce the burden of obesity across Maine.**

In 2019, **6 SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators** are working in schools across the state to increase the number of students who get school meals.

**Community Eligibility Provision** provides an alternative to families applying for free and reduced-price school meals. Schools or school districts in eligible areas can be approved by Maine Department of Education, Child Nutrition Services, to serve free meals to all enrolled students without having to collect individual applications. In Maine, there are 222 eligible or near-eligible schools. Of these, 68 schools are participating in CEP.



## SOLUTION

To ensure consistent access to healthy meals for all students in her SNAP-Ed eligible school, Maine SNAP-Ed's Nutrition Educator worked with school staff and Maine DOE to **promote and secure CEP status**. She had a successful history of teaching nutrition education in the school and greater Lubec community and developed strong relationships with community members that enabled her to facilitate the process.

The SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator:

- Champions the benefits of CEP to school staff
- Promotes the value of daily nutritious meals and snacks
- Coordinates parent events to build support
- Educates the community through adult and youth nutrition classes
- Advocates for universal free school meals through school and community events



## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

For the past three years, to promote the program and increase participation, the Nutrition Educator and school staff have invited parents to a lunch at the school cafeteria. About **50 people have attended recent school meal events**. Parents, teachers, grandparents, and guardians learn that meals served at school are free to students because of CEP. Families enjoy a typical lunch, and get a reusable grocery bag or cooking magazine with healthy recipes. The event is promoted through Facebook, sharing the healthy foods served in the cafeteria and highlighting the many health benefits for students.

In Lubec, families know they can rely on their school to provide nutritious meals to sustain their children and support their learning potential. With CEP, they can **save their food budgets** and send their children to school knowing they will have enough healthy food during the day.

*"Free school meals are a blessing for everyone."*

— Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator.

*"Maine Department of Education Child Nutrition is proud to work with partners like SNAP-Ed to increase access to school meals. The success seen with Lubec is a wonderful example of an important collaboration to ensure Maine children have access to nutritious meals in their communities."*

— Maine DOE Child Nutrition Supervisor

For more Success Stories from the Maine SNAP-Ed program or to get in touch with your local Nutrition Educator, please visit [www.mainesnap-ed.org](http://www.mainesnap-ed.org).

Data sources are available upon request by emailing [mainesnap-ed@une.edu](mailto:mainesnap-ed@une.edu).

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