

April 3, 2019
Senate Education Hearing

Chairman Mortimer
Members of the Committee

For the records, I am April Burton, Business Manager of Caldwell School District

My comments today are focused on how "Economically disadvantaged student" is defined. You will find this definition on Page 2, lines 42 item (8)(a) "Is eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch excluding students who are only eligible through a school's community eligibility program. This is referred to as CEP. CEP is a federal program included in the National School Lunch program. It is available to school districts that serve communities where families are experiencing extreme poverty.

So in addition to being low income, these are families in crisis who qualify for assistance programs to provide food, housing and other support. You may know them as SNAP or TANF.

CEP provides a streamlined process for determining student eligibility for the free lunch program by using state provided verification of those families receiving assistance. This is referred to as direct certification. Parents are not required to complete a free and reduced lunch application and the district is prohibited from requesting them to do so.

When a school or district qualifies for CEP, it must provide free meals to all attending students regardless of their family's income level.

I believe there may be a misconception that all students enrolled in a CEP district or school would be identified as economically disadvantaged. This is not the case. The percentage, of direct certified students, is multiplied by a factor determined by the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act. It is currently 1.6%. Direct certification does not capture those students qualifying for reduced-price lunch hence the reason for the multiplier. For the Caldwell School District, the percent of economically disadvantaged identified students is 74.4% after applying the multiplier. This percentage is consistent with Caldwell's 10 year average of free and reduced lunch percentages prior to CEP eligibility.

The Federal Programs division of the Idaho State Department of Education uses the CEP percentage in relation to Title I-A funding. The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act do not eliminate students eligible under CEP.

If the CEP percentage is not allowed, Caldwell School Districts percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged will be reduced to 46.5% which is not reflective of the demographics of the student population. This will negatively impact the services available to the students of Caldwell School District. I am respectfully requesting this exclusion be eliminated from this definition.