



Florida School District

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Mentor Project 2019-2020



OVERVIEW

As a follow up to the release of the 2019 report “Feeding More of Florida’s Children with The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP),” Florida Impact to End Hunger (FITEH) initiated the *Florida School District CEP Mentor Project*. The goal of the project was to increase the number of eligible school districts electing to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for School Year 2020-2021. FITEH staff successfully paired 2 “Mentor” districts with 2 “Mentee” districts and facilitated dialogue and information exchange via phone calls and emails for a span of 2 months. FITEH also aided an additional district directly in their exploration and interest in CEP. This district did not want to participate in the formal project but was appreciative of the support we provided that helped them to make the decision to move forward with CEP.

MENTOR PAIRS

Mentor: **Hamilton County** → Mentee: **Walton County**

Mentor: **Lee County** → Mentee: **Collier County**

PROCESS

In 2018, FITEH staff looked at data provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) showing which Florida school districts were participating in CEP during the 2018-2019 school year. Of the 66 public school districts, 47 were participating in CEP. An initial outreach was performed in May of 2019 urging those 19 remaining districts to meet the June 30, 2019 deadline to express interest in 2019-2020 CEP participation. One district adopted CEP for the 2019-2020 school year.

At the beginning of School Year 2019-2020, Florida Impact staff followed up with non-participating districts individually to gauge interest in participating in the *Florida School District CEP Mentor Project*. After several months of recruitment via emails and phone calls, FITEH gained commitment from two “mentee” districts and four “mentor” districts. FITEH matched the districts based on size and geographic location – Hamilton and Walton are both in North Florida and Lee and Collier are neighboring districts in South Florida. FITEH staff facilitated the first calls in January and March of 2020. During the calls, FITEH laid out the progression of the project and reiterated the end goal. Each district then made introductions and provided the current CEP landscape in their school system. The remainder of each call involved a question and answer session between the mentor and mentee districts, facilitated by FITEH. After the first call, FITEH staff followed up with each mentee district providing the link to the FRAC CEP Grouping Tool and establishing plans with both mentor pairs for a subsequent call at the end of March. In addition, FITEH helped to connect the Title 1 Coordinator in Hamilton County with the Title 1 Coordinator in Walton County to aid in further discussions about potential Title 1 issues.

RESULTS

With COVID-19 shutting down all schools in Florida, our work with the mentor pairs ceased. Staff reached out to the mentee districts in early May to check in and again offer our assistance.

Here are the results as of the date of this report:

Lee/Collier:

Collier County School District is still in discussions with their administration on moving forward with CEP.

Hamilton/Walton:

FITEH was unable to reach Walton County at the time of this report

Palm Beach County:

In addition to the original two mentee districts, FITEH also worked with Palm Beach County. Palm Beach County Food Service had already been working on bringing a number of schools onto CEP. We provided support to them by joining with the local United Way to meet with the Superintendent’s Office and advocate for CEP

adoption. Fortunately, the school district administration approved of the transition and Food Service is working toward electing their CEP schools by the new COVID 19 deadline. FITEH works closely in this district both through the School District Wellness Promotion Task Force and the United Way Hunger Relief Plan. We will continue to support and advocate for CEP implementation and are optimistic for the year ahead.

CONCLUSION

After the initial challenge of finding mentor and mentee districts willing to participate, the primary challenge in arranging the mentor relationship was scheduling, especially for the first call. However, once the first call was completed, we were optimistic in a continuing positive relationship between the districts. Of course, no one could have anticipated the COVID-19 situation causing all schools to close for remainder of the year. We are confident that had this not happened, these two mentee districts would have successfully elected to participate in CEP for the 2020-2021 School Year.

FITEH will remain supportive of these districts and any others that may elect to participate in CEP next year. In fact, when the USDA issued the *Nationwide Waiver of Community Eligibility Provision Deadlines in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs*, FITEH took the opportunity to reach out to all of the remaining non-CEP districts in Florida to let them know about the new deadlines and to offer our assistance. FITEH staff sent a series of emails to these districts throughout April and May highlighting the projected sharp spike in children and families becoming eligible for SNAP, and encouraging districts to lock in their ISP (Identified Student Percentage) for the next four years to ensure more students are getting free meals through CEP. With the Florida deadline to elect to implement CEP for the 2020-2021 SY pushed back to July 30th, FITEH will continue to provide assistance and pair districts together wherever possible.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. Florida Impact staff worked to create the "CEP Toolkit" to be a resource for all Florida's school districts. The Toolkit will be placed on www.floridaimpact.org/cep and will contain the following sections:
 - *CEP Basics*
 - *CEP & Title I*
 - *Outreach and Communications*
 - *CEP & Breakfast After the Bell*
2. The **Florida School District CEP Mentor Project Call Outline** was created as a resource for both Florida Impact staff as well as other organizations to use when implementing a similar project. Please see this document attached below.

Florida School District Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Mentor Project

CALL OUTLINE

Prior to call:

- Research into the mentee's current CEP status (Are there any schools (including charter schools in the district participating in CEP?)
- Research into the mentor's current CEP operations (Operating district wide or only a select number of schools? For how long? How many meals/students/sites are being served?)
- Try to assess everyone's objectives and prepare relevant questions to help stimulate conversation.
- Prepare best practice information to contribute to the conversation. This can be distributed prior to the call for everyone to become familiar with/ask questions about.

During call:

- Begin with brief introduction to facilitator (Florida Impact to End Hunger) the Community Eligibility Provision brief overview, and the mentorship program (goals, outcomes).
- Allow all participants on the call to introduce themselves.
- Emphasize at the beginning of the call that this is an open dialog.
- Ask mentor district to provide a history of their CEP implementation and the current landscape of the program.
- Ask mentee to join in by explaining where they are with CEP implementation in their district, with a focus on any challenges that have emerged or been recently overcome, and what their next steps/objectives are.
- Follow-up with any specific questions about the program, especially if there is information that could not be found in the pre-call research.
- Ensure that all challenges brought up during the call are discussed and, if possible, resolutions suggested.
- If the conversation continues, allow and encourage the mentee to ask whatever questions they have for the mentor. When applicable, facilitator should contribute relevant information, especially related to best practices from other districts.
- Key topics for discussion:
 - School board / Superintendent approval
 - What initial barriers have you encountered? Have you overcome these barriers?
 - Who are the key stakeholders to bring onboard? Who were your strongest advocates or opposition?/Who do you have onboard?
 - Marketing: did you use any specific forms/promotional materials to get the word out? Can you share these with us?

- How many schools did you start with? How did you select these specific schools?/How many schools would you like to start with?
- Have there been any unexpected barriers or benefits since beginning the program?
- Other advice?
- Prior to ending the call, try to establish goals or objectives for the next meeting.
 - Meeting with superintendent, presenting to school board, reaching out to/gaining buy-in from a certain number of stakeholders, etc.

After call:

- Follow up as soon as possible thanking the participants. Include any relevant documents or information requested in the call. Include brief notes from the call. Remind all participants of objectives to meet prior to the next call. Use this opportunity to schedule the next call or other follow-up.