**Students at 166 HISD schools**

**to eat lunch free this year**

*Federal initiative eliminates applications so no youngster goes hungry*

*July 28, 2014 –* Students at 166 HISD schools will be able to eat lunch for no charge this year, regardless of their income, thanks to a new federal initiative that became available to all states and eligible schools July 1.

“We think there will be many benefits, including reducing any stigma students might find associated with free meals,” said Audene Chung, HISD’s Nutrition Services administrator. “Regardless of income, all students at participating schools will be able to eat well.”

HISD has already offered free breakfast to all students since 2010. This push to expand the free lunch program, known as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), is just the latest step to ensure low-income students don’t go hungry. Although the school district will no longer collect the traditional school meal application, parents will receive a CEP form to fill out the first week of school to help collect the socioeconomic data needed to determine other sources of state and federal funding.

Currently, about 170,000 or 81 percent of HISD students qualified for a free or a reduced-price lunch last year.

To be included, HISD determined schools needed to have 51 percent of their students direct-certified through participation in federal programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. These locations tended to have a free/reduced meal percentage of at least 90 percent for last year.

While not all 283 HISD campuses will be in the program this year, Chung said the school district will continue to look at data to ensure that all eligible campuses may benefit.

HISD is able to make the program available under the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been piloting the program in states and school districts, including Detroit and Chicago, since 2011. This is the first year that it is being expanded to include all states and schools that meet the requirements.

“Our main goal is to ensure students eat healthy meals so they can stay focused on learning throughout the school day,” said Nan Cramer, HISD dietitian. “Our chefs do an amazing job creating menus that are nutritious and tasty, and now more students will benefit.”

A list of eligible schools is available by clicking [here](http://blogs.houstonisd.org/news/2014/07/28/students-at-167-schools-to-eat-for-free-during-2014-2015-school-year/).

