

ECLC students don't have to pay for lunch, breakfast

Written by By FAITH HUFFMAN, News-Telegram News Editor
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Parents of Sulphur Springs' youngest students won't have to worry about coming up with money to cover their pupil's meal costs this year. Early Childhood Learning Center will offer both breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students, but parents are asked to fill out the family size and income form for recording purposes.

Essentially, ECLC qualified under the Community Eligibility Provision for "high poverty schools" to participate in a Universal Lunch and School Breakfast Program.

"All students enrolled at this school may participate in the breakfast and lunch program at no charge to them," SSISD Director of Student Nutrition Services Rickie Elliott wrote in a press release announcing ECLC's participation in the program. "Meals will be served to all students at no charge regardless of eligibility status."

To qualify for CEP, schools must distinguish "identified" and "non-identified" students. Identified students are only those who qualify for free meals either by direct certification — that is their household participates in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) — or by qualifying for free school meals without submitting a school meal application because they are in foster care, enrolled in Head Start, homeless, runaways or migrant students. Non-identified students are those who qualify for free or reduced meals based on household income on standard applications. Only "identified" students contribute to the CEP calculation.

"Early Childhood Learning Center will be able to qualify 94 percent of the meals served, breakfast and lunch, at a free status. The free reimbursement received for this high percentage will off-set the cost of the remaining 6 percent," Elliott noted.

ECLC students began receiving universal free breakfast and lunch with the start of classes

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However, Elliott does ask that all parents/guardians of ECLC students complete the family size and income form sent home provided to their child "so that we can provide the correct coding for our student demographic data."

The form is similar to the application students at other SSISD campuses fill out to determine eligibility for free and reduced lunch prices. The ECLC form simply asks when the child enrolled in the free meal program, the child's name and grade, whether the family receives SNAP or TANF and an eligibility number where applicable. They then are asked to circle based on the number of people in the household one of the three options for the total gross household income. The form then requires a parent signature and contact information.

The theory behind the program is that providing meals to all children will help create a better learning environment by reducing hunger, giving each participating child a chance to perform better.

The meals served at ECLC will follow United States Department of Agriculture guidelines for healthy school meals.

For more information about the universal lunch and school breakfast program at ECLC, direct questions to 903-885-0968.