

## **COMPASS to Include School Meals**

Confirming eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals is a huge job. Paperwork must flow through the hands of teachers to children to parents and then back to the school. Each application must be scrutinized. Family income fluctuates over time, adding another variable.

To lighten the burden, Pennsylvania has a system whereby children from families enrolled in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) are certified eligible for school meals without going through this hassle. This involves the transfer of information from the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) to the Department of Education (PDE) and then on to the school districts. But even this system is cumbersome and time-consuming.

All of this will soon get easier in Pennsylvania. PDE is piloting a new system that will enable school districts to use COMPASS to identify children who are enrolled in the FSP. Moreover, COMPASS will be modified so that families not enrolled in the FSP will be able to apply on-line for free or reduced-price school meals.

The following districts will participate in the COMPASS pilot this coming school year: Lancaster, Reading, Harrisburg City, Pottstown, Susquehanna Township, Wayne Highlands, Williamsport, Armstrong, Mechanicsburg, Carlisle, Cumberland Valley, Pittsburgh, Allentown City, Hempfield, Chambersburg, and Conrad Weiser.