STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

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PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

May 8, 2007

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents, Public School Academy Directors, and Nonpublic School Administrators

FROM: Carol Wolenberg, Deputy Superintendent

SUBJECT: Direct Certification of Children in Food Stamp Households for Free School Meals

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, (Public Law 108-265) amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to require direct certification. Each local educational agency (LEA) must directly certify children who are members of households receiving assistance under the Food Stamp Program as eligible for free school meals, without further application, based on information provided in an electronic data file from the Department of Human Services (DHS). The direct certification requirement is effective School Year 2007-08 for all school districts with an enrollment of 10,000 students or more in the preceding year. For subsequent school years, the direct certification requirement applies to all LEAs that participate in the National School Lunch Program.

The United States Department of Agriculture has provided grant funds to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop a new process to ensure that all LEAs in Michigan can comply with this requirement. Beginning in August 2007, a Direct Certification Report through the Single Record Student Database/Unique Identification Code Application (SRSD/UIC Application) will be available for all public school districts. Nonpublic schools will be provided access to the report in the following school year.

This Direct Certification Report replaces the data file of children of food stamp recipients who reside in zip code areas (provided by the DHS) that the MDE has previously mailed to local districts every summer. The new report will match data from DHS with student enrollment data reported by school districts in the SRSD. Matched students will be automatically certified as eligible for free school meals. Each LEA must then notify these households that the children, as directly certified, are eligible for free benefits, no further application is necessary and the household must notify the school if they do not want free school meal benefits for their children. For more information, please refer to the *Eligibility Guidance for School Meals Manual* at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/default.htm.

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There are several benefits to this new process for direct certification of students for free school meals:

- Students' social security numbers no longer will be provided, improving program data security.
- Schools will not be able to view any students who are not enrolled in their district, further increasing data security and confidentiality.
- Schools will be able to view all students reported as enrolled in their district and will not be limited by the current set of zip codes, which could exclude some students from being directly certified.
- Eligibility determinations and access to free meals for eligible students will be improved; verification efforts will be decreased.
- This new process will utilize a sophisticated matching process that is currently part of the SRSD/UIC Application to match the DHS data with school enrollment data.
- Local districts will no longer need to match their enrollment data to the data provided by MDE.
- The Direct Certification Report will be available through a secure web-based application which will allow smaller LEAs, private schools, and public school academies the ability to participate in the direct certification process.

The Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) will provide additional materials on the process, as well as training materials for schools, on how to access the Direct Certification Report. These materials will be made available in early summer of 2007. Questions regarding the content of this letter may be directed to CEPI Customer Support by e-mail to cepi@michigan.gov or phone 517-335-0505 and select option "3."

cc: Public School Academy Authorizers