Center for Educational Performance and Information

Michigan Student Data System: Direct Certification for School Meals

Frequently Asked Questions

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Questions:
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Q1. What is Direct Certification?

A1. The Direct Certification Report identifies, for each school, the students who qualify for free school meals. All schools or local education agencies must follow the Direct Certification process if participating in the National School Lunch Program. This process eliminates the need to collect free meal applications from those students who are members of households receiving assistance under the Food Assistance Programs administered by the Michigan Department of Human Services as well as Foster Children.

Q2. Who is required to participate in Direct Certification?

A2. 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 LEA must directly certify children who are members of households receiving assistance under the Food Assistance Programs as eligible for free school meals, without further application, based on information provided in an electronic data file from the Department of Human Services.

Note: This requirement applies to all districts and schools (public and nonpublic) participating in the National School Lunch Program.

Q3. How does the process for directly certifying students work?

A3. The Direct Certification Report matches data from DHHS with student enrollment data reported in the Michigan Student Data System. Matched students are automatically certified as eligible for free school meals. A representative from each LEA and nonpublic school must then notify these households that the children are eligible for free benefits. No further application is necessary, and the household must notify the school if it does not want free school meal benefits for these children. For more information, please refer to the [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#).

Q4. Who has access to the Direct Certification Report?

A4. For public schools, Direct Certification Reports will be available to authorized users with the Supplemental Nutrition role or Local Super User role in MSDS.

Nonpublic schools will need to gain access to the MSDS by filling out a Nonpublic Schools Security Agreement. To access the security agreement, go to the [CEPI website](#). From the navigation bar, click on "Nonpublic Schools." Under the Reporting Requirements section, click on [CEPI Nonpublic User Security Form](#). Follow the instructions on the security agreement to complete the form and submit it to CEPI for processing.

Q5. When will the Direct Certification Report be available in MSDS?

A5. The first release of the Direct Certification Report for each school year will be available in the MSDS in early August. The report is refreshed several times

throughout the school year to include any newly matched students. For a complete list of refresh dates, please review the [CEPI Calendar](#).

Q6. How will schools access the Direct Certification Report?

A6. Within the MSDS, click on "General Reports" and then "Direct Certification Student Status" from the left navigation bar. From the dropdown menus, choose the School Year, Report Format (CSV or PDF) and enter your Submitting Entity, then click the "Submit" button.

Q7. How often do schools have to download their Direct Certification Report?

A7. Guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture indicates districts are required to run their Direct Certification Report at least three times per school year. They recommend doing so at or around the beginning of the school year, three months after the initial effort and six months after the initial effort.

It is best practice to pull the Direct Certification Report as updates are published to ensure all eligible students are receiving proper meal benefits. For a complete list of refresh dates, please review the [CEPI Calendar](#).

Q8. What are the direct certification requirements for Community Eligibility Provision schools?

A8. CEP schools are required to run direct certification at least once a school year. However, it is best practice to run it more frequently to support efforts to identify students for Supplemental Nutrition Eligibility in MSDS collections, to support students experiencing foster care, and to calculate Identified Student Percentage for future CEP applications.

Q9. Which students will be included in the Direct Certification Report?

A9. Public Schools: The initial release of the Direct Certification Report will include the matched students reported as continuing in your district during the End-of-Year General Collection and students submitted through the Early Roster Collection in the MSDS. The Direct Certification Report will be refreshed several times between August and November to include any newly matched students. Starting with the December refresh, the report will display only students submitted as continuing in the Student Record Maintenance and General Collections.

Nonpublic Schools: The Direct Certification Report will include the matched students submitted in your school's Nonpublic School Student Roster Collection as of the last refresh date. Records in a "Requires Resolution" status will not be included on the report. In those instances, the student's family can fill out a paper application to determine their eligibility for free or reduced lunch or milk.

For a complete list of refresh dates, please review the [CEPI Calendar](#).

Q10. When an individual in a household has been identified as directly certified, can benefits be extended to other children in the same household?

A10. Benefits can be extended to other children in the same household if a student was directly certified via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or Medicaid.

However, benefits cannot be extended to other children in the same household if the student is a foster child. Review the "EligCat" column of the Direct Certification Report to verify in which manner the student was certified.

Q11. What report formats are available for the Direct Certification Report?

A11. The Direct Certification Report is available in two formats: CSV and PDF.

Q12. How will kindergarteners and other new enrollees become directly certified?

A12. Authorized users for public schools can submit newly enrolled students through the Early Roster Collection. Authorized users for nonpublic schools can include newly enrolled students in the Nonpublic School Student Roster Collection. CEPI refreshes the data in the Direct Certification Report approximately every two weeks from August through May. The report reflects any additional matched students reported in any subsequent Student Record Maintenance and General Collections or added to the Nonpublic School Student Roster Collection. These additional matches can replace any paper applications that are already on file.

Q13. What if a household does not want the meal benefit?

A13. If the household wants to decline the free or reduced-priced school meals benefit, they must notify the school in writing.

Q14. Is a Free and Reduced-Price Meal application with a Medicaid case number the same as Medicaid Direct Certification?

A14. Applications with Medicaid case numbers are not acceptable to determine eligibility for Medicaid Free or Medicaid Reduced-Price meals. Medicaid matching for free or reduced-price eligibility is only by direct certification.

Q15. What happens if a student is directly certified as eligible for reduced-price meals but the parent states the student qualifies for free meals?

A15. A separate notification letter for Medicaid Reduced-Price eligibility must be sent to households along with a Free and Reduced-Price Meals application and the income Eligibility Guidelines. The household can complete an application to

determine if they qualify for free meals based on household size and income. There is a section on the letter for the household to decline the reduced-price benefit by notifying the school. Use the eligibility that will be of the greatest benefit to the student.

Q16. What is the hierarchy for programs that qualify students for free meals via Direct Certification?

A16. When a student is Directly Certified by SNAP (S), TANF (T), or Foster Child (F), that eligibility category will supersede the Medicaid eligibility categories. So, on the direct certification report you will always see an S, T, or F before Medicaid (M) or Medicaid Reduced (R).

Q17. Where do I find example letters to send to households if a student appears on the Direct Certification Report?

A17. Direct Certification template letters are posted on the Michigan Department of Education's School Nutrition Program [Direct Certification](#) web page.

Q18. What is Extended Eligibility?

A18. Extended Eligibility applies to other students living in the same household as the student on the Direct Certification Report. Here is a breakdown of how it works:

- SNAP: Benefits can be extended to other children in the same household.

- TANF: Benefits can be extended to other children in the same household.

- Foster Child Program: Benefits cannot be extended to other students in the same household. However, foster children may be included on the family application to increase the number of household members, which may increase the likelihood of receiving free or reduced-price meal benefits.

- Medicaid Free and Medicaid Reduced Price: Benefits can be extended to other children in the same household.

Q19. Why was a new code added to identify students who are free eligible via Direct Certification extended eligibility?

A19. A code to identify students who are free eligible via Direct Certification extended eligibility has been added to the SNE Component. This allows LEAs to report students who are in the same household as a student who appears on the Direct Certification report and receives SNAP, TANF or Medicaid-Free benefits. This new process of free direct certification extended eligibility helps support the Community Eligibility Provision Identified Student Percentage.

For additional details, please refer to the schema summaries and the [Collection Component Matrix](#). The [Collection Details Manual](#) has been updated to include the new code.