

Center for Educational Performance and Information

Michigan Student Data System: Direct Certification for Free School Meals

Frequently Asked Questions

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Questions:

Email: cepi@michigan.gov

Phone: 517-335-0505 x3



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 schools and districts (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 DHS with student enrollment data reported in the Michigan Student Data System. Matched students will be automatically certified as eligible for free school meals. A representative from each LEA and nonpublic school must then notify these households that the children, as directly certified, are eligible for free benefits, that no further application is necessary and that 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, their Direct Certification Reports will be available to authorized users with the Supplemental Nutrition role or Local Super User role in the 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 left navigation bar, click on "Nonpublic Schools." Under the Michigan Student Data System section, click on [MSDS Security Form \(Nonpublic School Users\)](#). 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 then 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, there is a General Reports menu option. 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 that districts should download 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. For more information, please refer to the [Frequency of Direct Certification Matching Activities memo](#).

Q8. Which students will be included in the Direct Certification Report?

A8. Public Schools: The initial release of the Direct Certification Report will include those 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 data in 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 those matched students as submitted in your school's Early 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](#).

Q9. When an individual in a household has been identified as directly certified, can benefits be extended to other children in the same household?

A9. Benefits can be extended to other children in the same household if a student was directly certified via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.

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. For more information on extending eligibility to additional children in a household, please review the [Extending Categorical Eligibility memorandum](#).

Q10. What report formats are available for the Direct Certification Report?

A10. The Direct Certification Report is available in two formats: CSV and PDF.

Q11. How will kindergarteners and other new enrollees become directly certified?

A11. Authorized users will have the capability of submitting any newly enrolled students through the Early Roster Collection. CEPI will refresh the data in the Direct Certification Report several times between August and November. The data in the Direct Certification Report will then be refreshed on a monthly basis through May to reflect any additional matched students reported in any subsequent Student Record Maintenance and General Collections. These additional matches can then replace any paper applications that are already on file.