



**Division of Child Care and Early
Childhood Education
Health and Nutrition**

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DIRECT CERTIFICATION MEMO

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All Schools and RCCIs with day students must conduct direct certification
Please refer to the Eligibility Manual August 2013 which may be found in the Resource Library

PART 6: DIRECT CERTIFICATION FOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A. GENERAL

Direct certification is the process under which LEAs certify children who are members of households receiving assistance under the Assistance Programs (SNAP, TANF or FDPIR) as eligible for free school meals, without further application, based on information provided by the State/local agency administering those programs.

Eligibility for free meals is extended to all children in a household if one member has been directly certified as eligible under the Assistance Programs. These children are also considered directly certified. LEAs may be able to use school district enrollment records to determine additional children who are part of the family but were not identified through direct certification.

During the carryover period, categorical eligibility status is extended to any newly enrolled children who are members of a household with one or more members who were directly certified under Assistance Programs.

This section only discusses direct certification for Assistance Programs. Other Source Categorically Eligible children, such as homeless children identified by the school district's homeless liaison, are processed using procedures similar to direct certification. Those procedures are found in Part 5 of this manual.

Because children who are directly certified are determined eligible based on documentation received from an Assistance Program, they are not subject to verification.

B. MANDATORY DIRECT CERTIFICATION WITH SNAP

All LEAs must directly certify children who are members of households receiving SNAP benefits.

METHOD OF DIRECT CERTIFICATION

Direct certification with SNAP must use a data matching technique between the SNAP office and the LEA/school. The SNAP household can no longer be required to provide the LEA with a SNAP letter notifying the household of eligibility for free meal benefits.

State agencies and LEAs can no longer use the "letter method" as the sole method of direct certification. This restriction only applies to direct certification activities with SNAP.

SNAP agencies may continue to provide letters to families as a secondary method along with use of an automated system, especially during the initial use of an automated system. The additional notification to families would help to ensure that they were aware of their children's categorically eligibility if the children were not matched during a data exchange.

FREQUENCY OF DIRECT CERTIFICATION

LEAs must conduct direct certification with SNAP at least three times during the school year. More frequent direct certification efforts are permissible and encouraged. The efforts must be made at a minimum:

- At or around the beginning of the school year (i.e., July 1);
- Three months after the beginning of the school year; and
- Six months after the beginning of the school year.

Subsequent direct certification efforts are required for children who were not initially directly certified and who are currently reduced price or paid. If the LEA has the capability, the status of any newly enrolled child must be checked for SNAP eligibility at the time of enrollment. If this is not possible, the household must be provided with an application so that the child's benefits are not delayed until the next scheduled direct certification update.

ZERO SNAP BENEFIT HOUSEHOLDS

Some households may be eligible for "zero benefits" and the law restricts categorical eligibility for free school meals based on SNAP participation to children who are members of a household receiving assistance under SNAP. Therefore, a child who is a member of a household that is receiving "zero benefits" from SNAP is not categorically eligible for free meals, unless the child is categorically eligible for another reason.

For the purposes of direct certification, State agencies must ensure that SNAP matches do not identify children as categorically eligible for free meals when the children are members of a household eligible for zero SNAP benefits. SNAP defines benefits as allotments issued on electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, or other means approved by the Secretary, that can be used to purchase food at authorized retail food stores.

SAs must work with their counterparts who administer SNAP to assure that direct certification matching only identifies children as categorically eligible when they are in households that actually receive SNAP benefits. Any State agency that has included children who are members of a household eligible for zero SNAP benefits in their direct certification matching must ensure that their matching process is revised to no longer identify these children as categorically eligible.