

Direct Certification System for Determining Students Eligible for Free Meals at School

Purpose:

- To identify students receiving SNAP* (formerly Food Stamps) and/or TANF* benefits.
 - These students are automatically eligible for free school meals.
- Parents/guardians do not have to fill out application form and schools do not have to process the form.
- Since applications aren't needed, meal benefits may be provided quickly, preventing unpaid meal charges or students who go hungry.
- All public and private schools participating in School Lunch and School Breakfast.

*SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

*TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Data Source:

- Student enrollment information from STARS is sent to Department of Human Services (DHS) data hub
- DHS data is matched with DPI data
- Student matches (linkages) are broadcast back to STARS
- Districts are notified of matches.
- Students are enrolled into Direct Certification special program.

Process to Enroll Students as Direct Certification:

- Schools are provided with a notification list of enrolled students that have been matched with DHS SNAP/TANF participation data.
- Students are automatically enrolled into Direct Certification and are marked as receiving Direct Certification under Special Programs section of Student Detail in STARS.
- **If a student on the notification list does not have the option to participate in the School Nutrition Programs (home-schooled, Pre-K that aren't served meals), notify the Child Nutrition Office and names will be removed from Direct Certification list.**

Unmatched School Aged Children:

- If direct match can't be made to student enrollment, child's information will be broadcast out to schools at 5 closest zip codes to child's DHS zip code.
- If none of those schools acknowledge child, DPI may research further by sending information out to additional schools of their choice.

Beginning of School Year:

- DPI opens up enrollment for the new school year in STARS.
- Schools rollover their enrollment from the previous school year.
- The Direct Certification match process occurs once enrollment is populated for new school year.
- As enrollment is updated by school, direct certification system will send notifications.
- Direct Certification notification lists will not be available until district opens their enrollment for the new school year.
- All students eligible last school year remain eligible for the first 30 days of this year or until their eligibility is re-determined through Direct Certification or application form.
- All students on notification lists at the beginning of the school year are new determinations for the new school year.
- Direct Certification students do not have to submit free/reduced price applications.

Extending Free Meal Eligibility:

- All other school aged children in household of a Direct Certified student are also eligible for free meals.
- If a match does not occur through STARS process, but additional enrolled children reside in the household of a child on the list, document relationship manually and provide free meal benefits.

During the School Year:

- Student receiving SNAP/TANF transfers into district
 - School enters student enrollment information into STARS, new match will occur and school will be notified.
- Enrolled student becomes eligible for SNAP/TANF
 - If enrollment information is in STARS, a match will occur and school will be notified
 - If no enrollment information is in STARS, the broadcast and research process will begin.

Additional Things to Remember:

- Households must be notified that they have been determined eligible for free meals.
 - Use the "[Notification of Predetermined Eligibility](#)" letter.
- Households may refuse benefits. If so, document and change student eligibility.
- Eligibility is good for the entire school year and 30 days into the next school year. Regardless of household changes or residential circumstances.

Accessing Direct Certification in STARS

- Identify the person(s) who will be accessing the student eligibility information on STARS.
- This person should be the person currently responsible for determining free/reduced price applications and/or maintaining the roster of free/reduced price students.
- Access to the Direct Certification system must be limited to only those persons authorized to access free/reduced price eligibility information. This information must be kept confidential.
- The district administrator must grant permission in STARS for that person(s) to access the Direct Certification system.

Once the user is logged into STARS, the main page will display. To access Direct Certification, click on the Direct Certification link under reports. Then click on the name of your district. And then select the school year.

Student Look Up:

The district may also Look Up students from DPI's Direct Certification application records. This is helpful if siblings of a student who is directly certified don't show up on your notification list, or if you suspect a student should be on the list. Click on "Student Lookup" in the left column. Then enter either a case number (which is listed on with the directly certified students record on the Direct Certification export), or enter the student's first and last name (doesn't need to be exact) and birthdate (must be exact) and click on Search. If the student name is found, the district would enroll them just like they do when the name is on the Broadcast Notifications list.

Direct Certification Reports:

The district/school may generate an Excel or pdf report of their enrolled Direct Certification students. This is a list of the students from either the District Notifications list or the Broadcast Notifications list that the district/school had indicated as Enrolled. To generate the pdf report, click on Generate PDF under the Functions menu on the left column of the page. Then click on the PDF button

The pdf report provides a separate page for each plant within the district in the format listed below.

A spreadsheet (.csv) report may also be generated by clicking on Export under the Tools menu in the left hand column. Choose the Direct Certification Students Export and then click on Export in the left column.

The spreadsheet may be sorted by plant, name, etc. The file may also be imported into the district's computerized meal counting system.

The District Direct Certification reports (pdf and excel) show the date that the student became eligible for direct certification. The most recent date that the student became eligible for Direct Certification is listed. Frequently, the date will be in a prior school year. If a district has signed an *Assurance Regarding Flexibility on the Eligibility Effective Date for Directly Certified Students* form, they can claim free meals for the directly certified student back to that date. Claims can be adjusted within 60 days of the claim period. If the date listed is before the current school year, the district can go back to the first day of school for the current school year.