Important Reminders for Completing Direct Certification

Direct certification (DC) is the process of determining children eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk based on documentation obtained directly from appropriate state or local agencies or other authorized individuals. This document provides important reminders regarding the DC process for school nutrition programs and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) The direct certification contact, determining official, and verifying official should review this document annually at the beginning of the school year.

For technical questions about accessing the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Web Application website or data collection efforts, please contact the direct certification Help Desk at 860-713-6681. For questions about processing free and reduced-price applications and DC regulations, refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) *Eligibility Manual for School Meals* or contact the district's CSDE school nutrition team member.

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Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT)

The S-EBT is a permanent, nationwide program that began in summer 2024. It was established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act passed in December 2022. S-EBT gives families with children extra benefits, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to help pay for food in the summer. S-EBT benefits can also determine a student to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals. For more information regarding S-EBT and free and reduced-price eligibility, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Student Eligibility for Free or Reduced-price Meal Benefits Through the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program*.

Beginning with school year 2025-26, the CSDE's direct certification list was renamed the Direct Certification Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (DC/S-EBT) list. Students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals though the S-EBT are included in the CSDE's DC/S-EBT list. However, these students are not considered directly certified since the household submitted a benefit application to determine eligibility. S-EBT students are indicated by the codes below on the DC/S-EBT list.

- FE = Free S-EBT: Free benefits do not extend to all children in the household.
- RE = Reduced S-EBT: Reduced-price benefits do not extend to all children in the household.

Direct Certification through Medicaid (Husky A)

Information regarding the DC Medicaid data process is available in the CSDE's resource, *Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs*.

Direct Certification Contact Person

Only one person per local educational agency (LEA) may be the DC contact with access to the DC Web Application Sign In. For information regarding the DC process, refer to Module 3: Direct Certification of the CSDE's training program, *Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program*.

To determine the LEA's DC contact, refer to the CSDE's *Direct Certification Contact List for School Nutrition Programs*.

If the DC contact changes, notify the LEA's CSDE school nutrition team member with the name, email address, and phone number of the new contact. Also notify the food service director so the online agreement for Child Nutrition Programs can be updated with the new contact information. The online agreement requires the name and contact information of the LEA's DC contact. When the CSDE has received and processed the new contact request, the

new contact will receive a confirmation email with instructions on how to set up a user ID and password.

Interschool Agreements

If the LEA has an interschool agreement with a public school and is claiming those meals or assisting with processing of the school's free and reduced-price meal or milk applications, the LEA may request (with the recipient school's approval) a login ID and password from the CSDE to access the recipient school's DC database.

If the district has an interschool agreement with a private school and is claiming those meals or assisting with processing of the school's free and reduced-price meal or milk applications, the district must work with the private school to gain access to their DC information. Private schools have a different process for obtaining DC data. For more information, refer to the CSDE's guide, *Direct Certification Upload Process for Private Schools*.

Accessing the DC/S-EBT List

Accessing the DC/S-EBT list is not optional. All LEAs that collect and approve free and reduced-price meal or milk applications must access the DC website at least once weekly. The information is updated on Monday unless it is a holiday. The database should be accessed on Wednesdays to allow the information to be completely updated. For questions regarding how to access the information, please contact the Help Desk at 860-713-6681.

Updating Student Enrollment

LEAs should update their enrollment in the Public School Information System (PSIS) registration as soon as possible after July 1 of each year. If LEAs are late in updating their enrollment with the CSDE, direct certification of students may be affected.

Benefit sources may change for existing directly certified students, especially early in the school year. Therefore, LEAs must monitor both the weekly matched list and the summary match ("View All Certified Records") list for the school year.

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Case Management

Students who were not matched at the CSDE/Department of Social Services level are placed in Case Management on the DC website. LEAs must access Case Management weekly to determine if any students in the LEA are directly certified.

Only one LEA may claim a potential match in Case Management. Therefore, a district should be confident in any match they are claiming.

When reviewing students in case management, pay attention to the date of birth and the location. A potential match between a DC source and a district student might not be a valid match and may actually be a correct match to another district's student.

Note: If a student is matched, print a copy of the page prior to pressing the "Save Match" button. This provides evidence that the student was matched through this process and will be a reference point if the selection was made in error and needs to be reversed. If an error is made in matching a student, the LEA must contact the Help Desk at 860-713-6681 to request that a ticket be opened to reverse the process.

Statewide Search

The "State Wide Search" button allows the DC contact to do a statewide search for a student who is not listed under the LEA. If the "State Wide Search" locates a student, the LEA must print a copy of the screen prior to adding the student to the district's DC list. This provides proof that the student was found in the DC system.

DC List Codes

The "Benefit Source" column on the DC/S-EBT list shows the codes for each type of DC. The DC/S-EBT list includes the codes below.

- FS = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits: Free benefits extend to all children in the household.
- AF = Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) benefits: Free benefits extend to all children in the household.
- OT = foster child: Free benefits do **not** extend to all children in the household.
- FM = free Medicaid based on HUSKY A: Free benefits extend to all children in the household.
- RM = reduced Medicaid based on HUSKY A: Reduced-price benefits extend to all children in the household.

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Hierarchy of Eligibility and Direct Certification

As a reminder, a hierarchy of benefits applies to the DC/S-EBT list. SNAP is always the top on the hierarchy list. If a student can be directly certified via SNAP benefits, they should be coded with FS. In addition, since S-EBT eligibility (FE and RE) is not direct certification and eligibility is obtained through an approved application, these students are not included in the hierarchy list below.

1. **FS (SNAP benefits):** Free benefits extend to all children in the household.
2. **AF (TFA):** Free benefits extend to all children in the household.
3. **OT (foster child):** Free benefits do not extend to all children in the household.
4. **FM (free Medicaid):** Free benefits extend to all children in the household.
5. **RM (reduced Medicaid):** Reduced-price benefits extend to all children in the household.

Using the Codes

It is important for determining officials to use the appropriate DC or non-DC codes above when tracking a free or reduced-price eligible student. This helps to ensure that students are included in the appropriate section on the FNS 742 Verification Collection Report. The USDA wants to know which students are directly certified in each category.

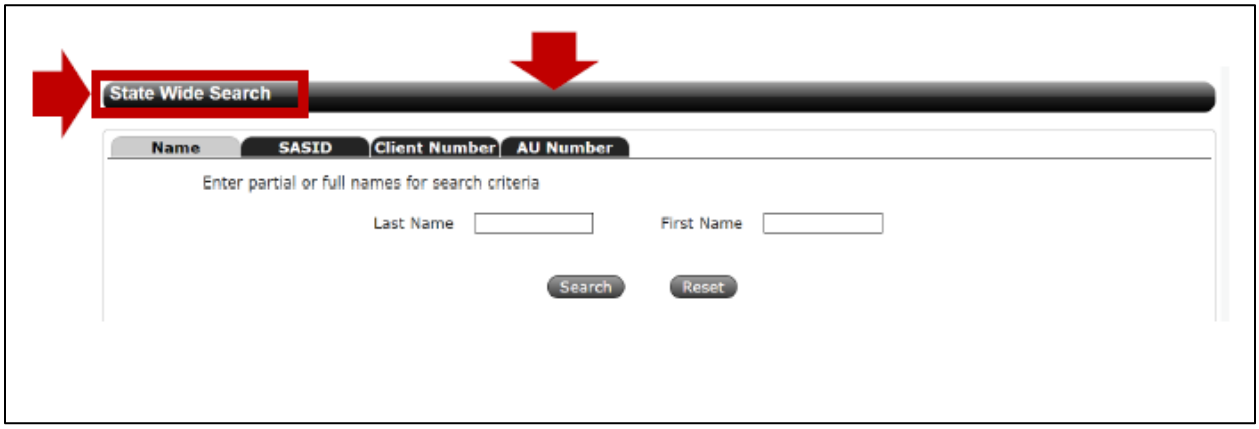
In addition, the LEA must extend free benefits to all children in the household if a child is listed as FS, AF, or FM on the DC list. If a child is listed as RM, reduced-price benefits must be extended to all children in the household, and the household must be given the opportunity to complete an application in case the household's total income and size makes the children eligible for free meals. If a child is listed as OT, FE, or RE, benefits are not extended to all children in the household.

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Extending Eligibility

An additional feature within the “State Wide Search” tab is the ability to search by the Authorized Unit (AU) Number. The AU is a data element that can be found on the “Review Matched” report and represents the unique number for a SNAP or TFA household. This AU Number will be shared by each child within the same household. It is therefore a good way to track households with multiple last names, and to track siblings within the household that attend different schools within the district.

Figure 1. “State Wide Search” Tab Showing AU Number



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Resources

Common Acronyms and Abbreviations in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/acronyms_abbreviations_snp.pdf

Determining Foster Children's Eligibility for Free Meals or Milk in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/foster_children_eligibility_snp_sfsp.pdf

Direct Certification Contact List for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/directcert/direct_certification_contact_list.pdf

Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/direct-certification

Direct Certification Upload Process for Private Schools (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/directcert/direct_certification_upload_private_schools.pdf

Direct Certification Web Application (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Direct-Certification

Direct Certification with Medicaid: Steps to Consider when Working with Point-of-Sale (POS) Software Companies (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/directcert/direct_certification_medicaid_steps_pos_software.pdf

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs

Eligibility Manual for School Meals (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/eligibility-manual-school-meals

Interschool Agreements (CSDE's Forms for School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/forms-for-school-nutrition-programs#i

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Module 3: Direct Certification of Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program (CSDE's Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training#Module3

Parent/Guardian Notification Letters ("Parent and Guardian Notification Letters" section of CSDE's Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs: https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/parent-and-guardian-notification-letters

Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) program (Connecticut Social Services): https://portal.ct.gov/dss/snap/summer-ebt---sebt

Questions? Contact the Help Desk at 860-713-6681.

For more information, visit the CSDE's Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs webpage, or contact the school nutrition programs staff at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/directcert/important_reminders_completing_direct_certification.pdf.

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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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