

Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT

Module 3: Direct Certification

CONNECTICUT Education

Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs

Revised March 2026

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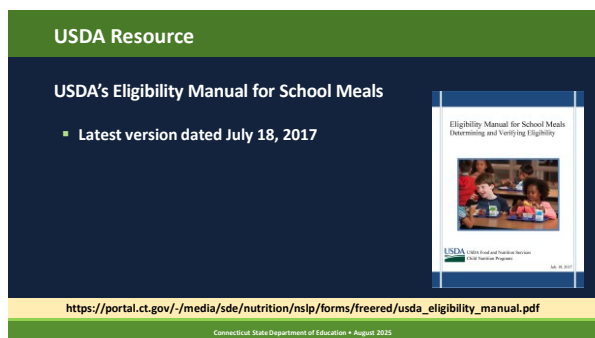
Determining Eligibility Training Modules

- Module 1: Introduction to Application Certification and Verification
- Module 2: Processing Applications
 - Part 1 – Starting the Application Process
 - Part 2 – Receiving and Processing Applications
 - Part 3 – Reviewing Applications and Special Considerations
 - Part 4 – Notification, Documentation, and Final Steps
- Module 3: Direct Certification
- Module 4: Test Your Knowledge About Processing Applications
- Module 5: Confidentiality and Disclosure

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training>

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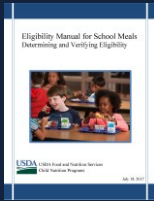
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USDA Resource

USDA's Eligibility Manual for School Meals

- Latest version dated July 18, 2017



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsip/forms/freered/usda_eligibility_manual.pdf

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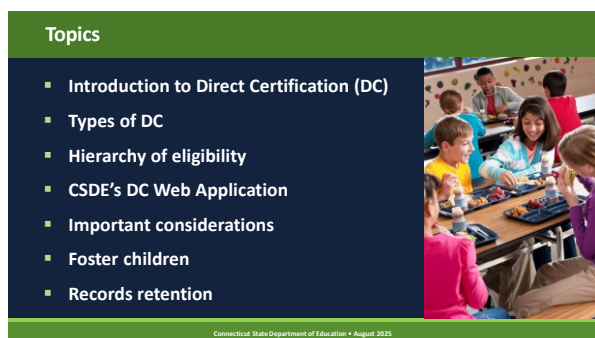
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Topics for Direct Certification


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Topics

- Introduction to Direct Certification (DC)
- Types of DC
- Hierarchy of eligibility
- CSDE's DC Web Application
- Important considerations
- Foster children
- Records retention



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Introduction to Direct Certification

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Direct Certification

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


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Communication for Direct Certification

- In most cases, does not involve household (HH)
- Communication should be between applicable state agency/program or other authorized individuals, and the local educational agency (LEA)




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Directly Certified Children

- Not required to submit application
- Not selected for verification
- Eligible for free or reduced-price benefits for entire school year (SY)



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Categorical Eligibility

A child is automatically eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk


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Conferring Categorical Eligibility

- Two situations



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Situation 1 to Confer Categorical Eligibility

- Child or another HH member receives assistance program benefits
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Temporary Family Assistance (TFA)
- Free benefits extend to all children in HH




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Situation 2 to Confer Categorical Eligibility

- Child determined individually eligible through Other Source Categorical Eligibility designation
 - Application process
 - DC
- Free benefits do not extend to all children in HH



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Other Source Categorical Eligibility

1. Children enrolled in federal Head Start Program or state-funded pre-kindergarten with identical or more stringent eligibility criteria than Head Start
2. Homeless or runaway children
3. Foster children

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Homeless, Runaway, or Head Start children

- Other source categorically eligible
 - Considered directly certified if programs officials provide lists of eligible participants
 - Free eligibility does not extend to other children in HH
- Determining official (DO) must confirm child's status
- Does not apply to foster children



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CSDE Resource


Determining Foster Children's Eligibility for Free Meals or Milk in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/foster_children_eligibility_snp_sfssp.pdf

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Mixed Households

Households that include children who are Other Source Categorical Eligible and children who are not

- Same HH could have two different eligibility determinations

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Types of Direct Certification

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Five Types of Direct Certification for Students

1. CSDE's DC/S-EBT list
2. List of local educational agency's (LEA) homeless or runaway students
3. List of LEA's students enrolled in Head Start students (or state-funded program with more stringent income requirements)
4. List of LEA's foster children
5. Eligible for Medicaid on CSDE's DC/S-EBT List

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DC Method 1: CSDE's DC/S-EBT List

Code	Student's status	Extension of eligibility
FS	SNAP benefits	Free: all children in HH
AF	Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) benefits	Free: all children in HH
OT (Other)	Foster child *	None


* Does not include homeless, runaway, and Head Start

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Tracking Codes for DC Method 1: CSDE's DC/S-EBT List

- DO must keep track of different codes for verification and audit purposes



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DC Method 2: List of LEA's Homeless or Runaway Students

- Must be signed and dated by LEA's homeless liaison
- May receive list by secure email
- Set up communication process between homeless liaison and DO to identify homeless students

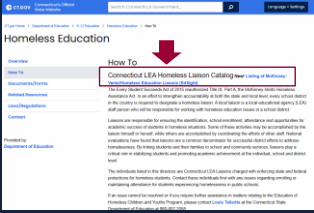


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Connecticut LEA Homeless Liaison Catalog




<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/homeless/homeless-education/how-to>

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DC Method 3: List of Students Enrolled in Head Start or State-funded Program with More Stringent Income Requirements

- Must be signed and dated by director of LEA's federally funded Head Start Program/other state-funded program
- May send by secure email




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DC Method 4: LEA's List of Foster Children

- Must be signed and dated by LEA's foster care point of contact
- Not subject to verification
- Free benefits do not extend to other children in HH



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DC Method 5: Eligible for Medicaid on CSDE's DC/S-EBT List

- Directly certifies children for free or reduced-price meals and free milk
- Not all children who qualify for Medicaid are directly certified for free or reduced-priced benefits
 - Must be on direct certification/S-EBT list




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Medicaid Eligible Students

Student's code on DC/S-EBT list	Benefits
FM – Free Medicaid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free eligibility Extends to all children in HH
RM – Reduced Medicaid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced-price eligibility Extends to all children in HH

- Must track different codes for verification and audit purposes




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Reduced-price Eligibility through Medicaid

- Could also be eligible for free meals through HH application
- Reduced Medicaid status cannot negatively impact eligibility if determined free eligible
- Determination of free eligible supersedes reduced Medicaid




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Medicaid and Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

Count toward CEP Identified Student Percentage (ISP)

Free Medicaid students	Reduced Medicaid students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No



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Considerations for Direct Certification with Husky A (Medicaid)



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsfp/directcert/considerations_direct_certification_medicaid.pdf

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Hierarchy of Eligibility

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Hierarchy of Eligibility Requirements

- Considerations when point-of-sale software is allowed to override an eligibility determination




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Overview of Hierarchy of Eligibility

1. Eligibility for SNAP benefits (FS) supersedes all other eligibility categories
2. Medicaid match should never overlay existing DC match with another allowable program category, e.g., SNAP, TFA, OT
3. LEAs must identify Medicaid match only when child does not match with SNAP, TFA, or OT



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Hierarchy of Eligibility: Example 1

1. Student categorized as RM (Reduced Medicaid)
 - Student's eligibility changes to AF
2. Latest DC file categorizes student as AF
 - Free benefits extend to all children in HH

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Hierarchy of Eligibility: Example 2

1. Student's name appears twice on DC list
 - Give student highest benefit
 - SNAP (FS)
 - Reduced Medicaid (RM)

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Summary of Hierarchy of Eligibility

Hierarchy	Code	Benefits
1	FS = SNAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free eligibility Extends to all children in HH
2	AF = Temporary Family Assistance (TFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free eligibility Extends to all children in HH
3	OT = Other (foster children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free eligibility Does not extend to all children in HH
4	FM = free Medicaid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free eligibility Extends to all children in HH
5	RM = reduced Medicaid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced-price eligibility Extends to all children in HH

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Direct Certification with Medicaid: Steps to Consider when Working with Point-of-Sale (POS) Software Companies

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/directcert/direct_certification_medicaid_steps_pos_software.pdf

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Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (S-EBT)

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S-EBT Starting School Year 2025-26

- Students eligible for free and reduced-price meals are on direct certification/S-EBT list
 - FE = free benefits
 - RE = reduced-price benefits
- Not directly certified
- Not subject to verification

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DC Web Application

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Accessing DC Web Application

- CSDE's Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs webpage


<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/direct-certification>

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DC Contact

- Each LEA designates one DC contact who can access DC list
- Due to confidentiality, only one DC contact per LEA




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Updates to DC List

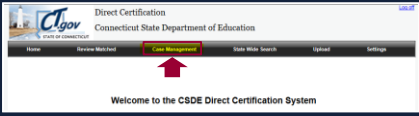
- Every Monday (or Tuesday if Monday is a holiday)
 - CSDE matches student enrollment with DSS SNAP/TFA/Medicaid/foster benefits
- DC contacts must access list weekly to ensure children are awarded free or reduced benefits accurately and timely



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Check Case Management Weekly



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Case Management: Click Details for More Information

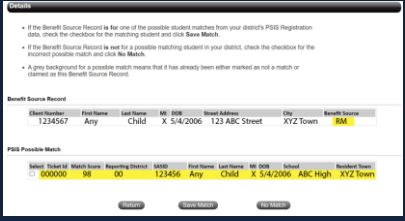


Student	Client ID	First Name	Last Name	MI	DOB	Street Address	City	Town Code	Alt. Num	Benefit Source
1234567	Any	Child	X	5/4/2006	123 ABC Street	XYZ Town	1234	00000000		BM

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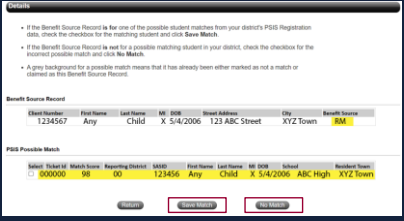
Details Screen with More Student Information



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Select Save Match or No Match

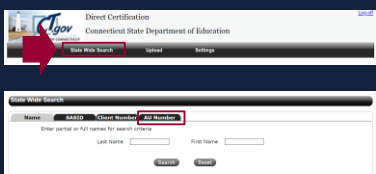


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Use Statewide Search to Find Students

- **SASID Number = State Assigned Student Identifier**
- **Client Number = 9-digit number assigned by Department of Social Services (DSS)**
- **AU number = unique number for HH**
 - Only in data from SNAP and TFA




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If Find Student in Statewide Search

- Take screenshot of match
- Print for audit purposes



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DC Web Application Process for Private Schools

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Use Direct Certification Web Application System

- But different DC upload process



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Direct Certification Upload Process for Private Schools



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsip/directcert/direct_certification_upload_private_schools.pdf

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Uploading to Direct Certification Web Application

- Must use Excel Student Information Template



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Student Information Template for Private Schools

File name: StudentInformation_Template_v1(1).csv

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May Also Use Statewide Search

- Look up a student

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CSDE Webpage

Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/direct-certification/documents>

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Questions

DC Web Application

Help Desk
860-713-6681

CSDE's CNP System

CSDE school nutrition consultant

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CNstaff/countyassign.pdf>

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Important Considerations

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Considerations for Direct Certification Process

- Notifying households
- Refusing benefits
- Carryover of DC eligibility
- Entering DC data
- Applications for directly certified students


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Notifying Households

- Must notify HH in writing anytime LEA approves free/reduced-price benefits
 - Includes approvals based on DC
- Use CSDE parent/guardian letters
- More information in Module 2 Part 4 – Notification, Documentation, and Final Steps

<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>



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Refusing Benefits

- HH qualifies for free or reduced-price meals, but parent/guardian wants to pay full or reduced price
- HH has right to refuse eligibility benefit
- Document request and claim meals as applicable




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Important Reminders for Completing Direct Certification




https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsp/directcert/important_reminders_completing_direct_certification.pdf

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Carryover of Eligibility

- 30 operating days from first day of school **OR**
- Until name appears on new SY's DC/S-EBT before end of carryover
- Status changes to denied if not listed on new SY's DC/S-EBT list by end "of 30 operating days



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Carryover Quiz

- June: Directly certified as **free Medicaid**
- August: DC list as **reduced Medicaid**

A. Change child to reduced Medicaid and extend benefits to all children in HH


B. Keep child as free Medicaid for 30 operating days from first day of school in case their name shows up on DC list

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Entering DC Data

- Accuracy is only as good as
 - Public School Information System (PSIS) information
 - Information provided by parent/guardian on DSS application for SNAP, TFA, or Medicaid benefits




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Entering DC Data for Interschool Agreements

- Must include students in direct certification process to ensure eligible students are directly certified accordingly




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Entering DC Data for Enrollment

- Communicate with LEA's enrollment person regarding when enrollment will be updated in state's PSIS
- Update by July 1 annually
- Date impacts number of students who are directly certified



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Matching Total Enrollment with Direct Certification

- Match total enrollment with DC/S-EBT list every week
- **Helps ensure**
 - all potential directly certified students are matched
 - students do not charge meals when eligible for free meals based on DC



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Applications for Directly Certified Child

- If HH submits application for directly certified child, disregard unless
 - application approved for free meals **and**
 - DC shows reduced Medicaid eligibility
- Note changes on application and keep on file



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DC Supersedes All Application Determinations Unless

- Child directly certified as reduced Medicaid
- Application processed as free eligible



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Direct Certification of Foster Children

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Methods to Determine Foster Child's Eligibility for Free Meals

1. HH submits application
2. Direct certification
 - OT on DC list OR
 - DCF 603 form OR
 - List of foster children from LEA's foster care point of contact




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Three Ways to be Eligible with Method 2: Direct Certification of Foster Child

1. Name appears as OT on DC list
2. DO obtains copy of current SY DCF 603 form
3. LEA Point of Contact provides DO with list of foster children



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Records Retention

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Records Retention Regulations

- 7 CFR 210.23(c) of NSLP regulations
- 7 CFR 220.7(e)(13) of SBP regulations



[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210#p-210.23\(c\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210#p-210.23(c))
[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.13\(b\)\(1\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.13(b)(1))

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Records Retention Timeframe

All Records to Support Claim

- 3 years after submission date of final claim for fiscal year

Records with Unresolved Audit Findings

- Beyond 3 years, as long as required to resolve audit issues



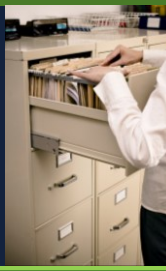
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Records Retention for Special Provision Schools

Example: Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

- Must keep all data to support base year or Identified Student Percentage (ISP) data




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Local Records Retention Requirements

- Check with board of education/town to determine if records retention requirements are more stringent




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Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsip/adminrev/records_retention_snp.pdf

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Questions? Contact School Nutrition Programs Staff

County	Staff
Middlesex County (includes Regions 4, 13, and 17) Tolland County (includes Regions 8 and 19)	Jennifer Bove 860-807-2044 • jennifer.bove@ct.gov
Fairfield County (includes Region 9) Litchfield County (includes Regions 1, 7, 12, 14, and 20)	Fionnuala Brown 860-807-2129 • fionnuala.brown@ct.gov
Hartford County (includes Region 10)	Teri Dandeneau 860-807-2079 • teri.dandeneau@ct.gov
New Haven County (includes Regions 5, 15, and 16)	Greg King 860-713-6804 • greg.king@ct.gov
New London County Windham County (includes Region 11)	Susan Alston 860-807-2081 • susan.alston@ct.gov

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cnstaff/countypassign.pdf>

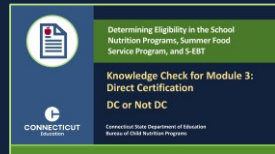
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Knowledge Check for Module 3: Direct Certification

DC or Not DC



<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training>

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Thanks for participating!



<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training>

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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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