



Expand Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced Price Meals (DCM-F/RP) to all states.

Direct certification is an electronic data-matching process that automatically certifies income-eligible students to receive free or reduced price school meals without an application, based on their families' participation in other means-tested assistance programs.

Direct certification increases efficiencies and benefits students, families and schools. The process:

- eliminates barriers to healthy school meals for at-risk students;
- spares low-income parents a cumbersome, unnecessary application process;
- reduces paperwork, processing and administrative costs for schools, allowing them to focus resources on serving students and improving menus; and
- substantially reduces school meal certification errors.

[USDA cites](#) the traditional school meal application process as “the single biggest source of improper program payments.” Direct certification has dramatically reduced errors and improper payments by replacing self-reported income information with verified sources.

Expanding direct certification processes builds on this success by supporting increased implementation of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows high-poverty schools to offer school meals at no charge to all students without an application. School eligibility and reimbursement rates for CEP are based on the percent of students certified for free meals without an application through means-tested assistance programs. As more students in low-income communities are directly certified, more schools can participate in CEP, further reducing errors and eliminating barriers to healthy school meals.

In addition, expanding direct certification will curb the growing national problem of unpaid student meal debt. Instead of spending resources to collect delinquent meal payments from families who qualify but have not applied for free meals, school nutrition staff can remain focused on serving students nutritious meals. At-risk students will no longer need to worry about paying for school meals they are eligible to receive for free.

To build on the many successes of direct certification, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required USDA to conduct a demonstration adding Medicaid to the list of programs used to directly certify students. Since 2012, 19 states¹ have participated in the Medicaid direct certification demonstration. An [evaluation](#) found that the demonstration “resulted in substantial numbers of students directly certified to receive free or reduced-price meals based on Medicaid data, comprising more than one-quarter of all students directly certified for free or reduced-price meals.”

Congress should ensure all states can utilize Medicaid data to directly certify students for free and reduced price school meals.

¹California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin