

Commissioner's Memo
2/27/2025

Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced-Price Meals

Memo Information

Memo Number **COM-25-055**

Memo Date 2/27/2025

Memo Type Informational

Unit District Operations

Regulatory Authority Richard B Russell National School Lunch Act

Response Required NO

Attention Child Nutrition Directors/Managers; Data Stewards (SIS; eSchool; eFinance; TRIAND); Federal Programs; Superintendents

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Memo Text

The Arkansas Department of Education, in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Human Services and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is implementing Direct Certification (DC) with Medicaid to enhance student access to free and reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Students enrolled in Medicaid with a household income that falls below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) will be directly certified for free meals. Additionally, students enrolled in Medicaid whose household income is between 130% and 185% of the FPL will be directly certified for reduced-price meals. Matches for Medicaid are student specific and cannot be extended to other household members.

Direct Certifications matches will now include Medicaid data and will be accessible through the [DC Portal](#), the same platform used for SNAP data matches. Each year, four statewide matches will be conducted; however, the portal will be updated weekly. The instant match feature of the portal allows users to check for newly enrolled students or those who qualify for SNAP or Medicaid between scheduled matches.

The first match will take place on April 1, 2025. Once the matches are available in the portal, Direct Certification users will be notified via email. Updates of new eligibility must be made in each district's POS system and eSchool as soon as the information is available. Student Meal Status will be pulled in the Cycle 6 report.

When a change in eligibility is determined districts must:

- ensure the change is not a decrease in benefits. Students must always receive the highest possible benefit in school meal programs,
- notify families in writing of this change,
- update eligibility status in their point of services (POS) system,
- update meal status in eSchool, and
- retrain records showing the DC determination for compliance monitoring and audit for a minimum of five years.

When updating eSchool Meal Status, the following codes should be utilized:

- 01 - Free
 - Income Application
 - Categorically eligible: Foster, Migrant, Homeless, Runaway, Head Start/Even Start
- 02 - Reduced
 - Income Application
- 03 - Paid
 - Denied Meal Application
 - No application on file and No Match
- 04 - Free SNAP DC
 - SNAP - Exact - Free (from list)
 - SNAP - Extended Benefits (sibling or household member to someone with SNAP - EXACT - Free on list)
- 05 - Free Medicaid DC
 - Medicaid - Exact - Free (from list)
- 06 - Reduced Medicaid DC
 - Medicaid - Exact - Reduced (from list)

Schools administering a special provision such as Provision 2 or Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) are required to utilize the DC portal when statewide matches are provided and code students in eSchool according to their match result.

Join us for a zoom meeting to talk through details on March 20, 2025 at 9:00am: [Register HERE](#).

If you have any questions or need further clarification, please contact the Child Nutrition Unit at 501-324-9502.