



Office of Prekindergarten through Grade 12 Education  
Child Nutrition Program Administration  
89 Washington Avenue, 375 EBA, Albany, NY 12234  
(518) 473-8781 Fax (518) 473-0018  
[www.nysed.gov/cn/cnms.htm](http://www.nysed.gov/cn/cnms.htm)

**To: School Food Service Directors/Managers**  
**From: Paula Tyner-Doyle, Coordinator**  
**Date: August 2014**  
**Subject: Direct Certification**

### **Online Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP)**

The Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP) is intended to certify all eligible students for free school meals without further application, who reside in a household receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Medicaid (determined by the Medicaid Program at or below 133 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines). Therefore, if a member of the household is eligible for SNAP or Medicaid all children in that household are eligible for meals at no charge.

LEAs are required to conduct an electronic data match for SNAP households. This electronic data is also available for Medicaid households. A joint effort has been made between the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to provide access to confidential electronic data to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). Direct Certification data includes: the case name (parent/guardian), student's name (first, middle initial, last), date of birth, age, address (street, city, state, zip code) and name of Assistance Program/Case type (SNAP/Medicaid). All DCMP users must certify that this information will remain confidential in compliance with the disclosure statement provided. LEA data systems must be able to match students by indicating the corresponding Assistance Program (i.e., SNAP, Medicaid).

LEAs are required to conduct the online DCMP with SNAP at least three times per school year. DCMP data files will be available for LEAs to access in July, October, January and April. The DCMP available in July must be completed by **as close to the beginning of the school year as possible**. The second DCMP available in October must be completed by or near **November 30**. The third DCMP available in January must be completed by or near **February 28**. It is recommended that all LEAs access the additional fourth data file provided in April, which is beneficial for LEAs planning to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

The following LEAs are required to complete the Direct Certification Matching Process:

If you collect free and reduced applications for any of the following programs, you must complete this process. This applies to all schools (public and nonpublic) that participate in the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food Service, or Special Milk Programs. This process is also required for LEAs implementing the Community Eligibility Provision and Provision 2 in both the base and non-base years.

The following do NOT have to complete the process:

- Jails
- Residential Child Care Institutions with NO day students
- Schools offering only PAID meals/milk

Families who have been electronically matched using the DCMP should be notified in writing and should be provided the opportunity to decline the benefits. Prototype letters in both English and Spanish have been below for LEA use.

If you are implementing the CEP or are in a non-base year for Provision 2, you may notify parents using a general announcement on your school website or a school newsletter/bulletin. CEP and Provision 2 non-base year participants must report SNAP matched eligibles during the month of November for other Child Nutrition reporting purposes.

Please click on the links below to access the instructions, checklist, and prototype letter for the direct certification matching process.

[Instructions for Accessing Direct Certification Data](#)

[Instructions for Direct Certification Case Number Search Tool](#)

[Instructions for Direct Certification Last Name Search Tool](#)

[Instructions for Direct Certification Date of Birth Search Tool](#)

[Checklist for the Direct Certification Matching Process](#)

[Prototype Direct Certification Notification Letter](#)

### **Letter Method (Categorical Eligibility)**

The online DCMP will help reduce the waste from paper applications and the burden on low income households to return the Eligibility Letter for Free School Meals/Milk. NYSED will be mailing an “Eligibility Letter for Free School Meals/Milk” (formerly the direct certification letter) to SNAP households as an additional method to capture students that may not have been certified for free meals during the DCMP. Households can submit this letter to LEAs for free school meals/milk as an alternative to the application process. However, this eligibility letter no longer qualifies as a direct certification. The “**Eligibility Letter for Free Meals/Milk**” qualifies students as **categorically eligible** for free school meals/milk and will be reported separately from the SNAP DCMP on the Verification Summary Reporting Document FNS-742.

### **Determining Eligibility for Free School Meals/Milk**

Students’ free and reduced meal benefits can only be carried over from the previous school year for 30 operating days from the first day of school. In order to prevent eligible children from experiencing a lapse in accessing their meal benefits, LEAs are

strongly encouraged to immediately direct families who have not been electronically matched using DCMP to apply for free or reduced price school meals using one of the following methods:

1. Submit documentation from OTDA's "myBenefits" account verifying receipt of SNAP/TANF benefits. If the family submits this documentation, you should search the DCMP database using the case number search tool in order to certify the student(s) via the electronic DCMP.
2. Submit a copy of the SNAP notification (certification/re-certification) letter. If you receive this notification letter, you should search the DCMP database using one of the available tools, in order to certify the student(s) via the electronic DCMP.
3. Submit the "Eligibility Letter for Free School Meals/Milk". If you receive this letter, you should search the DCMP database using the Last name search tool, typing the last name exactly as it appears on the letter, in order to certify the student(s) via the electronic DCMP.
4. Complete and submit the **current year** "[Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals/Milk.](#)"

Direct Certification with SNAP supersedes all other forms of student eligibility. If a student is found in the electronic DCMP with both a SNAP and Medicaid record, you should certify that student as SNAP and report the results on the FNS-742 Verification Summary Reporting Document.

Please note that only Medicaid students found in the electronic DCMP and extension of eligibility to other household members of that student(s) are eligible for free meals/milk. Medicaid is not a means-tested program, therefore, a Medicaid number written on an application for free meals/milk or any other form of Medicaid documentation submitted by a family does not make a student categorically eligible for free meals/milk. If you receive an application or another form of Medicaid identification, you can search the electronic DCMP for the student(s), but if not found, the family will have to submit additional documentation in order to certify the student for free or reduced price meals/milk.

If you have directly certified a student through the online DCMP and the household submits any other eligibility documentation (# 1-4 above) you should discard the other forms of eligibility documentation and the student should retain the DCMP match on the master list.

LEAs should conduct the DCMP prior to the distribution of the parent letter and application to reduce the burden of paperwork for both households and LEAs.

The effective date of eligibility for free school meals/milk is the date of the automated data matching file which first identifies the student as eligible for direct certification, rather than the date the LEA accesses and processes the automated data matching file into their local point of service (POS) system. This flexibility in determining the effective date of eligibility also applies to the 'Eligibility Letter for Free Meals/Milk.'

If you have any questions, please contact your Child Nutrition Program Representative at 518-473-8781.