Minnesota Department of Education

School Nutrition Programs
Procedures for Direct Certification of School Meal Benefits

Direct certification data identifies students who are eligible for free school meal benefits without completing an Application for Educational Benefits, based on their participation in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) provides direct certification data each month to Local Educational Agencies (LEA) that participate in School Nutrition Programs.

- Direct certification data is provided to public LEAs currently approved for School Nutrition Programs. Public LEAs are required to use direct certification data to certify students for school meal benefits. A nonpublic school may obtain direct certification data by uploading student enrollment data to MDE.
- Each month, MDE posts the direct certification files in the Cyber-Linked Interactive Child Nutrition System (CLiCS) 1, after matching the most recent MFIP and SNAP data from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to the most recent student enrollment data from each school district in the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS). Direct certification files are usually posted in the last week of each month.
- Direct certification files posted in late June are the first direct certification files that may be used for the coming school year. Each subsequent monthly download shows only the students who have been newly certified to the LEA. Students that have already been certified earlier in the same school year are not repeated.
- Two files are provided each month – a PDF file that lists the certified students, and a Data File that can be imported into the LEA's computerized system.
- An LEA should receive direct certification data for all sites that are under its School Nutrition Programs agreement, including any charter or contract alternative schools. If necessary, an LEA must coordinate with a sponsored charter or contract alternative school to provide the site with access to its direct certification data.
- Direct certification depends on the accuracy of student enrollment data. If the number of directly certified students appears too low for your LEA, check the accuracy of your enrollment data, for example that student's gender is listed accurately.

Data Privacy

Direct certification data is private data on individuals. MDE provides the data on the secure website CLiCS 1. LEAs must limit access to direct certification data to those school personnel who have a "need to know", that is, they need the direct certification data in order to process free school meal benefits for students.

If a parent or guardian disputes the direct certification of their child, the LEA may not disclose to the parent or guardian any DHS data that matched to the student. If upon review of the disputed direct certification it appears that the DHS data was matched to its student in error, the LEA should: (1) Inform the parent or guardian that the meal eligibility status of the student will be corrected on school records and (2) Explain that the direct certification of the student was based on private DHS data that cannot be shared and which may have been matched to LEA records in error.

Prompt Use of Direct Certification Data

LEAs must promptly use the direct certification data to certify students for free school meals following each monthly download of data. For direct certification data received during the school year, meal benefits must be implemented promptly and no later than 10 days from the date on the direct certification file. MDE sends a listserv message each time that new direct certification files are available on CLiCS 1.

Students are considered directly certified for free school meals as of the date that the direct certification report was generated. This date is shown in the lower left corner of the PDF copy of the report.

How to Access Direct Certification Data

Direct certification data is available to LEAs in CLiCS 1.

- On the CLiCS login page, select the link for “Direct Cert/Verification” – “All Program Years”
- Log in to CLiCS 1.
- Select Direct Certification on the left-side menu.
- Select the Search button. From the dropdown, select either “All” for all school year, or the current school year. For example select 2013 for school year 2012-13.
- Select either the PDF Report or the Data File for the desired date.

LEA Review of Data

Each student on the direct certification data has been matched on some combination of name, birth date, and gender to DHS data on children receiving MFIP or SNAP benefits. Social Security numbers are not used. If it appears that a student may have been matched in error to DHS data for a different child (because neither the name nor address of the adult DHS applicant appears to correspond to the student), then the LEA may not consider the student to be directly certified, unless the LEA has confirmed with the household that the match was accurate.

On the direct certification PDF report, the first bold line for each student is from MARSS data. The second and third lines on the PDF report show the MFIP/SNAP information that matched to the student.

Additional Students in the Household

When a student is directly certified, all children in the “household” as defined in 7 CFR § 245.2 may be directly certified for free school meals. This is the same definition as used to determine the complete household, or “economic unit,” on an Application for Educational Benefits.

The LEA may be able to use enrollment records to document additional children who are part of the household but were not included in the direct certification match. Also the notification letter for direct certification asks the household to notify the LEA in writing if there are additional students in the household who were not listed on the notification letter. The LEA must maintain documentation on additional students who are directly certified.

Notification Letter to Households

LEAs must notify households with students who have been directly certified. Households with students certified in June and July should be notified of direct certification and should not be sent Applications for Educational Benefits.

The Notification of Approval for Free School Meals letter for directly certified students is available from the School Nutrition Programs > Applications – Student Meals > Direct Certification webpage. The LEA must enter the names of the individual students who have been directly certified for each household.

If the LEA uses the name or address of the MFIP/SNAP applicant to send the notification letter and that name or address is different than the LEA’s records, the LEA must follow these DHS rules: (1) Envelopes must be marked “Do Not Forward,” (2) Letters may not be sent to out-of-state addresses.

How to Obtain Certification Data for New Students or for a Nonpublic School

MDE will provide direct certification data for kindergarten or other new students if the LEA uploads to MDE a student enrollment file using the New Student Upload feature in the Direct Certification module of CLiCS 1. A nonpublic school also can obtain direct certification data by using the New Student Upload feature to upload its student enrollment data. Obtaining additional direct certification data is optional.

The uploaded enrollment file must be a text file in the current year MARSS reporting format. Upload only the MARSS “B” file. The current MARSS reporting format is available on the MDE > School Support > School Finance > MARSS-Student Accounting > MARSS Reporting page of the MDE website.

After MDE has processed the LEA’s uploaded data, the data file and PDF report showing the LEA’s results will be available from the Direct Certification module in CLiCS 1.

1. File Format

The uploaded file must be a text file with the same format used for reporting of MARSS student data to MDE. The file format is provided in Appendix J of the MARSS Manual.

The complete MARSS reporting format, accommodating all MARSS data elements, must be used for the uploaded file, even though the LEA needs to provide data only for the data elements listed below. Upload only the MARSS “B” file.

Required Data

For the file to be used for direct certification, the following data elements on the MARSS file format must have values entered by the LEA (other values may be left blank):

Student Number

District Number

District Type

School Number

Student Grade Level

Sex/Gender

Birth Date

Student Last Name

Student First Name

2. Uploading

Upload student enrollment data to MDE via the “New Student Upload” feature in the CLiCS 1 Direct Certification module. A nonpublic LEA interested in uploading enrollment data for direct certification data should contact MDE-Food and Nutrition Service before uploading data.

3. Timing

MDE plans to run matches twice each week for uploaded student data. If an LEA has submitted multiple uploads since the last match, MDE will use the last file that was uploaded.

If any you have any questions about this information, contact Food and Nutrition Service at 651-582-8526, 1-800-366-8922 (MN Toll-free) or mde.fns@state.mn.us.

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