

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner

DATE: November 15, 2012

SUBJECT: Direct Certification Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS)
Warning Message

Compensatory revenue audits conducted by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) auditors and analysis by MDE staff have shown that districts and charter schools miss reporting students on MARSS as free meal eligible even though they have been identified as eligible through the Direct Certification Match. This underreporting has a negative impact on a district's/charter school's compensatory revenue and impacts the analysis of data used for accountability purposes and eligibility for certain programs.

The Direct Certification process is used by MDE to notify school districts of students who can be reported as eligible for free school meals based on Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) data without any application from the family for school meal benefits. The DHS data identifies children who are automatically eligible for free school meals because they have already been approved for participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps) or the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). This Direct Certification process has been available to all districts and charter schools that participate in School Nutrition Programs, primarily School Lunch, administered by MDE Food and Nutrition Service. The new edit described below will be available to all school districts and charter schools to improve accuracy of reporting students on MARSS as free meal eligible, regardless of whether the district or charter school participates in SNP.

Therefore, effective Monday, November 19, 2012, a new edit will be activated in the MARSS Web Edit System (WES) that will flag students that have been identified in the Direct Certification Match but who have not been reported as eligible for the free meal program on their MARSS record. The new warning message is:

364 *W* May be free eligible via Direct Certification

For any student marked with this warning, the district will need to verify that the student enrolled in the school and the student identified on the Direct Certification Match is the same student. To assist district staff in this verification, the parent/guardian and home address will be provided on the local MARSS 08 Error Report. The home address is from DHS and is the most recent

address known to DHS; however, it may be from as early as just prior to June 2012 so it may not be where the student is currently living.

If the student has been verified as the same student enrolled in the school, the student can be reported as free meal eligible on MARSS (i.e., Economic Indicator of 2). If they are different students, the district must have an eligible Application for Educational Benefits on file to report the student as eligible for the free or reduced-price meal program. The Economic Indicator data for students enrolled on October 1 are used to calculate a district's compensatory revenue for the following school year.

Please note that these data are classified as private and need to be treated with the same level of confidentiality as the Direct Certification reports. Steps need to be taken locally to assure compliance with Data Privacy laws.

Statute allows districts and charter schools to update each student's free/reduced-price meal eligibility up through December 15 each year. The Direct Certification match is updated periodically with new files from DHS resulting in a cumulative file of matches since the beginning of the fiscal year. The MARSS edit will be refreshed nightly by looking at the most recent match file until December 16, 2012. After December 16, the direct certification edit will stop looking for new Direct Certification Match files. Rather it will use the December 15 match file through the last Fall MARSS submission which is due at MDE by December 18, 2012.

I encourage you to communicate this information to your staff that work directly with the MARSS reporting as you want to take advantage of this new edit to ensure that your economic data is complete and accurate. When there are eligible students who have not been reported in MARSS, MARSS staff also need to check with the staff that approves school meal benefits, to confirm whether the student has been approved to receive free meals.

For a complete description of how compensatory revenue is computed, how MARSS data are used in that calculation and what local and statewide reports are available for school staff to verify the completeness and accuracy of the data, [View the October 18, 2012 MARSS Memo](#). The memos are listed at the bottom of the page.

Please direct your questions to:

Direct Certification edits and/or student counts: marss@state.mn.us.
Compensatory Revenue: Contact [Bob Porter](#) at 651-582-8851.