OSPI School Meal Programs Reference Sheet

Direct Certification

Direct Certification is the process Local Education Agencies (LEAs) use to certify categorically eligible children for free meals without further application.

Requirements

- LEAs must directly certify children who are members of households receiving Basic Food Benefits.

- **Washington state law requires LEAs to perform direct certification at least once each month.**

  - RCW 28A.235 and RCW 28A.300 (Hunger-Free Students Bill of Rights) supersedes USDA requirements, LEAs must conduct direct certification monthly.

- Consent to Share documentation must be obtained for directly certified students prior to sharing eligibility status.

- Best Practice:

  - Conduct direct certification frequently at the beginning of the school year.
  - Send Consent to Share form with notification of eligibility annually.

Categorically Eligible Children

Categorically eligible children are categorized into two groups: Assistance Programs Households and Other Source Categorical Eligible.

Assistance Program Households
- Basic Food
- TANF
- FDPIR

Other Source Categorical Eligible
- Foster Care
- Homeless
- Migrant
- Head Start or Even Start

Washington State has an electronic system that matches data from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) with the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) data to produce a "Direct Certification List". LEAs can use this list to "directly certify" students without further application. This system identifies Basic Food, TANF, receiving Migrant education services, and children in foster care as automatically eligible for free meals. Access the Direct Certification system by logging into the OSPI Education Data System (EDS).

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Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) and Other Source Categorical Eligible student data, not in the Direct Certification system, must be gathered from the appropriate officials and agencies, such as the Homeless Liaison. If EDS lists HOMELESS, that indicates that there is no address on file for this household and does not automatically qualify the student with McKinney Vento Status and eligibility for free meals. Eligibility Status will be listed under the reason code on the direct certification download.

Washington State considers the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) as Other Source Categorically Eligible. Lists should be obtained by the grantee agency.

Washington State participates in a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pilot program that helps directly certify children receiving Medicaid benefits. This match includes some, but not all Medicaid programs. For more information, view the Direct Certification – Medicaid Reference Sheet.

Process:
- Perform direct certification at required intervals or more frequently.
- Extend free meal eligibility to all students in a household where any household member receives Assistance Program benefits.
- Assign appropriate code to students using Appendix X of the CEDARS Manual and extend benefits in the meal counting system. (Not required for private schools.)
- Notify Household of Eligibility:
  - Notification must be in writing.
  - Email notification is allowed if the LEA has an email address for a parent or guardian.
- Obtain Consent to Share Eligibility Determination as appropriate.
- When students participate in more than one assistance program, system business rules allow for a hierarchy with reason qualified.
  - Example: Basic Food trumps other reason qualified options like TANF – children in foster care receiving basic food benefits will display reason qualified Basic Food and "yes" in the foster column. This student will display CEDARS code 19.

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Reference
- [RCW 28A.235](#)
- [RCW 28A.300](#)
- [7 CFR 245.6(b)](#)

Resources
- [OSPI Direct Certification System User's Manual](#)
- [OSPI Education Data System (EDS)](#)
- [USDA Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#)
- [Hunger-Free Students Bill of Rights Reference Sheet](#)

Acronym Reference
- CEDARS – Comprehensive Education Data and Research System
- DSHS – Department of Health and Social Services
- ECEAP – Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program
- EDS – Education Data System
- FDPIR – Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
- LEA – Local Education Agency
- OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

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