



State of New Jersey

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To: School Business Administrators
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From: Arleen Ramos-Szatmary, Coordinator
School Nutrition Programs

Date: July, 2013

Subject: Direct Certification

Direct Certification (DC) is the process for identifying, via an electronic matching process, school age children that are recipients of NJ-SNAP (Food Stamps) or TANF benefits, to certify them as eligible for free meal benefits in the school nutrition programs. This matching process is done in the SNEARS system and the link to do DC for the 2013-2014 school year is available as of July 15, 2013.

Below are the requirements for all Local Education Agencies (LEA) participating in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast Program, for the 2013-2014 school year:

1. Direct Certification **must be done a minimum of three times** during the school year according to the following time schedule:
 - a. July 15 – September 1, 2013
 - b. September 9 – September 30, 2013
 - c. January 9 – January 31, 2014

LEAs are encouraged to do the matching process more frequently; the NJ SNAP/TANF data will be updated monthly throughout the school year.

2. Direct Certification must be done using a student database upload into the SNEARS web-based system;
 - a. Doing direct certification solely by a manual matching process will not be accepted.
 - b. Doing solely individual matching in SNEARS will not be accepted.

LEAs that do not comply with the above requirements will be notified by email, and non-compliance will result in reimbursement funds being placed on hold until requirements are met.

There will be a webinar on August 6th, 2013 at 1:30-3:00 PM explaining the DC process. To register for the webinar click on the following link: <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/825548134> . The webinar will be recorded and available to view in SNEARS, under the upper menu tab "Training". There are other resources to assist with the process under the upper menu tab "Resources", in the category "Direct Certification", including a step by step outline of the DC process.

Feel free to contact this office at 609-984-0692, asking for either Emily Lomerson or Karen Krawczun, if you have any additional questions or concerns. If you have computer related issues during the DC process, please contact the IT Help desk at 609-341-3817.

Thank you for your cooperation with this important process to identify students eligible to receive free school meals.

DIRECT CERTIFICATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

- Q.** How can I get access to the Direct Certification program?
- A.** The Direct Certification program is available under the Food and Nutrition Electronic Services via the NJ portal. The "Other User" as well as the Certifier or Alternate Certifier will be able to assist or do Direct Certification.
- Q.** How can I upload the Student Enrollment Data?
- A.** After you have obtained the format of the Excel spreadsheet from our website, you will export your student enrollment data into this file and save the file to your local machine, e.g. C:\. Proceed to the **File Upload Match** header and click on the **Browse** button and select the file name, which contains the student enrollment data in the specified format. Then, click on **Match**.
- Q.** Can I change the format of the Social Security Number (SSN) or Date of Birth format in my Excel file?
- A.** No. In order for the match to be performed appropriately, the SSN and Date of Birth data must be in the format indicated in the spreadsheet's example on the first line.
- Q.** Can I delete columns labeled optional if I do not have that data?
- A.** No, you cannot delete any columns. Leave the columns blank if you do not have the information.
- Q.** How can I access the DC list once the match is done?
- A.** The DC list can be accessed by clicking on the **Direct Certified Students** header across the top of the screen. You must save the Direct Certified students file in your local computer before logging off.
- Q.** Will the list of matches be in alphabetical order?
- A.** Yes.
- Q.** Will I be able to save the list of matches onto my local computer system?
- A.** Yes. If the number of students matched exceeds 5,000 you will be asked to download the information in Excel format in two batches and save it to your local machine.

Q. Will I be able to do a match more than one time?

A. Yes. However, if you want to match a single student, the method to use is individual match.

Q. I collect the parent first and last name in one column, do I have to separate the first name and last name?

A. If you already collect the first and last parent name in one column you may upload them in that format in the last name column, however, if you have both parents' names in one field you may only provide one parent first and last name under the last name column. Otherwise, please follow the provided format.

Q. Why do I get a blank screen when I try to download the excel file?

A. In order to be able to view the download excel file you must enable specific options on your computer by doing the following steps:

(1) Open a web page and click on tools,

(2) Select Internet Options (the Internet Options dialog box opens)

(3) Click on the Security Tab (2nd tab) in the dialog box,

(4) Click on Custom Level Button, Scroll down until you see "ActiveX controls and plug ins" and click on "enable" on the following radio buttons:

- Allow previously unused ActiveX controls to run without prompt

- Automatic prompting for ActiveX controls

Scroll down until you see "Downloads" (blue icon) and click on "enable" on the following radio buttons:

- Automatic prompting for file downloads

- File Download

Save all the changes and reopen the excel file

Q. What is a Household match?

A. Direct Certification meal benefits are supposed to be extended to all other children that reside in the household, when at least one household member receives SNAP or TANF benefits.

Q. Why do I have to repeat the upload process for the household match?

A. The second upload matches the students on the enrollment that were not identified as Directly Certified to the students that were identified as directly certified. This produces a list of potential household members that may be eligible for DC benefits.

Q. How many times do I have to conduct the direct certification process?

A. The direct certification process must be completed three times a year. From July 15 but not later than September 1, from September 12 through September 30 and from January 9 through January 31.

Q. Do I generate my own notification letter?

A. You must use the letter in the SNEARS system. You should generate the letter to be printed on the district letterhead.

Q. What if I get an application and the student appears on my direct certification list also?

A. If you receive an application from a directly certified student, you may discard it. **Direct certification overrides the paper application.** If there are other students listed on the application you may directly certify those students by "extension of benefits"; in this case you must retain the application as documentation that the other students are members of the same household.

Q. What if a student is on my direct certification list but the next time I run the program they are no longer on the list?

A. Once a student has been directly certified, that status is good for the entire school year. Their benefits do not end if they are not on a subsequent list.

Q. Do my direct certification students go on my Master Eligibility List (MEL)?

A. Yes, directly certified students should be on your Master Eligibility List, and this year the list should have a column indicating the source of the direct certification. Directly certified students do not have an application number assigned.

Q. What if a student is listed in the column labeled duplicate certification?

A. You should check your enrollment information to confirm the student you have directly certified is actually enrolled in and attending your school. If you find they are not; you should remove them from your DC list. If you confirm they are attending your school you do not have to take any additional action.

DIRECT CERTIFICATION PROCESS A Brief Outline of Steps to Follow

A detailed Direct Certification manual, including screen shots, can be found in any section of SNEARS, under Resources. Select the Direct Certification link on the left of the screen to access the link for the manual.

1. Enter SNEARS through the My New Jersey portal
2. Click on *Child Nutrition Programs*
3. Click on *Proceed to SNEARS Options* in the bottom of the Messages and Memos screen
4. Click on *Direct Certification*. (Only the Certifier, Alternate Certifier and Other User can do Direct Certification)
5. Read the Statement of Confidentiality and Policy, and click on the Certify button
6. SNAP/TANF Data Requisition Form
 - a. Complete requested information
 - b. Follow directions for selecting the municipal codes for the towns from which students attending your school district reside
 - c. When finished selecting the municipal codes, click the *Submit Codes* button
 - d. A screen will come up, showing the codes you have selected; if correct click the *Proceed* button
7. Welcome screen explains each of the upper menu bars within the Direct Certification program
8. Select the function you wish to perform. If this is the initial attempt at DC matching you must start with the *File Upload Match*. **All LEAs must do the file upload matching process.**

9. File Upload Match

A. Initial enrollment upload

- i. Student data must be downloaded onto a specially formatted Excel spreadsheet, which can be obtained by clicking on the link noted on the screen. This formatted spreadsheet can also be located under the *RESOURCES* tab in SNEARS, under the category of Direct Certification
- ii. Once the student data is downloaded on the formatted Excel spreadsheet, and saved on your local computer, then click on browse to locate that spreadsheet
- iii. Enrollment file uploads cannot contain more than 5000 students at a time. LEAs with larger enrollments will have to upload multiple spreadsheets to match all students
- iv. When the file has been located, click on the *Match* button
- v. A screen will appear, showing a listing of students that have been matched to the SNAP/TANF data
- vi. Check each name to verify them as students of your district, or if all students on the page are enrolled in your district, you may click the *Check All* button in order to select all of the matched names on the page
- vii. Click the *Next* button to view additional pages
- viii. When all names have been verified, click on the *Direct Certify* button

B. Finding Additional Students

New this year is the ability to find other members of the household that are eligible for DC benefits

- Repeat the process from steps 9a thru 9g to find potential additional household matches

C. Click on the *Directly Certified Students* header

- i. Select the school year from the drop down box and click *Submit* to view the list of Directly Certified students
- ii. Click on *Generate Excel File for Direct Certified Students*; this file can then be saved onto your local computer
- iii. The other button, *Generate PDF Letters for Direct Certified Students*, allows the downloading and printing of individual letters to be sent to the households notifying them that their children have been directly certified to receive free school meals
- iv. This screen also allows you the option of printing individual letters, by clicking on the *Print* link in the last column of the listing of directly certified students

10. Individual Match

- a. Students can individually be matched against the SNAP/TANF listing in two ways:
 - If you have the student's social security number, enter it and click on *Search*
 - If you do NOT have the student's social security number, click on the *Advanced Search* link
 1. Enter at least two of the three search criteria listed on the screen, and click on *Search*
- b. If the student matches, it will come up on the screen; check the box to verify the student, then click on the *Direct Certify* button

11. Directly Certified Students

- a. The list of directly certified students can be viewed by clicking on the upper menu bar labeled *Directly Certified Students*

12. Duplicate Certified Students – NEW THIS YEAR

- a. This tab identifies students that may have been directly certified by more than one LEA
- b. This list should be reviewed and the LEA should verify that the students they have directly certified are actually enrolled and attending their school district
- c. Follow the instructions to remove any students that were incorrectly identified as *DIRECTLY CERTIFIED* by the LEA

Local Student ID Number (Optional)	SSN (Optional - No Hyphens)	Student First Name (Required)	Student Last Name (Required)	Student Date of Birth (Required) (MM-DD-YYYY format)	Student Mailing Address (Required)	Student Mailing City (Required)	Student Mailing Zip (Required)	Parent/Guardian First Name (Required)	Parent/Guardian Last Name (Required) (If Parent/Guardian names are not collected separately, enter the complete Parent/Guardian name in this column)	Student Contact Phone Number (Optional - XXXXXXXXXX -No Hyphens or Parantheses)
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