



State of New Jersey

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Division of Food & Nutrition
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To: School Business Administrators, Charter School Leads; Non Public School Administrators; Food Service Directors of Schools Participating in the School Nutrition Programs

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Subject: Direct Certification – Guidance for Sending Districts

The *Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008* (Public Law 110-246) and the *Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act*, as amended by the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010* (HHFKA, Public Law 111-296) require that children living in households receiving assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) be directly certified for free school meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or the School Breakfast Program. Each year, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is required to assess State performance in directly certifying such children, to report the findings in a Report to Congress, and, with the advent of the HHFKA, to compare each State's direct certification performance rate to certain mandated benchmarks.

New Jersey has been identified as a state that has been slow to reach the established benchmark of 95%. In addition, the USDA has also identified discrepancies when comparing required reports representing Direct Certification and related Verification data. When determining the possible causes of the inconsistencies, it was found that many "sending" districts have different approaches as to how they perform the Direct Certification matches.

In an effort to reduce inconsistencies and obtain accurate and representative data, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture is providing guidance to all "sending" school districts, which are those districts in which a public school district sends some or all of its students to attend the schools of another district. This is often done to achieve costs savings in smaller districts or because other districts may offer special needs education or other services that the sending district does not offer.

“Sending” school districts must obtain the direct certification lists from the school where the children are consuming meals in order to prevent duplication of matches for the same student in the School Nutrition Electronic Application Reimbursement System (SNEARS) system.

Obtaining accurate data is not only critical for avoiding discrepancies, but also for determining schools’ eligibility for federal Title I funds. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) will allow districts with schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to use CEP direct certification data to rank schools for Title I eligibility. Therefore, it is imperative that sending school districts have procedures in place to match direct certification data from their partner sites. Failure to provide accurate data may adversely impact school’s eligibility for Title I funds in subsequent school years.

If the school district where children are sent does not participate in any of the school nutrition programs offered by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, the “sending” school district **can** perform Direct Certification for those students.

Direct any questions to the School Nutrition Programs Unit at 609-984-0692.

Thank you for your commitment to feeding the children of New Jersey nutritious, safe and balanced meals.