

## Direct Certification

Direct Certification is the process by which LEAs 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.
- ✓ Direct Certification must be performed 3 times per year (beginning of school year; 3 months after initial; and 6 month after initial).
- ✓ Best practice is to perform direct certification on a monthly basis.

### Categorically Eligible Children

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

#### Assistance Programs 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 DSHS with CEDARS data to produce a "Direct Certification List." LEAs can use this list to "directly certify" student without further application. This system identifies Basic Food, TANF, migrant, and Foster Care Children as automatically eligible for free meals. Access the Direct Certification system by logging into the OSPI [Education Data System](#) (EDS).

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.

Washington State considers the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program as Other Source Categorical Eligible.

### 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.

- Notify Household of Eligibility:
  - Notification may be in writing or verbally.
  - Email notification is allowed if the LEA has an email address for a parent or guardian.

**Washington State** participates in a USDA demonstration/pilot project to conduct [Direct Certification using Medicaid](#) data.

**Reference:**

- [OSPI Direct Certification Training Modules](#)
- [OSPI Education Data System \(EDS\)](#)
- [USDA Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#)

**Acronym Reference**

<b>-CEDARS</b>	Comprehensive Education Data and Research System
<b>-CNS</b>	Child Nutrition Services
<b>-DSHS</b>	Department of Health and Social Services
<b>-EDS</b>	Education Data System
<b>-FDPIR</b>	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
<b>-LEA</b>	Local Education Agency
<b>-OSPI</b>	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
<b>-OSPI</b>	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
<b>-TANF</b>	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families
<b>-USDA</b>	United States Department of Agriculture