

Direct Certification

Direct Certification is the process 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.
- ✓ Direct Certification must be performed 3 times per year (beginning of school year; 3 months after initial; and 6 month after initial).
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ Best practice – conduct direct certification frequently at the beginning of the school year.

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.

OSPI CNS School Meal Programs Reference Sheets

- 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.
- 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 - foster children receiving basic food benefits will display reason qualified Basic Food and in the foster column, "yes", when the student is foster. This student will display Cedars code 19.

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

Reference:

- [RCW 28A.235](#)
- [RCW 28A.300](#)
- [RCW 28A.300.255](#)

Resources:

- [OSPI Direct Certification Training Modules](#)
- [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
-CNS	Child Nutrition Services
-DSHS	Department of Health and Social Services
-EDS	Education Data System
-FDPIR	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
-LEA	Local Education Agency
-OSPI	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
-OSPI	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
-TANF	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families
-USDA	United States Department of Agriculture