



State of New Jersey

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To: School Business Administrators
Charter School Leads
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Food Service Directors

From: Janet Hawk, Coordinator
School Nutrition Programs

Date: July 6, 2011

Subject: Direct Certification – IMPORTANT Changes

New Jersey has been targeted by USDA as a low performing state in regards to its rate of directly certifying school age children that are recipients of NJ-SNAP (Food Stamps) or TANF benefits, for free meal benefits in the school nutrition programs.

The Division has been working extremely hard over the last year to strategize ways to improve our direct certification process. In addition, USDA has come out with additional requirements that include Local Education Agencies performing the Direct Certification matching process at least three times during the school year.

Below are the requirements for all Local Education Agencies participating in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast Program, effective for the 2011-2012 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 – August 31, 2011**
 - b. **September 12 – September 30, 2011**
 - c. **January 9 – January 31, 2012**

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.**

- c. **Schools may apply for a waiver from the requirement to do DC in SNEARS, only if they use a local level computer matching system. The waiver request must include detailed information about the computer/software system to be used, including name of the program and description of how it works. The system must be able to provide detailed reports indicating the numbers of students directly certified. Samples of such reports must be submitted with the waiver, to validate accuracy.**

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.

Our technology team is continuing to work on enhancing the Direct Certification (DC) system to improve matching results. The initial enhancements, taking effect July 15, 2011, include the following:

- **A new Excel format is required** – asking for several additional fields of data. The required Excel format can be found in SNEARS under Resources, under the category “Direct Certification”.
 - There are required fields, and optional fields. We are requesting as much data as the LEA can possibly provide to improve our matching process
 - The required fields cannot be left completely blank
 - In the case of parent names, if the LEA data system will not allow the separation of first and last names into two separate fields, then include the names under the column labeled “Parent LAST name”
- The listing of matched students will include the information from the LEA database, along with the information from the NJ SNAP/TANF database to assist the LEA in ensuring that the students should be directly certified; local student ID numbers will also be included.
- When the Direct Certification letters are printed, the system will use the address from the LEA database, rather than from the NJ SNAP/TANF data.
- In addition to the municipalities selected by the LEA, matching will be expanded to the entire county in which the LEA is located.
- Since SNAP/TANF data does not contain special characters (apostrophes, hyphens, number sign #), they will be disregarded from the uploaded data when the match occurs.

There will be additional enhancements to the DC process at the time of doing the second required match in September. A memo outlining those changes will be provided to LEAs in August 2011.

We understand this is a lot of change for this process and we truly appreciate your cooperation. The end result will be in identifying more students eligible to receive free school meals, who may otherwise be missed.

Feel free to contact this office at 609-984-0692, asking for either Arleen or Emily, 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.

An outline of performing the Direct Certification process in SNEARS is as follows:

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 get to the link to access the manual. It is also available with a link located at the top of the SNAP/TANF Data Requisition Form screen within the Direct Certification section.

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; in most cases it will be the *File Upload Match*
9. File Upload Match
 - a. 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
 - b. 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
 - c. When the file has been located, click on the *Match* button
 - d. A screen will appear, showing a listing of students that have been matched to the SNAP/TANF data
 - e. Check each name to verify them as students of your district, or click the *Check All* button in order to select all of the matched names.
 - f. Click the *Next* button to view all pages

- g. When all names have been verified, click on the *Direct Certify* button
- h. 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
- j. Click on *Generate Excel File for Direct Certified Students*; this file can then be saved onto your local computer
- k. 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
- l. 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:
 - i. If you have the student's social security number, enter it and click on *Search*
 - ii. 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. SNAP/TANF Data

- a. The original, UNMATCHED, data listing all persons eligible for SNAP/TANF in the municipalities selected can be downloaded by clicking on the *SNAP/TANF Data* upper menu bar
- b. This data should only be used to do a manual check of questionable students