

Most school districts can take additional steps to increase the number of students they certify to receive free school meals without submitting a school meal application. This improves the financial viability of implementing community eligibility, reduces administrative work for the district, and ensures that the most vulnerable students are able to receive free school breakfast and lunch.

Certify ALL Categorically Eligible Children Without an Application.

- In addition to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), children whose households participate in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or the Food Distribution Program for Indian Reservations (FDPIR) or who are homeless, migrant, in foster care or Head Start are categorically eligible for free school meals without an application.
- Children that live in households that participate in TANF or FDPIR often are identified through a data matching process that is similar to that of SNAP.
- Those that are homeless, migrant, in foster care, or Head Start often are identified by a school official, such as the homeless liaison, migrant education coordinator or social worker, who shares the students' names with the school nutrition department. The child then must be certified immediately for free school meals.
- School nutrition departments also can review school meal applications for SNAP, TANF, or FDPIR case numbers or that have the box checked stating the they are homeless, migrant, in foster care, or Head Start, and then take steps to directly certify them.

Extend Eligibility to Other Children in the Household.

- If one child in a household is directly certified to receive free school meals through SNAP or TANF, all the other children in the household can be directly certified.

- Eligibility for free school meals does NOT extend to other categorically eligible children in the household (i.e., FDPIR, homeless, migrant, in foster care, or Head Start).
- School nutrition departments can use the parent's/ guardian's name, address, or both to identify additional children in the household and extend eligibility for free school meals to them.
- State child nutrition agencies require detailed documentation from school districts when extending categorical eligibility to children and can provide additional information on how to extend eligibility to additional children in the household.

Perform Direct Certification Matches More Than Three Times a Year.

- Districts are required to conduct direct certification matches three times a year, but school districts should perform direct certification matches as often as the state agency provides updated direct certification lists to ensure that categorically eligible students are identified for free school meals as quickly as possible.
- Many state agencies provide updated direct certification lists as often as once per month, weekly, or daily.

Conduct SNAP Education and Offer Application Assistance in Schools.

- Many households that are eligible for SNAP do not participate, because they are unaware that they are eligible or do not know how to apply.
- The school social worker or counselor, as well as community partners, can help disseminate SNAP eligibility information to families and assist with completing applications.

For more information, contact the Food Research & Action Center at frac.org or 202- 986-2200.