

# Medicaid Direct Certification: Statewide in School Year 2017-18!

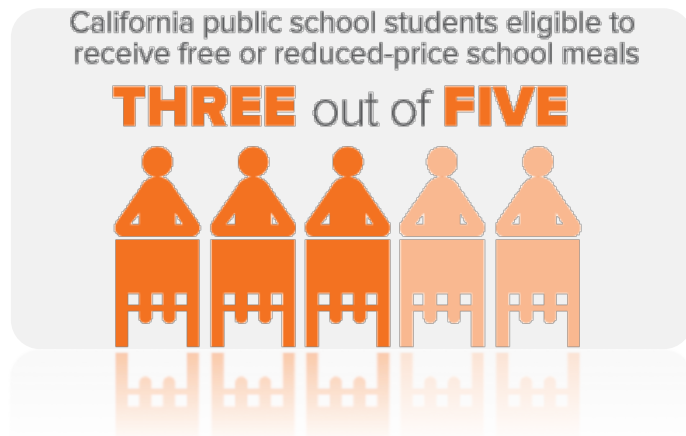


Contact: Elyse Homel Vitale at 510.433.1122 ext. 206 or [elyse@cfpa.net](mailto:elyse@cfpa.net)

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Three in five California public school students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals. Well-nourished students are better prepared to learn, grow, and achieve at their fullest potential. Unfortunately, on an average school day, nearly one million (30%) of California's low-income public school students miss out on the health and academic benefits of school lunch while two million (62%) miss out on school breakfast.<sup>a</sup>

In order for students to receive free or reduced-price school meals, they must be certified as eligible and enrolled in the program.



## THE BASICS

**WHAT:** In June 2016, the California Department of Education (CDE) was approved by the United States Department of Agriculture to participate in a demonstration project to evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid.<sup>b</sup> This demonstration project is aimed at increasing access to nutritious school meals for low-income children while requiring less paperwork for the State, schools, and families alike.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Under this demonstration project, the CDE and the California Department of Health Care Services (CDHCS) will collaborate to directly certify students for free and reduced-price school meals based on household income. The income data will be captured by the CDHCS and utilize Medicaid records. This secure data exchange will take place without disclosing a student's Medicaid status, health records, or specific income data.<sup>c</sup> Local education agencies (LEAs) will be notified of directly certified students through monthly data updates in the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS).<sup>d</sup>



**WHO:** All public school districts, county offices of education, and charter school that are approved to participate in the National School Lunch Program in California will be eligible to participate in the Medicaid Direct Certification demonstration project after they have certified completion of a required training and relevant administrative updates.

**WHEN:** The CDE will announce direct certification training dates in spring 2017 and is committed to making Medicaid Direct Certification available statewide in school year 2017-18.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

---



Medicaid Direct Certification benefits students, parents, and LEAs. California's existing direct certification process uses CalFresh data to certify low-income students for free school meals. However, the reach of CalFresh among eligible Californians is persistently low. In comparison, the reach of Medicaid is tremendous: 1 in 3 Californians is now enrolled in Medicaid. Medicaid Direct Certification can paperlessly enroll hundreds of thousands of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals.

### DECREASED APPLICATION BURDEN AND ERROR RATES

- ➔ LEAs can process and verify fewer school meal applications, decreasing the related administrative burden and cost.
- ➔ Errors rates associated with paper applications will decline.
- ➔ The burden on parents to complete and submit applications will decrease.

### INCREASED SCHOOL FUNDING

- ➔ As school meal participation increases, LEAs will draw down additional federal- and state-funded reimbursements for meals served.
- ➔ As additional students are identified as eligible for free and reduced-price school meals, LEAs will draw down additional state education dollars through the Local Control Funding Formula.



### IMPROVED ACCESS TO HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS

- ➔ The number of California schools that are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) – and utilizing this option – will likely increase. LEAs that participate in CEP make breakfast and lunch available to all students free of charge.
- ➔ With CEP, LEAs are well positioned to implement the most effective service options, such as Breakfast After the Bell.
- ➔ California students will have improved access to healthy school meals, which supports their learning, development, and academic achievement.

## TAKE ACTION!

---

Medicaid Direct Certification is a well-tested, efficient, and effective tool for enrolling eligible students in free school meals. Support LEAs by initiating conversations about the importance of reaching more eligible students and the resources that Medicaid Direct Certification can bring to your community.

<sup>a</sup> Source: California Food Policy Advocates. (2016). *School Meal Analysis: 2014-15*. Retrieved July 2016, from <http://cfpa.net/school-meal-analysis-2014-15>.

<sup>b</sup> Medicaid is known as Medi-Cal in California. The official name for this demonstration project is "USDA Demonstration to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid."

<sup>c</sup> The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services released an informational bulletin that clarifies Medicaid agencies are permitted to share with the school meals program the minimum amount of information needed to certify or verify the child's school meal eligibility. The full CMS guidance can be accessed here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP08-2013a3.pdf>.

<sup>d</sup> More information about CALPADS is available here: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/background.asp>