

Survey Results:

District Experiences with the Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Project

Direct Certification with Medicaid is the process of directly enrolling students in the school meal program through a confidential data match process between Medicaid (called Medi-Cal in California) and school enrollment data. The Demonstration Project is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 2014, the USDA granted the authority for 14 California school districts to participate in the Demonstration Project. These districts began automatically enrolling students eligible for free school meals in the meal program at the end of the 2014-15 school year. In June 2016, the state was granted the authority to expand the Demonstration Project statewide and to include students eligible for both free and reduced-price meals.

This survey collects feedback from the 14 districts that originally participated in the Demonstration Project. The purpose of the survey was to learn more about district experience and to inform efforts to expand of the Demonstration Project statewide in the 2017-18 school year.

Methodology

The California Department of Education, Nutrition Services Division provided recommended contacts at each of the 14 districts. Participants were reached out to by email and phone to explain the survey and ask for their participation. The survey was administered online. The response rate for the survey was 100%. All responses were received between June and September 2017. The survey was conducted by the [California Food Policy Advocates](#) in collaboration with the California Department of Education (CDE), Nutrition Services Division.

Survey respondents

Cajon Valley Unified School District, Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District, Lassen View Union Elementary School District, New Haven Unified School District, Oakland Unified School District, Red Bluff Joint Union High School District, San Diego Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, Santa Ana Unified School District, South Bay Union School District, Vacaville Unified School District, Vallejo City Unified School District, Washington Unified School District, and Woodland Joint Unified School District.

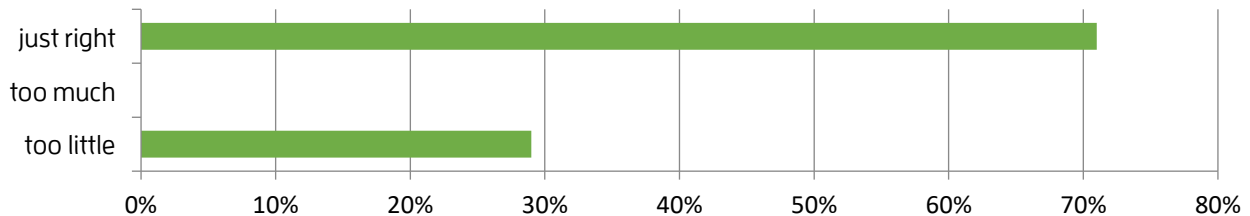
Challenges

While the survey intended to collect feedback on district experiences participating in the "original" Demonstration Project (2014-15), several respondents commented on their experiences with the 2017-18 expansion of the Project. Additionally, due to staff changes, some respondents had not been personally involved with the roll-out of the original Demonstration Project.

SURVEY RESULTS

Training & Technical Assistance

Q1. The amount of training and technical assistance your district received to implement Direct Certification with Medicaid was...



Write-in comments: Several respondents communicated satisfaction with the trainings provided by the CDE. One respondent would have liked greater clarification on the timeline, implementation and next steps. Two respondents would have liked training before the original pilot, mentioning that they didn't receive training until more recently.

Q2. Do you feel your district needs ongoing training or technical assistance to continue Direct Certification with Medicaid?

No (13), Yes (1)

Write-in comments: One respondent would like additional training on data sharing and file uploads. Other comments included a desire for an "open door" for further assistance, suggested "annual refresher" on the topics covered, and concern that their Point of Sale being able to recognize the new coding from the CALPADS extract.

Technological Updates

Q3. What type of technology updates, such as to the Point of Sale (POS) or Student Information (SIS) system, did your district need in order to implement Direct Certification with Medicaid?

Open-ended question. Several districts reported updates to their POS system or referred to general "software updates." Specifically updates were mentioned regarding letter templates and report configurations. One district mentioned choosing to develop a script to allow the SIS system and POS system to communicate in real-time.

Q4. Did you feel that the technology updates were a challenge or barrier to your district implementing Direct Certification with Medicaid?

No (8), Yes (6), N/A (0)

Write-in comments: One district mentioned that they weren't able to implement Direct Certification with Medicaid during 2016-17 due to software challenges. Two districts mentioned challenges with the letters. Two districts mentioned challenges with matching reduced price; One would like to go back to only matching students eligible for free meals and the second mentioned that they would have to match reduced-price students manually in 2017-18 because their software can't yet handle the process.

Q5. Who is your POS Vendor?

POS vendors listed: Heartland School Solution (2); Harris School Solutions/ eTrition (2); Horizon International (1); MCS Software (2); Meals Plus (1); Mealtime (1); Nutrikids (4); PCS Group (1); Primero (1)

Q6. Who is your SIS Vendor?

SIS vendors listed: Aeries (9), Powerschool (1); Q (1), San Diego County of Education (1); Synergy (2); Zangle (1)

Q7. How would you describe your department's working relationship with your district IT department?

Open-ended question. The vast majority of respondents (13 of 14) indicated a good to great relationship with their IT department.

Q8. What procedural changes did your district make in order to implement Direct Certification with Medicaid?

Open-ended question. Half of respondents said there were no major procedural changes. Responses varied for the remaining districts and included changes to ensure a more secure data exchange, in how data is requested, and to system letters. Two districts mentioned needing to be "more careful," and citing some of the differences in the various matching processes (Medicaid vs. CalFresh or Free vs. Reduced).

Opportunities and Challenges:

Q9. What were/are the biggest challenges to Direct Certification with Medicaid and how did your district overcome those challenges?

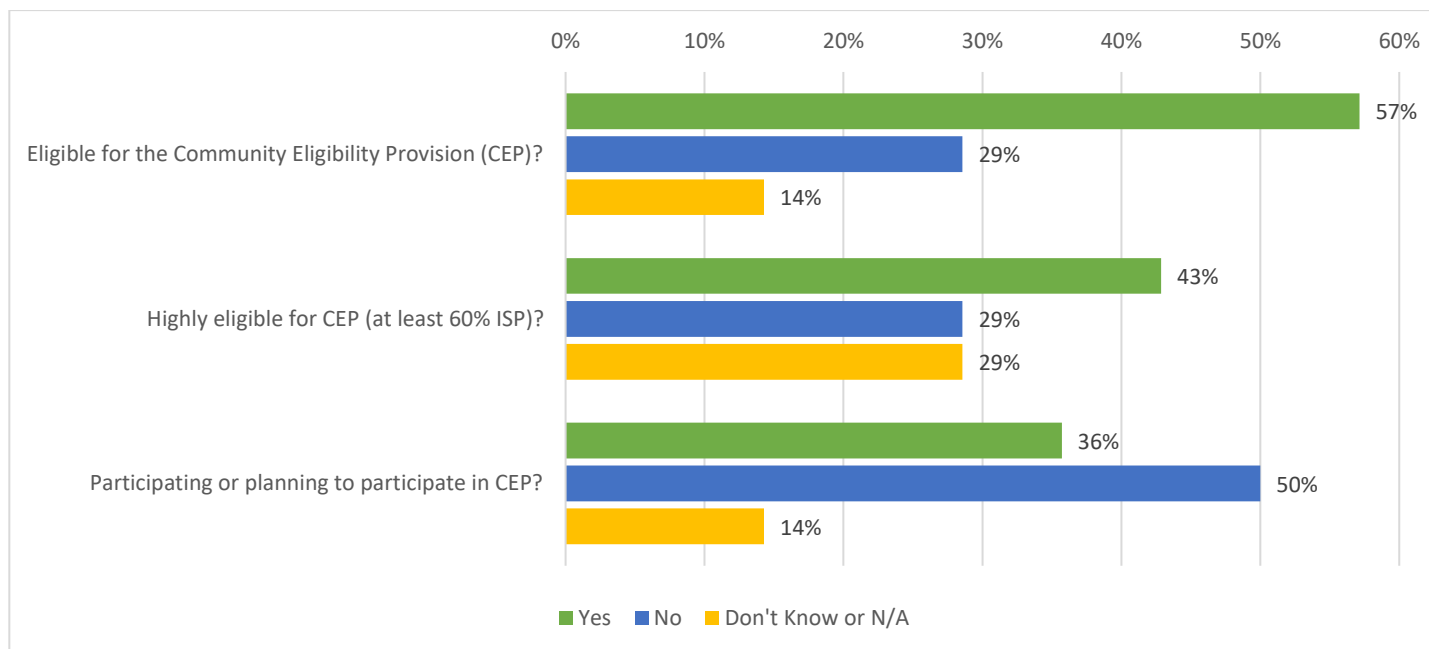
Open-ended question. The challenges listed included accessing the Medi-Cal data to conduct the match, informing parents about the Medicaid Direct Certification program, and challenges with changes needed to software systems. Although we did not specifically ask about matching students for reduced-price meals, five districts mentioned that it was or would be a challenge to start matching students for reduced-price meals using Medicaid data. Needed technology updates was one of the challenges to begin this matching process. Conducting sibling matches was also

mentioned as a challenge. One district mentioned the challenge that "participation was lower than expected." Four districts indicated that there were no major challenges.

Q10. What, if any, issues has your district had regarding the Direct Certification with Medicaid match?

Open-ended question. Nine districts indicated that there were no issues. A few districts listed challenges with the match capturing all eligible students or applying benefits to the correct students. These districts mentioned challenges with matching "Independent Study" students, siblings, or differences between the state and county match lists.

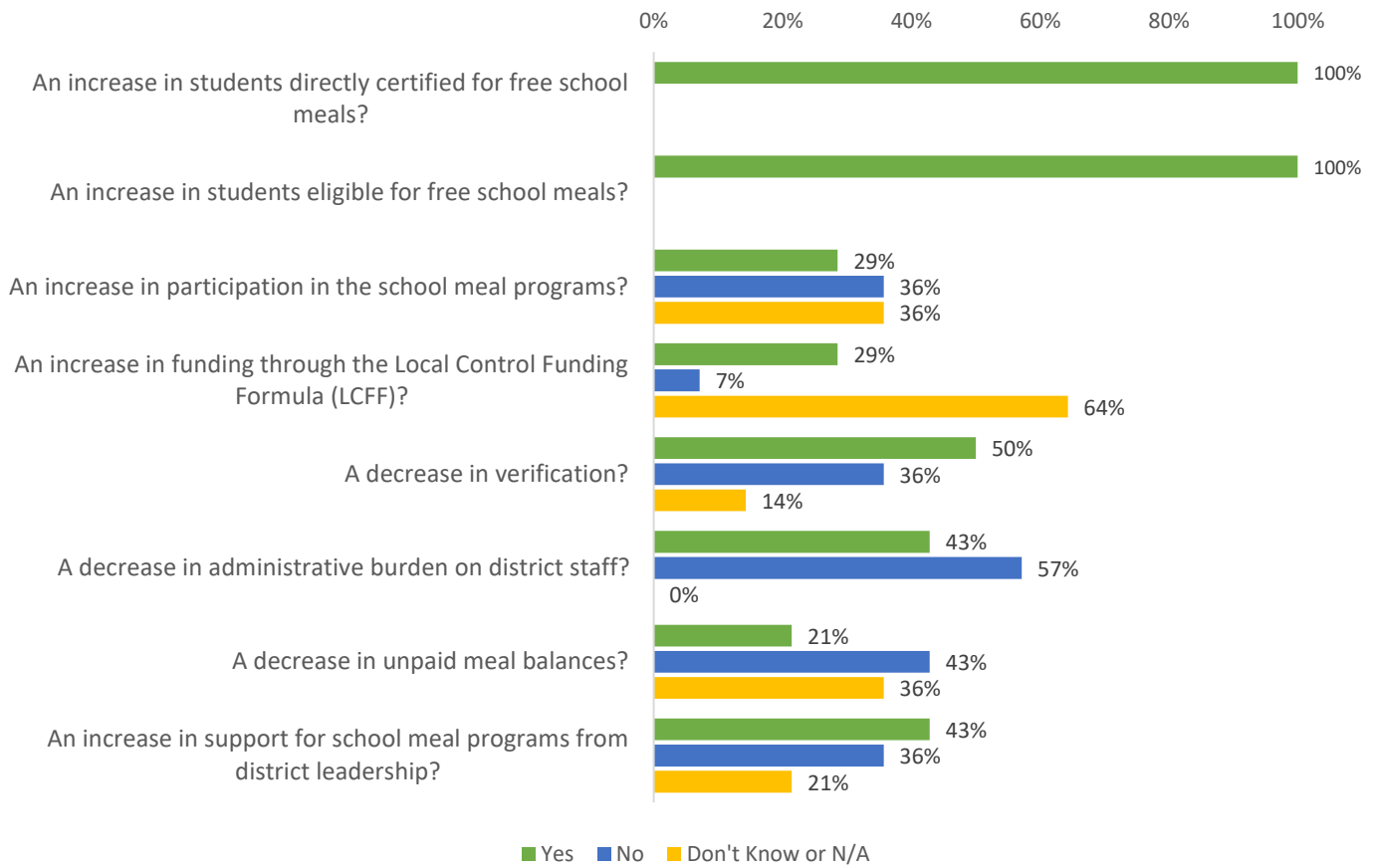
Q11. As a result of Direct Certification with Medicaid, are more schools in your district...



If schools in your district are highly eligible for CEP but NOT participating, why not?

Open-ended question. Only one respondent answered that as a result of the Demonstration Project they had schools "highly eligible" for CEP but were not planning to participate in CEP. The reason given was funding concerns for "offsetting" the cost of full paying students. Two respondents were unaware of how the Demonstration Project affected their eligibility or participation in CEP. Two respondents did not know if their districts had "highly eligible" schools but responded that their eligible schools were not participating or planning to participate in CEP. Reasons given: (1) "hard sell" to the district office, community, and board, and (2) concerns that it would not be cost effective. Another district responded that they had heard that CEP had negative impact on food service finances.

Q12. As a result of Direct Certification with Medicaid, did your district see...



Q13. Please tell us more about the benefits of Direct Certification with Medicaid.

Open-ended question. Some districts elaborated on the benefits described in Q11 and 12. Additional benefits listed:

- (1) **more time** "to concentrate on food and service,"
- (2) **saving money** due to needing fewer free meal applications,
- (3) **less room for error** due to a reduction in application processing, and
- (4) reduced need for "substitute staff" due to children being certified earlier before the start of the school year.

Q14. What advice do you have for other districts that will begin Direct Certification with Medicaid?

Open-ended question. Advice included:

- (1) Checking for an increase in schools eligible for CEP,
- (2) Keeping in contact with the California Department of Education and peers
- (3) Working with software vendors to make sure they can process the new Medicaid data

Q15. What would you like to know from other districts about their experience with Direct Certification with Medicaid?

Open-ended question. There was interest from several districts in knowing general information about other districts' experiences or processes with Direct Certification. There was an interest in knowing about challenges and barriers, such as sibling and household matching, issues with the import, and false positives. Several districts wanted to learn more about best and promising practices. Three districts mentioned an interest in hearing others' experiences or strategies with sibling or household matching. One of these districts specifically mentioned wanting to know if school districts are creating "family ID" tags to help with the matching process. Another question was around the possibility of accessing preschool data to establish a "feeder database." One district would like to know if districts decided to move to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) as a result of matching with Medi-Cal data.

Q16. Would you like additional opportunities to share your experience or learn from other districts about Direct Certification?

Yes (8), No (6)

Q17. Anything else you would like to share with us?

Open-ended question. Districts communicated:

- (1) Challenges with the reduced-price match. One district followed up after completing the survey to communicate challenges with implementing Direct Certification with Medicaid reduced-price. The challenge centered around differences in the reported income on a paper application and as matched with Direct Certification. The concern was that this could result in an application being labeled "error-prone" and subject to additional verification. When verification is required, students risk losing free and reduced price meals if parents don't respond adequately to the request. The district suggested software changes to handle cases such as these.
- (2) A desire for more information about data sharing. One district wondered about data sharing, mentioning the current federal administration and deportations.
- (3) Interest in validating their match. One district asked about opportunities to access aggregate information about students in their district that are enrolled in the Medicaid program. They think this could be useful to validate their match and ensure they are capturing all eligible students.
- (4) Wanting to provide free meals for all students regardless of income. One district expressed that they would like to see school meals provided to all students. They suggested that efforts to collect income information should be discarded altogether so they can, "focus on feeding children instead of how much money their families earn."

Q18. Would you recommend that other districts adopt Direct Certification with Medicaid?

100% of respondents say "yes!"