Ohio Child Nutrition Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Project

As of school year 2023-2024, the Ohio Department of Education participates in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Project. This project allows school food authorities (SFAs) to use Medicaid, in addition to the already approved Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Ohio Works First (OWF) data, as a method of directly certifying children for free or reduced-price meals or free milk. The information below is an overview of considerations and important highlights for program staff with responsibilities administering School Nutrition Programs. Refer to the Direct Certification Manual for a detailed overview of Direct Certification requirements.

THE CHILD NUTRITION DIRECT CERTIFICATION (CNDC) - OHIO DISTRICT DATA EXCHANGE (ODDEX)

The Child Nutrition Direct Certification (CNDC) for the Medicaid Demonstration Project is accessible within the Ohio District Data Exchange (ODDEX). ODDEX is the application in which the CNDC module resides. SFAs can access and export direct certification data files for the use of Child Nutrition Program administration. To get access to the CNDC, SFAs will need to complete the following steps:

1. **Obtain an OH|ID:** This is a unique username registered to individuals needing access to State of Ohio Programs.
2. **Set up a Department of Education Profile:** Within the OH|ID portal, users will access the App Store, request access to the Department of Education Profile Setup and complete their user profile. Reference pages 8-16 of the OEDS guidance document for a step-by-step walkthrough to set up your Department of Education user profile.
3. **Assign Role in OEDS:** Schools registered with the Ohio Department of Education have a school profile set up in the Ohio Educational Directory System (OEDS). The OEDS Administrator at the district level can assign one of two roles:
   - **Data View – CNDC:** For program staff that need to strictly review student data.
   - **Verifier – CNDC:** For program staff that will have access to manually match students to benefits, upload student data files, as well as configure vendor export files.

Reference pages 39-44 of the OEDS guidance document for a walkthrough of assigning and removing roles in OEDS.

QUALIFYING FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

- The demonstration project only allows Medicaid free or reduced-price meal certifications through the direct certification process.
- Households are not permitted to submit Medicaid numbers on a free or reduced-price household meal application or provide proof of Medicaid coverage to a school as a way of applying for free or reduced-price meals.
- The CNDC uses Medicaid-reported household income to review eligibility for meal benefits against federal income eligibility guidelines.
  - **Students might be on Medicaid but are not guaranteed to directly certify for free or reduced-price meal benefits.**
- Direct Certification using Medicaid data is limited to children who are members of households with income that does not exceed the following National School Lunch Program (NSLP) income standards. To qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on Medicaid income, the household income must be within the Federal Poverty Level (FPL):
  - Free school meal eligibility is 130 percent of the FPL for the family size used by Medicaid; and
  - Reduced-price school meal eligibility is 185 percent of the FPL for the family size used by Medicaid.

MEDICAID REDUCED-PRICE ELIGIBILITY

Households with children that certify for reduced-price meal benefits through the direct certification process may wish to apply using a traditional meal application if they believe they qualify for free meals under federal income eligibility guidelines. SFAs can access updated notification letters in the Claims Reimbursement and Reporting System (CRRS) Download Forms section. The local educational agency's (LEA) free determination supersedes the Medicaid reduced-price status if the LEA determines that a child is free based on being a foster child, homeless, runaway, enrolled in a federally funded Head Start Program or eligible for free benefits based on an approved meal application.

EXTENDING ELIGIBILITY TO HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Students certified for free or reduced-price meal benefits can extend household eligibility to students identified within a shared household. Reference page 22 of the Eligibility Manual for more information on determining household composition.

MANUALLY MATCHING AND UNMATCHING STUDENT BENEFITS

The new CNDC has the added benefit of identifying students who didn't fully match for a benefit with the required elements but who matched on multiple other data elements within the system The CNDC will flag these students as potential matches for review. SFA's are encouraged to review potential matches for abnormalities in name, spelling errors, etc. If a match is validated, SFA's can use the match button located within the student detail and input a comment validating how the match was confirmed. Should an SFA manually match a student in error, an unmatch button will be located within the student detail and the same process should occur. SFA's should validate and comment on why the benefit was unmatched from the student. Once unmatched from a benefit, the student cannot be rematched to the same benefit. See the CNDC instructions page for further details on the "Review Students" functionality.

COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION

In determining a SFAs Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for Community Eligibility Provision purposes, schools may include students who certify for Medicaid Free benefits in this count. Students who certify for Medicaid Reduced benefits cannot be included in an SFA's ISP. According to CEP requirements, the ISP may only include students certified for *free* meals without the use of household applications.

RESOURCES

Ohio Department of Education – National School Lunch Program Webpage
National School Lunch Program | Ohio Department of Education

FNS; NSLP and SBP Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid
National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid | Food and Nutrition Service (usda.gov)

FNS, Community Eligibility Resource Center
Community Eligibility Provision Resource Center | Food and Nutrition Service (usda.gov)