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More Students to Automatically Receive Free, Reduced Price Meals Under USDA Program

(BOISE) – A change to how eligibility is determined for free and reduced school meals has more than doubled the number of students eligible to be directly certified in Idaho. Depending on their relation to the federal poverty level (FPL), Medicaid-enrolled students will now automatically qualify to receive benefits through USDA’s Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Project.

All students below 185 percent of the FPL this school year will qualify for direct certification. Direct certification is a process by which schools can automatically certify students as eligible for free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP).

The change comes as Idaho is added to the roster of states approved to participate in USDA’s Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Projects for the 2024 – 2025 school year. State agencies that administer the NSLP and the SBP were invited to apply to participate in the project and Idaho was one of five states selected for the expansion this year. This change will benefit over 160,000 Medicaid-enrolled students in Idaho who qualify for either free or reduced-price meals.

“This change cuts significant red tape for both schools and families when it comes to getting kids fed and ready to learn,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield. “By removing this barrier for both parents and families, we can ensure that our efforts are concentrated on what they should be – educating kids – and not on filling out or processing governmental forms that can be a barrier to service.”

For some districts, the immediate change has been noticeable and a significant number of their students stand to benefit.

“We’re thrilled with the new enhancements to the system, and the number of additional students matched has almost doubled compared to July,” said Emmett School District Child Nutrition Director Tyree White. “This is going to be a huge help to families in our district.”

This year, Idaho joins Maine, New Jersey, North Dakota and Rhode Island for the 2024 – 2025 round of the Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Projects. Parents and local education agencies can learn more about direct certification and the project rollout by visiting <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/direct-certification-medicaid-demonstration-project>.

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