ISBE Verification Training Questions & Answers

1. What is a sponsor file upload in the Direct Certification system and how do I complete one?
ISBE recommends all sponsors upload a sponsor-created file into the Direct Certification system to identify SNAP, TANF, income-eligible Medicaid, and Foster students who have not already been directly certified. This sponsor file upload helps capture any students who have not already been matched in Direct Certification with the districts' current Student Information System (SIS).

To complete a sponsor file upload, a comma-delimited file must be created that includes specific student information. Step-by-step instructions for creating this file and how to upload it into the Direct Certification system are located in [Section F (Electronic Direct Certification)](#) of the School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook.

2. Who should complete a sponsor file upload in the Direct Certification system? When should this be done?
All sponsors can upload a sponsor-created file into the Direct Certification system to identify SNAP, TANF, income-eligible Medicaid, and Foster students. While public districts automatically receive monthly reports, they can still complete a sponsor file upload at any time to capture any additional directly certified students.

Non-public schools do not automatically receive monthly reports in Direct Certification. It is required for non-public schools to complete a sponsor file upload a minimum of three times each school year, but it is highly recommended to do this monthly.

Additionally, all sponsors (public and non-public) are highly encouraged to complete a sponsor file upload in Direct Certification on or near Oct. 1 prior to taking the application count for Verification.

3. Do I approve an application with a SNAP/TANF nine-digit number if it cannot be directly certified?
Yes, applications with a nine-digit number are approved at face value for free meal benefits. The application is not directly certified unless a match is found in the Direct Certification system.

If the household cannot be directly certified, then the application should be included in the application count subject to the Verification process.

If randomly selected for Verification, the household must be contacted to request documentation to support the SNAP/TANF number provided. Supporting documentation should be provided from the Illinois Department of Human Services.

4. What if a nine-digit SNAP/TANF number provided on an application matches one found in the Direct Certification system, but it is for Reduced Medicaid?
If a nine-digit number is provided on an application as a SNAP/TANF number, but it matches a case number for the household in the Direct Certification system for Reduced Medicaid, the benefits for the household must be changed from free to reduced-price and the household must be notified of the change.

When notified, the household should also be provided with a Household Eligibility Application to reapply based on income, if needed. Please note, Medicaid numbers cannot be provided on an HEA; only SNAP and TANF numbers are accepted.

5. **What if a household is approved for free benefits based on a SNAP/TANF number provided on an application, but the household is later found in the Direct Certification system with a <u>different</u> case number qualifying them for Reduced Medicaid?**

   The original determination for free meals based on a SNAP/TANF number provided on an application can remain for the entire school year. If the household cannot be directly certified, then the application should be included in the application count subject to the Verification process. If randomly selected for Verification, the household must be contacted requesting documentation to support the SNAP/TANF number provided.

6. **When a SNAP/TANF/Free or Reduced Medicaid student is in a household with additional students not found to be directly certified, do those benefits extend to all students in the household? After extension of benefits to additional students in a household are all students now considered directly certified?**

   Benefits for students directly certified as SNAP/TANF/Free or Reduced Medicaid should be extended to all students residing in the same household. All students receiving benefits due to an extension are considered and counted as directly certified on Step 2 of the Verification Summary Report.

7. **If foster is marked on an application, does this application need to be included in the Verification pool of applications?**

   Yes, applications with a student marked as foster are approved at face value for free meal benefits. The application is not directly certified unless a match is found in the Direct Certification system. The application should be included in the count of applications subject to the Verification process if they cannot be directly certified. If randomly selected for Verification, the household must be contacted requesting documentation to support the foster status. Documentation should be provided from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. If documentation cannot be obtained, schools may contact youthincare@isbe.net.

8. **Are zero income applications considered error-prone?**

   No, error-prone applications are those with income that falls above or below free income guidelines or below reduced income guidelines within the specified dollar amounts provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Please see the guidance for error-prone applications on the Verification website: https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Based-Child-Nutrition-Documents.aspx.

9. **If an application is approved for meal benefits at registration, but the household is later found as directly certified, when does the directly certified benefit go into effect?**

   If a student on a Household Eligibility Application (HEA) is found as directly certified prior to the start of the school year, the application is maintained in an inactive file and the student is documented as directly certified for meal benefits. If the HEA is approved for benefits and then later in the school year the household is found to be directly certified, the application is replaced with the Direct Certification, but the original application must be maintained to show how benefits were approved for the dates prior to being directly certified.

10. **How can a district confirm household size?**

    If there is a question about the number of members in a household, districts may contact the household to inquire about the information provided on the application and to confirm the information provided is correct. Households may be reminded that by signing the HEA they have certified that all information they provided is true.

11. Is the October Direct Certification file the last month that may be used for the purposes of Verification?
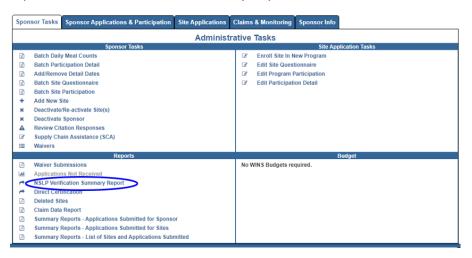
Yes, the annual file in July and monthly files for August, September, and October are the only months that can be used for removing HEAs from the Verification pool of applications. A sponsor file upload obtained between July and October may also be used to remove applications from the pool of applications subject to Verification.

12. If a household is found as directly verified is the Verification process complete?

Yes, if a household is found as directly verified then the Verification process is complete for that household's application. Prior to contacting the household selected for Verification, it is recommended to check Direct Verification to see if a match can be found. If a match is found in Direct Verification, print a copy of the report and maintain for your records. Any Direct Verification matches should be reported on Step 4 of the Verification Summary Report.

13. When does the Verification Summary Report appear in WINS?

The Verification Summary Report appears in WINS (shown below) on Oct. 1 annually. This link will take users to Step 1 during the timeframe of Oct. 1-31. On Nov. 1, the same link in WINS will open and allow users to access Steps 1-5 of the Verification Summary Report.

14. When is the deadline for completing the Verification process?

The Verification process of communicating with households and collecting documentation should be completed by Nov. 15 per USDA regulations. For 2025, this date is extended to Nov. 17, 2025, because the due date falls on a weekend. Please note, the Verification Summary Report in WINS must be submitted by Dec. 15, 2025.