



Direct Certification:  
Simplifying the school meal program by  
utilizing technology, reducing paperwork, and  
making sure eligible students receive meals

Produced 2012

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## Executive Summary

### Planning Grant Overview

Direct Certification (DC) is the process by which children are deemed “categorically eligible” for free meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The 2008-2009 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Report to Congress, noted there were twenty-six States with DC rates at or below the national median DC rate of 71%. Wisconsin was included in this group. In 2011, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was awarded a Planning Grant from the USDA to help learn why Wisconsin’s DC rate remained lower than other states. This grant project was carried out by Covering Kids & Families-Wisconsin (CKF), based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. CKF worked with DPI and the Department of Children & Families (DCF) to explore current DC practices and challenges experienced by School Food Authorities (SFAs). Analysis was informed through four data and information collection activities: surveys, site visits, interviews and reviews of other states’ DC processes. A survey of SFAs in Wisconsin resulted in a tremendous response rate from both public and private agencies and provided valuable insights into how well SFAs are handling DC in Wisconsin. The survey found SFA staffs are well-versed in and supportive of the reasons why DC has been put in place and mandated. Additionally, the survey found that:

- Nearly 9/10 survey respondents were aware that DC can be run more than once per year
- Most SFAs typically produce their first DC run from July through September
- More than two-thirds of SFA staff running DC have 2-5 years’ experience and come from a wide variety of positions within the SFA

CKF staff visited with 71 SFAs located in 11 of 12 regional Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs). Despite challenges agencies faced successfully completing the process, many believed that the process was going well and were surprised that Wisconsin was not achieving a higher certification rate. Overwhelmingly, interviewees said that DC is:

- Worthwhile
- More efficient than paper applications
- Much improved via the introduction of an online submission process

CKF staff compared Wisconsin DC practices to those carried out in nine other states: Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, and North Carolina. Many of the DC enhancements found in other states were often also suggestions generated through the project survey, site visits, or meeting with DPI and DCF staff.

### Recommendations for Implementation

Through the planning grant, CKF and DPI identified several improvements that could be made to capture more eligible children with the DC process and further improve Wisconsin’s DC rate.

Taking into consideration all findings, CKF and DPI developed recommendations for inclusion in an Implementation Grant proposal to USDA. Broadly, recommendations can be categorized under the following three objectives:

1. Develop, modify, and implement **informational trainings, resources and support** that better address existing DC challenges experienced by SFAs as well as be able to more quickly respond to new challenges as they emerge.
2. Explore, test, and integrate **new technology** that can address existing DC challenges by simplifying the workload of SFAs.
3. Develop or more fully implement means by which to provide **additional support and accountability** to SFAs.

Direct Certification is intended to remove administrative barriers that may prevent eligible students from receiving free meals at school. By using the web-based matching for DC, schools have a quick way to enroll eligible children in free meals, reducing paperwork for both schools and families and getting children started with benefits as soon as possible. Improvements will help SFAs increase their capacity to consistently run DC as efficiently and frequently as possible, ultimately improving Wisconsin's DC process and increasing the statewide certification rate.

## Wisconsin's Direct Certification (DC) System

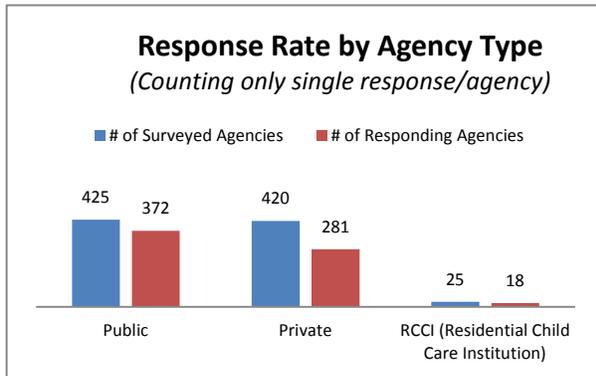
Children in households receiving benefits through the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and, in some cases, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) are categorically eligible for an SFA's free meal program. Directly certifying categorically eligible children ensures they receive free NSLP and School Breakfast Program meals without further need for the household to submit an application. The components of and processes for DC systems vary by state and even by local School Food Authority (SFA) within the state. This contributes to variation in the extent to which all eligible children are actually certified to receive free school meals.

Largely, individual schools and districts make local decisions about how they would like to administer school meal programs. As a result, contracts with DPI often include SFAs that are comprised of a variety of public school districts, individual private schools, and agencies serving school-age children (i.e. residential child caring institutions, juvenile detention centers). In Wisconsin, SFAs may conduct DC as often as they wish, as long as the process is run, at a minimum, during federally required time periods each year. The number of times an SFA runs the DC process varies widely throughout the state. In order to capture the greatest number of eligible students, SFAs have been instructed by DPI to wait to conduct their first direct certification run after July 1 of each year—but before the first day of school.

The State of Wisconsin's DC system is primarily supported by DPI and DCF. These agencies collaborate to assist schools in conducting the DC process via a web-based system. DPI

administers the NSLP and provides support and training on the policies related to DC; whereas DCF provides technical assistance to users and maintains the State's DC web-based system.

### Assessment of Existing DC Processes in Wisconsin



DPI worked with CKF to explore current DC practices and challenges experienced by SFAs and state agencies, including DPI and DCF. Analysis was informed through SFA surveys and site visits, along with interviews and reviews of other states' DC processes. **An electronic survey** was distributed to persons identified as the DC contact for all 870 SFAs participating in the NSLP in Wisconsin. The survey received responses from one or more

staff in 671 of the 870 SFAs in Wisconsin, a response rate of 77%. Schools of all sizes were well represented, though a relatively larger percentage of public school and RCCI representatives responded to the survey compared to private schools.

Using information collected through the survey, several dozen SFAs were identified and selected for invitation to participate in a site visit. Sites were selected to capture an adequate representation of variation in student population size, geographic locality, urban/suburban/rural locality, public/private funding, ability to run DC at least once and personal assessment of the extent of difficulty experienced with the process. Over a period of seven weeks, **CKF conducted 71 site visits and interviewed 16 additional SFA contacts**. Interview questions were similar to those asked during the survey, but with greater emphasis on understanding the step-by-step process of how each SFA representative handles DC. This approach revealed elements of the process that varied widely among SFAs as well as specific challenges and how they were (or were not) addressed.

To put additional context to the challenges faced by SFAs in Wisconsin and to consider solutions implemented by other states seeking to improve their DC process, **CKF conducted phone interviews with two states, Indiana and Kansas**. These states were selected because they have a similar number of SFAs as Wisconsin as well as a similar procedure for matching student information to SNAP data. In addition, both Indiana and Kansas had higher DC matching rates than Wisconsin as of school year 2009-10.

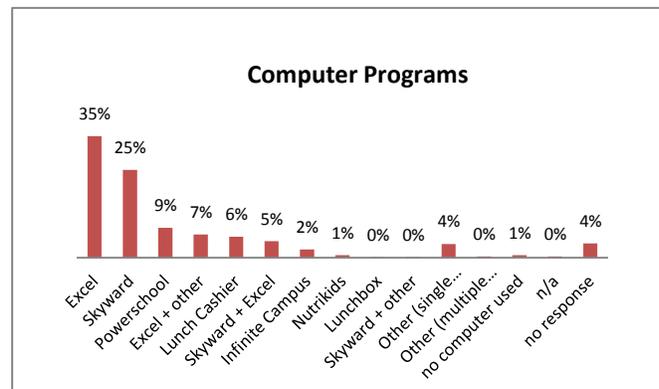
Upon completion of SFA site visits and phone interviews, CKF met with two DCF staff charged with matching SFA student data with state SNAP and TANF participation files to discuss details of the data match process, and possible solutions to challenges that involve database systems and other technology. CKF additionally met with DPI staff to discuss state agency staff perspectives on challenges faced by SFAs, viability of solutions proposed by SFA staff, and additional solutions not yet considered.

## Key Findings

### Survey

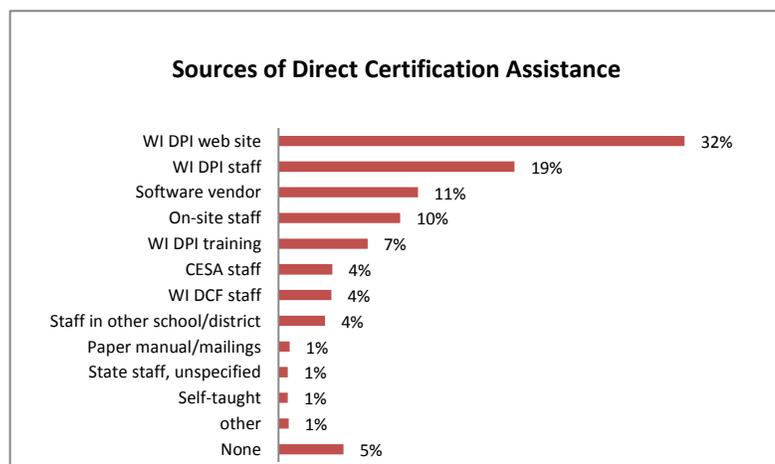
The survey responses provided a relatively clear picture of how DC was working overall in Wisconsin and areas where more details would be needed. In short, DC is relatively well understood and well executed. This is especially notable given that the staffs charged with running DC are highly varied in terms of both position and experience, and they are working with numerous computer programs. More specifically, the survey revealed:

1. At least **one-third of SFAs do not currently run the program more than once a year.**
2. Running DC is a **one or two person affair** at a given SFA and a **wide variety of positions** are tasked with executing a DC run.
3. **Skyward** is the most frequently used DC computer program and close to half (47%) of respondents indicated they use **Microsoft Excel** exclusively or in combination with a school-specific software package.
  - Nearly 40% mentioned the **DPI web site and/or DPI training** as their source for information.
  - The single most frequently mentioned request for trainings or assistance was to have **in-person trainings and/or webinars** available to SFA staff. Several SFA staff used the survey to indicate they would like guidance on resolving “near-matches.”



### Site Visits and Interviews with SFA Persons Responsible for Running Direct Certification

CKF staff visited with 19 private schools and 52 public school districts located in 11 of 12 regional CESAs in spring 2011. Student enrollment in these schools and districts ranged from 44 to 80,000. Overwhelmingly, interviewees said that DC is **worthwhile, efficient and a better process than in the past.** The challenge of **unresolved near**



**matches** was one of the most common problems identified during CKF’s site visits with SFAs. Overall, the site visits allowed CKF to identify commonly experienced barriers which likely delay or prevent students from being appropriately directly certified for free school meals.

### *Review of other states' direct certification processes*

The final activity of the planning grant included identifying promising DC practices used in other states and the benefits of implementing any of those practices in Wisconsin to boost certification rates. CKF staff compared Wisconsin DC practices to those carried out in nine other states and conducted phone interviews with school nutrition directors in Kansas and Indiana. The conversations covered questions surrounding overall process of generating matches between school and state administrative data; division of labor and workload; the amount of training and technical assistance provided by the state; and which improvement(s) might be most responsible for boosting overall state DC rates.

## **Direct Certification Planning Grant Overview**

### *Summary of Direct Certification*

Direct Certification (DC) is the process by which children are deemed “categorically eligible” for free meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Categorical eligibility is conferred if the child’s household receives benefits through the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and, in some cases, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Directly certifying categorically eligible children ensures they receive free NSLP and School Breakfast Program meals without further need for the household to submit an application. The components of and processes for direct certification systems vary by State and even by local School Food Authority (SFA) within the State. This contributes to variation in the extent to which all eligible children are actually certified to receive free school meals.

### *Purpose of Funding For Direct Certification Grants*

The Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2010 provided \$22 million, in the form of grants issued by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), for the purpose of improving state direct certification rates. Grants are required to be distributed to State agencies that administer the NSLP and have the lowest rates of children directly certified for free meals. Per the 2008-2009 USDA Report to Congress, there were twenty-six States with direct certification rates at or below the national median direct certification rate of 71%. Wisconsin was included in this group.

Two grants have been made available by FNS: Planning Grants and Implementation Grants. Per FNS guidelines, “Planning Grants are intended for NSLP Agencies that know they need to improve their State’s direct certification system, but may need to conduct additional research to identify the most effective way of doing so and/or planning to ensure that a chosen approach is actually the most effective approach.” The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction chose to submit an application for the 2010 Direct Certification Planning Grant.

### *Wisconsin’s Planning Grant Purpose and Structure*

Through the FNS Planning Grant, Wisconsin sought to clarify the reasons for the State's current baseline functioning; to determine why and where there is variance in DC rates; to identify potential reasons for gaps in performance; and to develop solutions and suggested goals for improvement. The intended long-term goal is to allow each SFA to have the capacity to consistently run the direct certification process as efficiently and frequently (at least quarterly) as possible; increase the ability of SFAs to successfully match students; and ultimately increase statewide direct certification rates for both public and private schools. The proposed methods included: a review of available data and information, concentrated quantitative research via statewide surveys, targeted interviews/focus groups, and discussions with state agency staff, identified partners, and local SFAs.

Grant oversight and management was provided by the Director of the School Nutrition Team at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction while project planning, implementation, and research and analysis activities were carried out through an interagency agreement by staff of Covering Kids & Families, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. To guide planning and strategy under the Planning Grant, Covering Kids & Families (CKF) drew upon its successful work with 16 diverse schools districts across Wisconsin on the Connecting Health Insurance to Lunch Data (CHILD) project. Through that project CKF staff became intimately familiar with direct certification efforts in Wisconsin, experience which served as the basis for working with CKF to complete the research project.

#### *Wisconsin's Direct Certification System*

**Administration:** The State of Wisconsin's direct certification system is primarily supported by the Departments of Public Instruction (DPI) and Children and Families (DCF). Together, these agencies collaborate to assist schools in conducting the direct certification process via a web-based application system. The DPI administers the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs and provides support and training on the policies related to direct certification; whereas the DCF provides technical assistance to users and maintains the State's direct certification web-based system.

**Data Sources, Processing and Management:** In Wisconsin, SNAP and TANF eligibility is determined by each local county agency. The TANF program is administered by the Department of Children and Families; whereas the SNAP program is administered by the Department of Health Services. Once determinations have been made for each program, county workers enter individual case data into the statewide Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support (CARES) income benefits system. To provide regular, timely access to both SNAP and TANF data, the Department of Children and Families direct certification web-based system is updated weekly with the CARES system data. Weekly updates allow newly eligible school-age children to be directly certified throughout the course of the school year.

**Role of School Food Authorities:** Largely, individual schools and districts make local decisions about how they would like to administer school meal programs. As a result, contracts with the

Department of Public Instruction often include School Food Authorities (SFAs) that are comprised of a variety of public school districts, individual private schools, and agencies serving school-age children (i.e. residential child caring institutions, juvenile detention centers). SFAs run direct certification based on their claimant status, as opposed to by site. Thus, when an SFA sends in claims to the DPI for reimbursement, they must run direct certification for all students enrolled at the sites for which they claim.

**Data Matching:** Wisconsin's direct certification process begins with SFAs creating an aggregate file of all enrolled students—extracted from their own internal data management system. The SFA then logs into the DCF web-based direct certification system and uploads its file. Once uploaded, the file interfaces with the DCF web-based system to begin the matching process—whereby each school's aggregate student file is matched against the database of school-age children that exist in the state's SNAP or TANF programs. Currently, the DCF system uses three identifiers to determine a match: FIRST NAME, LAST NAME and DATE OF BIRTH. In most cases, the matching process occurs immediately and the file is returned directly to the SFA with information identifying which children belong to families who are recipients of state TANF and SNAP programs. If all three of the identifiers match the school's student data—the record is returned with a "Y" (Yes) in the eligibility field. If an exact match is not found, the system then tries to determine if other identifiers are possible matches. In the case of FIRST NAME or LAST NAME, the system first trims the school and state data to the same length. If the names are equal, the record is returned with an "F" (First name) or "L" (Last name) code indicating that there may be a match for this student. If a possible match is not found this way, the system then compares the first three characters of the names. If the characters are equal the record is returned with an "F" (First name) or "L" (Last name) code indicating that there may be a match for this student. The final attempt at finding a match looks for children with the same first name and last name and a date of birth that is similar (transposed month day or year). If a possible match is found this way the record is returned with a "B" (Birth date) code in the eligibility column. All other records are returned with an "N" (No) in the eligibility column. SFAs then have the opportunity to follow up with their local agency to determine if the possible matches ("F", "L", "B" codes) are in fact the same individual. If the appropriate correction is determined, the SFA may resubmit the data. If the SFA is unable to determine the reason for the error, they may encourage parents to submit a paper application. Currently, it is unclear how often SFAs follow up on possible matches to determine reasons for error, nor the percentage of parents who submit paper applications upon receiving notification that their children were not directly certified but seemingly eligible for the free lunch program.

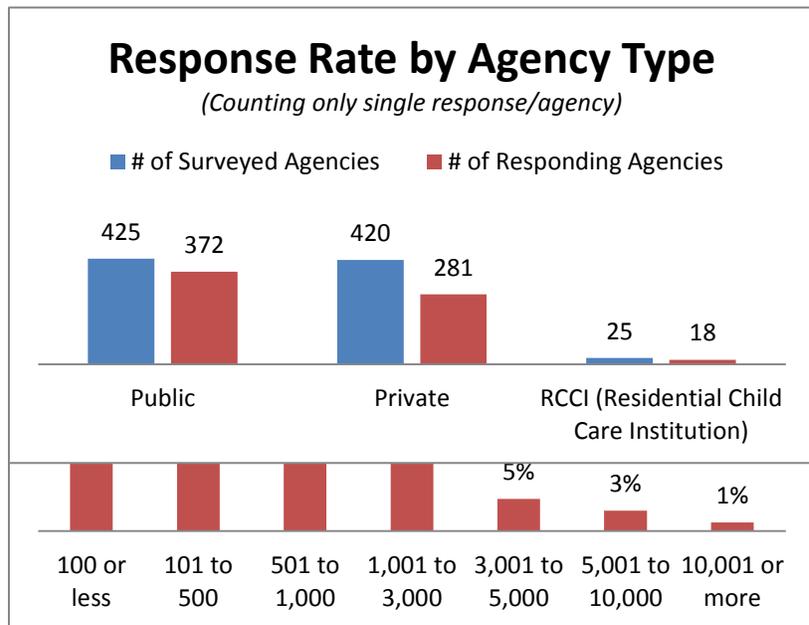
**Frequency:** The State of Wisconsin's direct certification system allows each SFA to conduct direct certification as often as they want, as long as the process is run, at a minimum, during federally required time periods each year. Thus, the number of times an SFA runs the direct certification process varies widely throughout the state. In order to capture the greatest number of eligible students, SFAs have been instructed to wait to conduct their first direct certification run after July 1 of each year—but before the first day of school.

## Methodology – GAP Analysis

DPI worked with Covering Kids & Families-Wisconsin (CKF) to explore current direct certification practices and challenges experienced by SFAs and state agencies, including DPI and the DCF. In consultation with DPI, CKF determined a methodology for collecting data and information about current direct certification practices as compared to the expected or desired procedures. This gap analysis was informed through the following four data and information collection activities:

- Survey of SFA persons responsible for running direct certification
- Site visits and interviews with SFA persons responsible for running direct certification
- Interviews and group discussions with personnel at Wisconsin state agencies responsible for ensuring direct certification requirements are carried out
- Review of other states’ direct certification processes

The survey of SFA persons responsible for running direct certification was designed in consultation with the DPI School Nutrition Director and Consultant staff. The survey was distributed by DPI to persons identified as the direct certification contact for all 870 SFAs participating in the National School Lunch Program in Wisconsin. This included 450 public school districts and educational agencies known as Residential Child Caring Institutions, and 420 private schools. The invitation to participate in the survey was distributed by DPI via email and the survey itself was available to be completed and submitted through the Internet. In just two weeks the electronic survey received responses from one or more staff in 671 of the 870 SFAs in Wisconsin, a response rate of 77%. Schools of all sizes were well represented, though a relatively larger percentage of public school and RCCI representatives responded to the survey compared to private schools.



The survey collected information regarding: type of SFA (public versus private) and size of its student population; number of staff persons involved in running the direct certification process; how often the process is run per school year; software used to organize various aspects of the process; resources and support drawn upon for training or resolving problems; and personal assessment of the purpose of running direct certification as well as the most challenging

aspects. It was used primarily as a means of establishing the range of direct certification practices as well as a general baseline of the types of and extent to which SFAs are experiencing challenges with the process.

Following the survey, CKF sent invitations to SFA contacts that had offered to participate in an interview and demonstration of their direct certification process at their location. Using information collected through the survey, additional SFAs were identified and selected for invitation to participate in order to capture an adequate representation of variation in student population size, geographic locality, urban/suburban/rural locality, public/private funding, ability to run direct certification at least once and personal assessment of extent of difficulty experienced with the process. Over a period of seven weeks, CKF conducted 71 site visits with SFAs. An additional 16 SFA contacts were interviewed either over the phone or during the Wisconsin School Nutrition Association conference. Interview questions were similar to those asked during the survey, but with greater emphasis on understanding the step-by-step account of how each SFA representative handles direct certification. Doing so revealed elements of the process that varied widely among SFAs as well as specific challenges and how they were (or were not) addressed.

To put additional context to the challenges faced by SFAs in Wisconsin and to consider solutions implemented by other states seeking to improve their direct certification process, CKF conducted phone interviews with two states, Indiana and Kansas. These states were selected because they have a similar number of SFAs (or LEAs) as Wisconsin as well as a similar procedure for matching student information to SNAP data. In addition, both Indiana and Kansas had higher direct certification matching rates than Wisconsin as of school year 2009-10.

Upon completion of SFA site visits and phone interviews with school nutrition directors from Indiana and Kansas, CKF met with two DCF staff charged with matching SFA student data with state SNAP and TANF participation files to discuss preliminary findings, details of the data match process, and possible solutions to challenges that involve database systems and other technology. CKF additionally met with DPI staff (School Nutrition Director, Public Instruction Supervisor, Office Assistant, and 10 Consultants) to discuss preliminary findings, state agency staff perspectives on challenges faced by SFAs, viability of solutions proposed by SFA staff, and additional solutions not yet considered. Ongoing conversations with the DPI School Nutrition Director and DCF staff informed the final set of solutions proposed in this USDA Implementation Grant proposal.

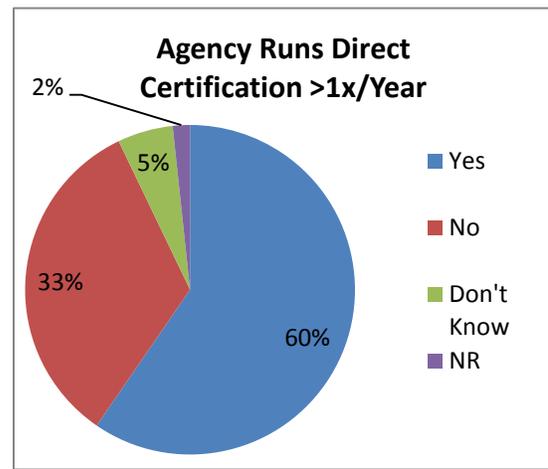
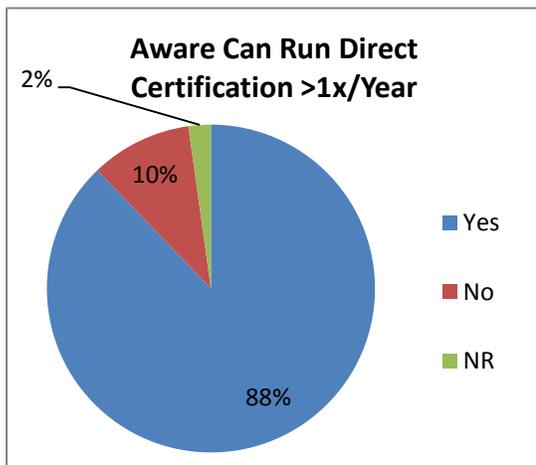
## **Findings**

### **Survey of SFA Persons Responsible for Running Direct Certification**

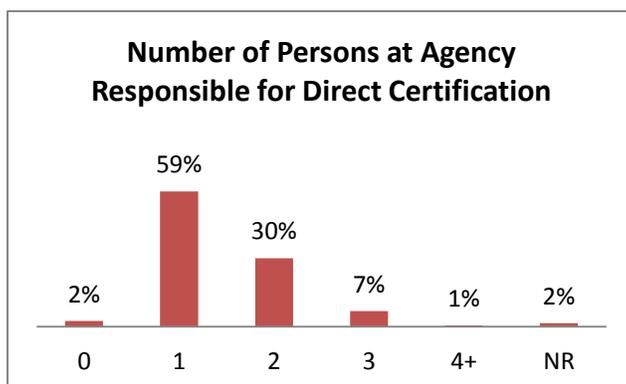
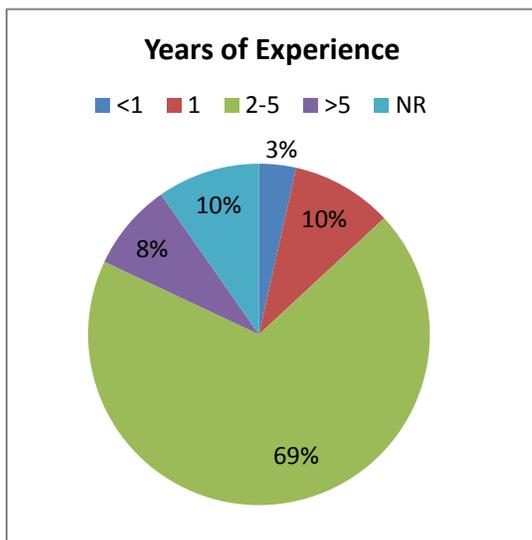
As noted above, the survey of SFAs in Wisconsin resulted in a tremendous response rate from public and private agencies alike, and provided valuable insights into how well SFAs are handling direct certification in Wisconsin. In short, direct certification is relatively well

understood and well executed. This is especially notable given that the staff charged with running direct certification are highly varied in terms of both position and experience, and they are working with numerous computer programs. More specifically, the survey revealed:

- SFA staff are well aware of not only the requirement to run direct certification, but they are also well-versed and supportive of the reasons why the system has been put in place and mandated.
- Nearly nine in ten respondents were aware that their agency may run direct certification more than once per year, yet at least one-third of SFAs do not currently run the program more than on annually.

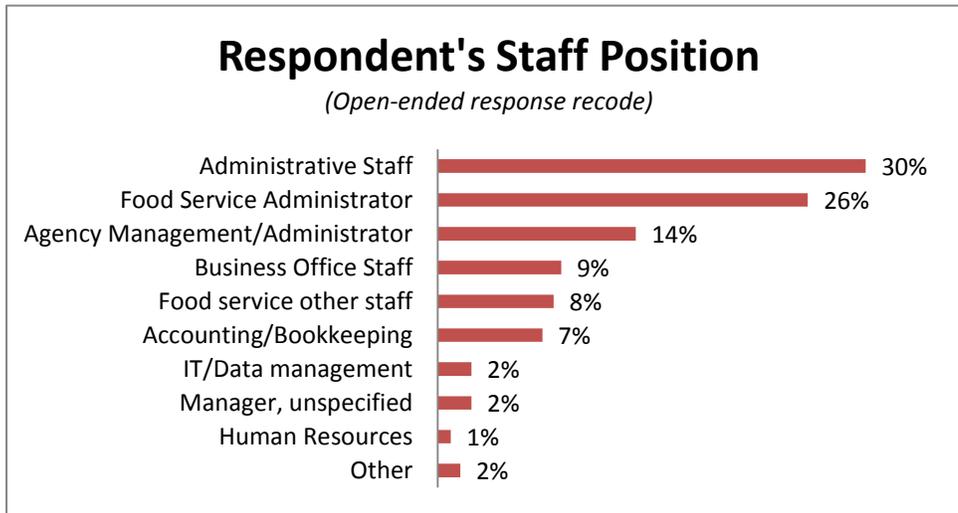


- More than two-thirds of SFA staff charged with running direct certification have two to five years of experience doing so, with an additional 8% now in their sixth year or more running the program. This increased experience is likely a factor leading to recent improvements in the direct certification rate in Wisconsin as more experience tends to result in fewer problems executing a run. Nevertheless, with smaller schools only somewhat recently being required to run direct certification and with staff turnover, 13% of respondents reported a year or less of experience with the program.

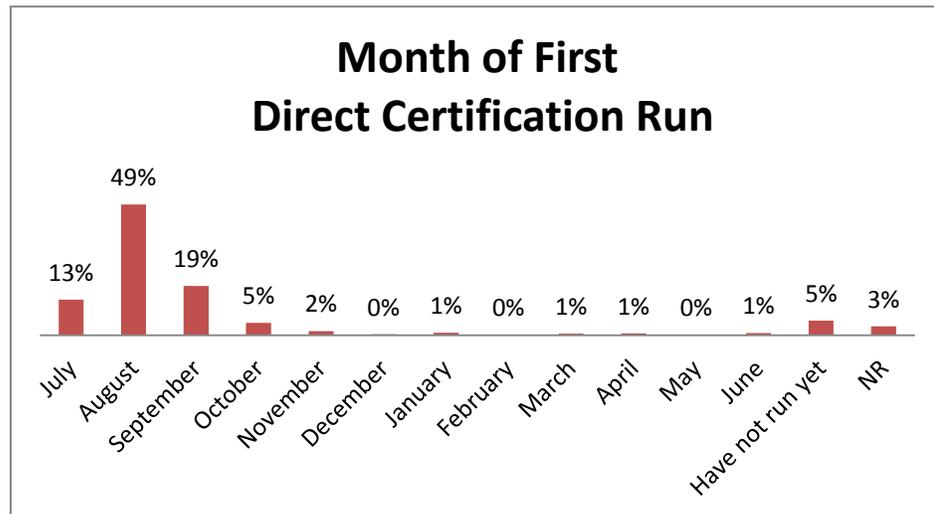


- By and large, running direct certification is a one or two person affair at a given SFA. In 8% of SFAs three or more people are involved with the process. A wide variety of

positions – from administrative staff to management and even district administrators, from food service staff to those in charge of information technology – are tasked with executing a direct certification run.

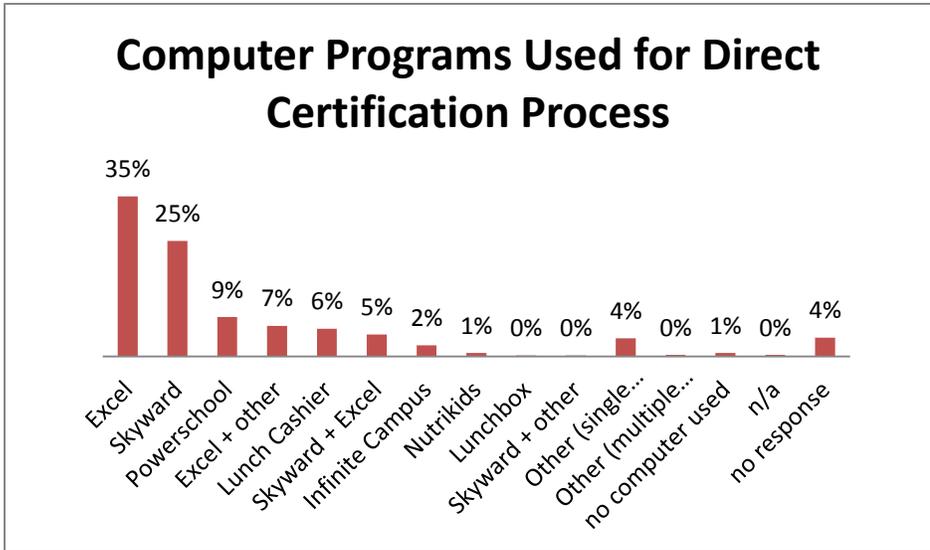


8. Overwhelmingly the first direct certification run occurs as SFAs prepare for and work through the beginning of the school year in July through September.



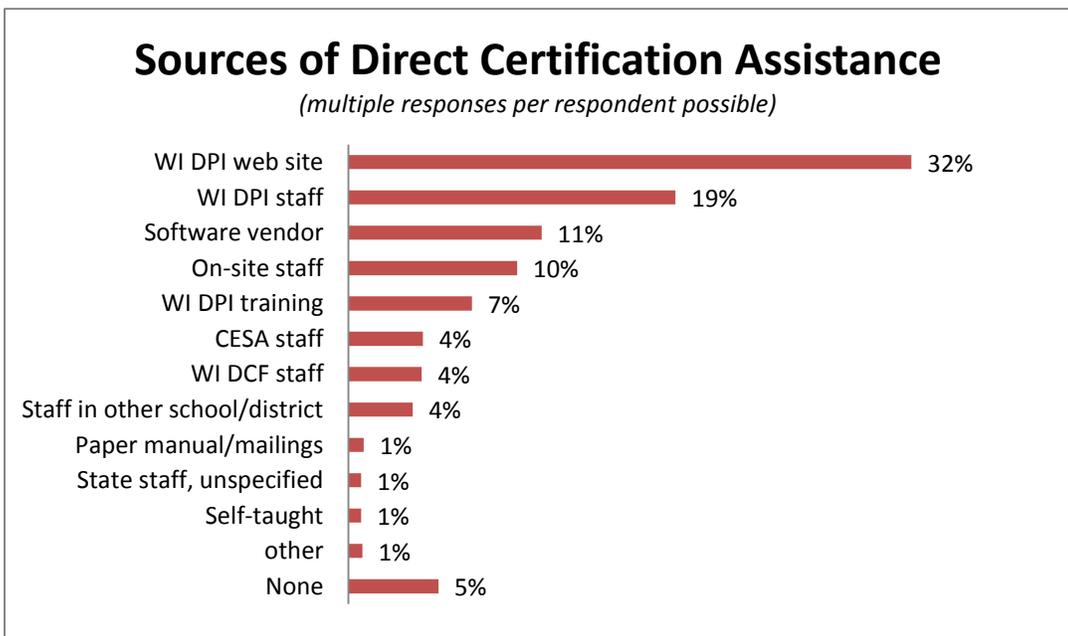
9. A wide variety of computer programs are used across SFAs in Wisconsin. Among programs designed specifically for schools, Skyward is the most frequently used program, followed by Powerschool and Lunch Cashier. Close to half (47%) of respondents indicated they use Microsoft Excel exclusively or in combination with a school-specific software package in order to run direct certification.

Just under half of the respondents provided specific areas they find most confusing or problematic about direct certification. Many were software and technology related, from



working through the initial set up or logging in, to formatting files for submission, to general discomfort with technology. One in six of those noting specific problem areas cited confusion over resolving near-matches and one in ten mentioned extending categorical eligibility to other members of the household. Finally a number of respondents simply noted “the overall process”, that there are frequent changes to the process, and/or that they don’t run direct certification often enough to become fully comfortable with the process.

- When SFA staff seek to learn about direct certification or to troubleshoot issues they are having, nearly 40% mentioned the Department of Public Instruction’s web site and/or a DPI training as their source for information. Another one in five consult with their software vendor.



11. When asked what kinds of training or assistance they would like or other improvements they would like to see, respondents offered many thoughts. The single most frequently mentioned (by 91 respondents) request was to have in-person trainings and/or webinars available to SFA staff. Many also asked for detailed manuals and/or tutorials to be made available, while others are eager for a simple “cheat sheet” to guide them through the process. Some would like regular reminders about running direct certification. Others are looking for improved personal assistance from the state, their county agencies or their software vendors. Finally, several SFA staff used the survey to indicate they would like guidance on resolving “near-matches.”

The survey responses enabled CKF staff to get a relatively clear picture of how direct certification was working overall in Wisconsin and areas where more details would be needed to fully understand where things were working well and where improvements were needed.

### **Site Visits / Interviews with SFA Persons Responsible for Direct Certification**

To further understand the processes and software being used by SFAs to execute their direct certification runs and to understand areas consistently showing up as either going well or needing improvement, CKF staff visited personally with 19 private schools and 52 public school districts located in 11 of 12 regional CESAs (Cooperative Educational Service Agencies) in the spring of 2011. Student enrollment in these schools and districts ranged from a low of 44 to a high of 80,000.

Overwhelmingly, interviewees said that direct certification is:

- worthwhile,
- much less time consuming than if they had to process the equivalent of paper applications, and
- much improved since the introduction of the online submission process (which replaced an FTP process from prior years).

CKF staff were frequently told that the support received from both DPI and DCF was very helpful; few had any specific criticisms of assistance from either agency (though some were unaware of its availability). And despite any challenges agencies have faced successfully completing the process, many believed that it was going well and were surprised that Wisconsin wasn't achieving a higher certification rate.

The site visits allowed CKF to identify a number of commonly experienced barriers which likely delay or prevent students from being appropriately directly certified for free school meals.

1. **Challenge:** Small/Private schools that don't view DC as a priority or otherwise lack the resources to run DC

Smaller districts and private schools have unique and often multiple challenges running Direct Certification. Many are unfamiliar with the Direct Certification process and only run Direct Certification infrequently, once, or not at all. Smaller schools/districts often have minimal staff members spread out over many areas and are unable to have a specific person focus on Direct Certification. They often have little or no onsite IT personnel to guide them through the Direct Certification process and often the task of Direct Certification is put into the hands of a principal or other administrator. There is little motivation to run Direct Certification due to the time it takes and only a few students matching state TANF and SNAP records. Many private schools in particular instead urge their families to turn in paper applications and feel that they have a very good handle on who is eligible for free meals. In addition, some private schools rely on public districts for food and billing services and do not have a staff member focused on the National School Lunch program. With public districts in charge of the food and billing services, there is some confusion among private schools as to who is in charge of Direct Certification and there remains a misunderstanding about Direct Certification and what it is.

During site visits we found that food services staff understand the importance and necessity of Direct Certification, but overall they did not feel as comfortable or tech-savvy administering Direct Certification and prefer to spend their time feeding the kids. Business Services or Administrative Assistants tended to be more comfortable with technology associated with Direct Certification as well as the process of organizing large student data, and generally seemed to have more time to devote to the process, though running DC was one among many responsibilities for such staff.

2. **Challenge:** Lack of training for new staff

Staff turnover in schools/districts can hinder the Direct Certification process. Often new staff is unaware of DPI and DCF resources available to them and must rely on previous staff notes for guidance on the Direct Certification process. To the extent guidance is available from the State, it is only as good as the new staff person's ability and willingness to find and follow it.

3. **Challenge:** Multiple persons at SFA involved at running DC

This concerns SFAs – typically moderate sized ones – where there are multiple persons charged with running DC. Usually, each person has a well-defined role such as one handles exporting the full student enrollment file while another handles downloading and updating the lunch database. In some SFAs the system seems to work easily and the relationships and communication among staff persons is good. It is clear in others, however, this multiple person endeavor leads to communication breakdowns, loss of information and/or loss of efficiency. In one SFA, one person received software vendor communications while the other received DPI letters, but they did not necessarily share the information; the SFA staff person was unaware of the move to a web-based system that so many other SFA staff lauded as turning their experience from a “nightmare” to a “pleasure.” No specific, systemic improvements have been identified for this issue and it may not be reasonable for the state to specifically discourage the

involvement of multiple staff persons in the process. There may be benefits to the involvement of many persons and likely a decision each SFA must come to.

4. **Challenge:** Running DC perceived to be too time consuming

A frequently cited concern among SFA staff is the amount of time it takes to conduct a DC run. These concerns arose primarily in SFAs (often small ones) who only run it once per year, and larger SFAs (with several thousand students). The primary challenges for those who run it infrequently were: 1) having to re-learn (or at least re-familiarize) the process each time, 2) having largely part-time staff who are stretched across many tasks, 3) not having technical or other support to assist them. The larger districts who struggle with DC face the same challenges that other districts do in terms of understanding software capabilities, the DC process as a whole, resolving near-matches, etc., but those challenges are magnified by the sheer number of students involved. These districts are more likely than others to use different software for student information versus lunch service, software that does not often “talk well” between platforms. Many use a manual process of reviewing results of subsequent runs, a process that can entail lining up results (that run dozens of pages) of two matches side by side and looking for differences. Many also report spending a great deal of time using categorical eligibility to (largely manually) to enroll siblings and other household members of DC’d children.

5. **Challenge:** Time intensive process to extend eligibility to all children in household

SFAs seem to be aware of the requirement to extend eligibility to all kids in a household, but there is a wide variety of methods for doing so, with variable success and time commitments. Some rely on built-in software mechanisms (either provided by a vendor or written by IT staff at the SFA) while others must coordinate across multiple databases or even staff persons within the SFA to determine if there are other children in a household of a directly certified student. Especially in larger districts the process would often involve securing verification/confirmation from the parents, adding another layer of complexity simply in reaching them. Districts large enough to that staff did not know their families as intimately as smaller SFAs and, by their very nature, were dealing with hundreds to thousands of records, and yet small enough that administrative and other staff are stretched very thin, seemed to be particularly frustrated by the process of extending categorical eligibility to children in families of children directly certified.

6. **Challenge:** Resolving near-matches

Many SFAs indicate challenges resolving near matches. Some SFAs were aware of them, but not sure what to do to resolve them either at all or beyond checking their own records for spelling or last or first names and date of birth errors. Other challenges with resolving near matches include SFA staff alerting parents and leaving it to them to resolve the issue, SFA staff feeling there are too many near-matches to resolve, and SFA staff not being aware there are near matches (many of these staff use software so automated they never encounter the near matches). An additional concern related to Wisconsin’s DC rate is that children eligible, but not

matching, are often enrolled via paper applications, categorical eligibility, or through an extension of eligibility to other siblings in household. In all instances the child is enrolled in free lunch, the main concern of the SFAs, but is not counted toward the DC rate.

SFAs are provided with a memo explaining the coding in the file that is returned via the DC process. The memo indicates near matches, but not what can be done to resolve them.

7. **Challenge:** Misunderstanding DC versus paper application; not understanding that run can/should be run more than once per year

A number of issues surfaced related to properly utilizing and recording direct certification for children when paper applications are also involved:

1. Some SFAs still distribute (and sometimes collect) paper applications before running DC and notifying parents of DC'd children that they do not need to fill out a paper application; a paper application is submitted and the child is noted as eligible for free lunch via the paper application even if s/he is subsequently matched via DC.
  2. Some SFAs still "trust" the paper application more than the DC results and record children who are determined eligible through both processes as via paper application rather than via DC.
  3. Some SFAs, particularly very small ones, continue to rely solely on paper applications, despite DC being required.
  4. Conversely, some SFAs rely entirely on the DC process and do not make paper applications available.
  5. Some SFAs do not code children receiving free meals differently based on their eligibility determination method (DC versus paper). It is unclear how these SFAs determine the number of DC'd kids to report to DPI.
  6. It is unclear whether all SFAs are properly tallying all of children who have been directly certified and reporting that number to DPI through the verification report.
8. **Challenges:** Multitude of software vendors used by SFAs, inadequate support from vendors, and range of functionality available to run DC even within same software packages

Throughout the state there are a significant number of software packages used by SFAs to run DC. The range of software functionality, sophistication, and customer service responsiveness are highly variable and undocumented. Even SFAs using the same software may have or be aware of differing capability of that software to most efficiently run DC. SFAs are generally left on their own to deal with any software concerns, including errors that may occur in the DC process as a result of incorrect software coding. Neither DPI nor DCF has a complete or necessarily up-to-date list of all software vendors conducting business with SFAs for the purposes of running DC. There is no standard method of communicating with vendors regarding USDA policy changes, nor method of training or assessing software ability to correctly process DC. Some SFAs are keen to the fallibility of software and hand-check results while others assume the software has run DC without error.

9. **Challenges:** Frequent changes to USDA policy, particularly those that are not communicated until the beginning of the school year

Many SFAs indicated that the policy modifications from USDA were often communicated at the beginning of the school year – at time when their schedules are extremely busy and it is difficult to implement any new changes to their procedures. Additionally, as policy seems to be frequently changing, some are confused about where current policy stands. Most were very aware of the DPI web site and received the memos, though many indicated that emailed memos would be appreciated. Not all were aware of DCF User Guide and some felt it could be simplified even more. Many felt trainings about DC would be very useful, though it would difficult if not impossible to find time to attend them during the school year.

## Discussions with Wisconsin State Agencies Responsible for Direct Certification

Prior to and throughout the project, CKF staff consulted regularly with June Paul, DPI School Nutrition Director, to assess project progress and preliminary findings as well as plan appropriate next steps. Paul was instrumental in identifying the list of SFA survey contacts, securing use of the DPI Vovici software for electronic survey distribution and collection, coordinating assistance from Kathy Addie (DPI Information Technology Technical Support staff), contributing a portion of Rek Kwawer's (DPI School Nutrition Office Assistant) time for troubleshooting, data sharing, and responding to SFA inquiries resulting from the project, providing project meeting space at DPI, and offering up time during regular staff meetings to discuss project implementation and impacts with DPI School Nutrition team consultants.

CKF staff met with DPI School Nutrition Team consultants three times over the course of the project. These individuals are charged with – among other things – ensuring that schools and districts participating in school nutrition programs are running direct certification correctly. They regularly answer calls from school personnel wanting to resolve direct certification difficulties. Meetings with the consultant team members were a critical element of the project, allowing CKF to craft a more relevant SFA survey, using language and addressing aspects of the direct certification process familiar to school staff charged with running direct certification. Additionally, these meetings were a time for consultants to review and reflect upon SFA survey and site visit findings and augment those data with their own experiences of trouble spots and possible solutions. It was also an opportunity to discuss specific direct certification practices that were highly variable across SFAs and even introduce some practices that were not known to the consultants.

In preparation for submission of the Implementation Grant proposal, CKF staff met with Paul and as well as DCF staff to review all identified challenges to successfully running direct certification and potential solutions to pursue. Through these meetings, Paul's experience with the direct certification system allowed her to offer valuable insight into which solutions would likely provide the greatest impact on number of students directly certified while not unduly burdening existing DPI or SFA staff or introducing processes that would be difficult to sustain in the long term.

CKF staff additionally consulted with Jim Perry and Diana Gleichauf of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) a number of times in the course of the project. Perry and Gleichauf both work as Programmer Analysts within the Bureau of Information Technology and manage and ensure the accuracy of the state administrative SNAP and TANF participant files against which schools match their student enrollment data. This includes overseeing the technical aspects of the matching process.

The challenge of unresolved near-matches is one of the most common problems identified during CKF's site visits with SFAs. Conversations with Perry and Gleichauf focused on identifying possible methods for minimizing near-matches. CKF drew upon ideas gleaned through communication with and documentation of procedures implemented to handle the issue in other states. CKF and DCF staff discussed the feasibility of offering additional fields on which to find likely matches, a web-based individual student look-up that could be accessible to school staff, and Soundex, a program add-on which allows names to be tagged as potential matches based on sound rather than spelling.

While additional fields offered in SNAP and TANF participant data such as school code, address, and social security number (SSN) would seem ideal as fields for increasing likely matches, Perry and Gleichauf advised that school code and address are highly unreliable and SSN has been specifically prohibited by federal officials. However they suggested that fields such as county, city, parent/guardian names and sibling are reasonable alternatives that can be used to narrow down matches in situations where the primary fields (first name, last name, and date of birth) lead to uncertain results. Many other states have also implemented web-based individual student look-up systems - in part for resolving near-matches - allowing school staff to view and select from a list of all potentially matching SNAP or TANF participants. However, both Perry and Gleichauf expressed concern over lack of confidentiality with this process. It was decided that the method should be pursued through discussions with DHS and DCF administration. Finally, Soundex is a program option that Perry indicated is already available within the DCF software and would require minimal resources to employ.

Discussions with Perry and Gleichauf additionally allowed CKF to better understand the content and extent of communication with software vendors in the state as well as the aspects of training and documentation for SFAs that DCF has traditionally handled regarding direct certification. Communication with software vendors is sporadic and more typically in response to vendor contact (rather than DCF reaching out to them). This is in part because the number of software vendors used is constantly shifting it is impracticable for DCF to maintain a comprehensive contact list for all. DCF maintains the base manual describing procedures for SFAs to run direct certification and produced the regional in-person trainings when the process was rolled out to all districts. Perry and Gleichauf's expertise would be drawn upon for any updated trainings and manual modifications that would occur in an Implementation Grant though there is interest in having long-term updates to and maintenance of the manual content turned over to the DPI direct certification team.

## Review of other states' direct certification processes

The final activity of the planning grant included identifying promising direct certification practices used in other states and the benefits of implementing any of those practices in Wisconsin to boost certification rates. CKF staff compared Wisconsin direct certification practices to those carried out in nine other states: Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, and North Carolina. States for comparison were identified according to similarities in region, number and type of school districts, and process for matching student names to state SNAP data, while also having direct certification rates higher than Wisconsin, particularly if significant improvements had recently been made to generate those rates. Information on state practices was collected from the 2007-08, the 2008-09, and the 2009-10 Report to Congress (Direct Certification in the National School Lunch Program: State Implementation Progress); instruction manuals, memos, and reports available from state NSLP web sites; and, for Kansas and Indiana, phone communication with state school nutrition directors.

Many of the direct certification enhancements found in other states were often also suggestions generated through the project survey of Wisconsin SFA's, SFA site districts, or meetings with DPI and DCF staff. The three Reports to Congress and various online materials and manuals were used to better understand the variation in implementation for improvements such as the fields and algorithms used in determining a successful match or ensuring more frequent matches submitted by SFAs. To supplement this material and to better understand technical details of improvements, CKF staff conducted phone interviews with school nutrition directors in two states: Kansas and Indiana. The conversations covered questions surrounding overall process of generating matches between school and state administrative data; division of labor and workload (e.g., to what extent schools or the state are responsible for ensuring data is submitted for match); the amount of training and technical assistance provided by the state; and which improvement(s) might be most responsible for boosting overall state direct certification rates.

From the Kansas State Department of Education, CKF staff spoke with Cheryl Johnson, Child Nutrition & Wellness Team Director. Kansas has a similarly large number of school districts as Wisconsin (300 and over 400, respectively). Between 2007 and 2010, Kansas increased its direct certification rate over 10 percentage points (73% to 84%). Johnson attributes much of the rate increase to switching from a matching system based on paper forms to one that is computer-based. Kansas, unlike Wisconsin, prepares the match for schools each month – rather schools being responsible for submitting and receiving data files. Nonetheless, SFAs must investigate near-matches of birthdates or names. Johnson was also able to speak to the benefit of having an online look-up directory. This directory allows schools to query individual names within the state SNAP participation system which can be useful for resolving near-matches. The online-look up option, according to Johnson, has also been especially attractive to private schools particularly as their roster of eligible students is much smaller and submitting individual names for data match is much less time consuming than preparing formal matches. Johnson also shared that the state has made a commitment to offering annual direct certification training

sessions each July and providing an extensive and comprehensive manual of direct certification procedures.

CKF staff also spoke with John Todd, Coordinator of School and Community Nutrition at the Indiana Department of Education. Indiana has 352 school districts and between 2007 and 2010, experienced significant increases in its direct certification rate, rising from 56% to 74%. Of particular interest, Indiana uses two methods in its matching system that Wisconsin does not use: a multi-tiered matching process across a number of fields, and SoundEx software.

Indiana, like many states, begins with attempting a match on the first and last name of the applicant, along with his/her date of birth. When matches occur on one or more fields, but not all three, Indiana not only flags these “near matches” as is done in Wisconsin, but it then queries its system to see if matches occur on other fields sufficient to confidently determine a child in the school nutrition system is the same child as that in its SNAP system. It also employs SoundEx software that can identify names with multiple common spellings as matching.

To bolster the ability of its SFAs to determine accurate matches, Indiana provides an online look up system whereby data are provided about each near match so an SFA can determine which, if any, children nearly matching are in fact the children in their system and suitable for direct certification.

Indiana also recently added children in foster care to its state-based list of eligible children, a list Todd says enables as many as 22,000 additional potential matches.

Finally, Todd attributes much of its recent improvement in its DC rate to investing in reviewing Verification Summary Reports from individual SFAs for completeness and accuracy. It found many instances of under-reporting and trained its SFA staff in how to properly account for all children directly certified.

## Summary of Findings

Barrier	How Barrier Affects Running Direct Cert	# of SFAs Affected			Possible Solution(s)
		Few	Some	Many	
Not appropriately aware of DC benefits and requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Running only kids new to school (rather than all kids potentially new to SNAP)</li> <li>• Worry that kids no longer on SNAP taken off free lunch too</li> <li>• Running only once/infrequently/not at all</li> <li>• Not a familiar process due to infrequency</li> <li>• Perceived as time consuming</li> <li>• Must re-learn each time</li> <li>• Process feared</li> </ul>		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirement to run 3x/year <i>should</i> help to make process more familiar</li> <li>• Establish specific deadline dates for SFAs to run DC in Wisconsin</li> <li>• Remind agencies that students may become eligible at any point (as join SNAP)</li> <li>• Communicate benefits to state and SFAs of DC (vs. free based on paper application)</li> <li>• Individual contact with those who have not run successfully; offer assistance</li> <li>• Make sure info getting to right people; use more email communications and follow-up on undeliverables</li> </ul>
Near matches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some completely unaware of near-matches</li> <li>• Software can “hide” presence of near-matches</li> <li>• Don’t resolve/Little priority given to resolving</li> <li>• Ask families to do the work: fix name/DOB at County or School</li> <li>• Assume ineligible</li> <li>• Ask families to complete paper application</li> <li>• Some can see all children located within geographic boundaries. Adds time and length to near-match list.</li> </ul>			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced communication from state about ways to resolve</li> <li>• DCF provide exact text of near-match fields</li> <li>• State phone hotline or online look-up to resolve individual situations</li> <li>• Require the families use only legal names on school registration forms</li> <li>• SFAs provide additional fields to indicate likely match (county, city, parent name)</li> <li>• Ask SFAs to share best practices on how they accomplish this (represent variety of software, district sizes)</li> <li>• DCF to use Soundex to match</li> <li>• Assist SFA’s with limiting upload list to only those in district schools (rather than “800” status)</li> </ul>
Misunderstanding direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not correctly distinguishing between</li> </ul>		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind agencies that students may</li> </ul>

Barrier	How Barrier Affects Running Direct Cert	# of SFAs Affected			Possible Solution(s)
		Few	Some	Many	
certification vs paper appl.	<p>direct cert and free (via paper application) in database or verification report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relying solely on paper applications rather than running direct cert</li> <li>• Not distributing or making paper applications available; assuming direct cert will account for all eligibility</li> <li>• Fewer reported as directly certified than should be (impacting overall state rate)</li> <li>• Not realizing that students may become eligible under DC at any time during year</li> <li>• Not realizing financial impact of accurate DC rate for schools/state</li> </ul>				<p>become eligible at any point (as join SNAP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate benefits to state and SFAs of DC (vs. free based on paper application)</li> <li>• Individual contact with those who have not run successfully; offer assistance</li> </ul>
Inadequate support from software vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delays in completing process</li> <li>• Add'l costs to school/district due to errors</li> <li>• Mistrust software to run correctly; rely on manual checks (more time-intensive process)</li> <li>• Software updates assumed to account for current USDA/DPI policy (e.g., Skyward template letter may not offer an opportunity to decline benefits)</li> </ul>		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State oversight of private vendors</li> <li>• Yearly vendor training organized by state (opportunity for vendor fair as well as hands-on technical assistance)</li> <li>• Language offered to SFAs to include in contract with vendors that holds vendor liable for errors</li> <li>• Annual survey for SFAs to rate their software provider; available for view by all SFAs</li> <li>• Move to single vendor, or defined subset of vendors</li> </ul>
Variety of software used to run DC throughout state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training/support provided highly variable</li> <li>• Time/process involved to run DC via highly variable</li> <li>• Each software must be up-to-date on current DC policy</li> <li>• Over-reliance on software to run DC</li> </ul>			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centralized oversight of vendors/coding used in software for running process</li> <li>• Increased efforts to communicate new policies with vendors</li> <li>• Move to single vendor, or defined subset of vendors</li> </ul>

Barrier	How Barrier Affects Running Direct Cert	# of SFAs Affected			Possible Solution(s)
		Few	Some	Many	
	correctly could result in errors				
Within same software, range of proficiency/understanding of how to run DC process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all agencies use software in the same way. Skyward, IC, etc., may have different levels of functionality that not everyone is aware of, have access to, have purchased.</li> <li>• Some can see all children located within geographic boundaries. (Though is there a potential benefit to this?)</li> </ul>		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearly vendor training organized by state (opportunity for vendor fair as well as hands-on technical assistance)</li> <li>• Ask SFAs to share best practices on how they run DC using their software; may reveal new functionality available to others</li> <li>• Assist SFA's with limiting upload list to only those in district schools (rather than "800" status)</li> </ul>
Changing or late communication of DC policy from USDA/DPI/DCF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion about current requirements</li> <li>• Difficult to integrate into workload at beginning of school year (very busy)</li> <li>• Near impossible for private school staff to get away to attend trainings during year</li> </ul>			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer training during late spring/early summer and evenings</li> <li>• Provide advance notice of anticipated changes for next school year</li> <li>• Provide email reminders of current policy requirements and/or "to do" list</li> <li>• Offer webinar in Fall in order to bring training to SFAs</li> <li>• Suggest modification to USDA via implementation grant</li> </ul>
Time intensive process to extend eligibility to all children in household (and now foster children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reason to not run DC more frequently</li> <li>• Unsure if capturing all kids in a household</li> <li>• Over-reliance on software to successfully capture</li> <li>• Refer to several databases and/or personnel to resolve</li> </ul>			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance on connecting children in a household (from state or software)</li> <li>• Ask families to list other HH members on certification letter (other states do this)</li> <li>• Ask SFAs to share best practices on how they accomplish this (represent variety of software, district sizes)</li> <li>• Interface with foster kids system</li> </ul>
Multiple persons involved at SFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must coordinate each time DC is run</li> <li>• Can impede running DC more than 1x/yr</li> <li>• Communications from state, software</li> </ul>	X			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure info getting to right people; use more email communications and follow-up on undeliverables</li> </ul>

Barrier	How Barrier Affects Running Direct Cert	# of SFAs Affected			Possible Solution(s)
		Few	Some	Many	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vendor not rec'd or read by each person</li> <li>• Each has separate expertise in process; problematic if that person leaves</li> </ul>				
Position of staff person(s) responsible for running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals/Superintendents have little time to devote – will run only once</li> <li>• Food Services understand importance but tend not to be tech savvy and would rather spend time actually feeding kids, tho for this reason may be inclined to run often</li> <li>• Business Services/Administrative Assistants are often the most organized, thorough, aware of money aspect, available (time-wise), and likely to run DC often even just to pick up small number of new kids</li> </ul>		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use language in communications to SFAs that frames DC as a billing issue and not simply about food</li> </ul>
Very small schools/districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few students eligible</li> <li>• Running only once/infrequently/not at all</li> <li>• Have well-developed process for getting high return rate on paper apps</li> <li>• Unfamiliar with DC process</li> <li>• Little motivation to run DC (large time but little payoff)</li> <li>• Little or no onsite IT (or other tech-savvy) personnel; overwhelmed by technology</li> <li>• Typically put in hands of principal</li> <li>• No one at private school focused on NSLP</li> <li>• Ongoing, unresolved issues</li> <li>• Large misunderstandings about DC</li> <li>• Rely on public districts for food/billing</li> </ul>			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More frequent on-site visits from DPI consultants</li> <li>• Better times for trainings (mid-summer, late spring, evening)</li> <li>• Better locations for trainings</li> <li>• Encourage pulling resources under large structure (diocese, other existing cooperative). Example of Xavier ACES Educational System</li> <li>• Individual contact with those who have not run successfully/are struggling; offer assistance</li> <li>• Make sure info getting to right people; use more email communications and follow-up on undeliverables</li> </ul>
Lack of training for new staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely on previous staff notes, guidance</li> </ul>		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More frequent on-site visits from DPI</li> </ul>

Barrier	How Barrier Affects Running Direct Cert	# of SFAs Affected			Possible Solution(s)
		Few	Some	Many	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May perpetuate misunderstandings</li> <li>• Unaware of DPI, DCF resources</li> <li>• “Understanding” based on past staff experiences with FTP</li> </ul>				consultants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better times for trainings (mid-summer, late spring, evening)</li> <li>• Better locations for trainings</li> </ul>
Verification reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number listed in report may not reflect actual directly certified</li> <li>• Formatted/organized in such a way that data gathered from SFAs may not be accurate or best represent true DC rate</li> </ul>		?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest report format improvements to USDA</li> <li>• Assess discrepancy to determine true magnitude of issue</li> <li>• Communicate benefits to state and SFAs of accurate reporting of DC rate</li> </ul>

**Additional Notes:**

- Some have simply had trouble getting username/password to work correctly
- Problematic when a group of private schools works in collaboration but submit under only 1 school name (such as, ACES Xavier Educational System submitting under Xavier HS or St. Pius X or St. Joseph MS). The remaining schools would be flagged as not completing process.
- DPI consultants may not be fully knowledgeable/comfortable with how to run DC.

## Process of identifying final recommendations for implementation

From the full list of challenges to address and possible solutions, a smaller subset was identified for inclusion in the Implementation Grant proposal to USDA. This was achieved through a series of meetings with DCF and DPI staff. Upon the conclusion of SFA on-site visits and interviews, CKF staff presented a draft list of challenges and solutions to both DCF staff as well as DPI food and nutrition consultants and administration. Discussions with DCF staff, Jim Perry and Diana Gleichauf focused on issues surrounding technology, potential improvements, and the resources required to implement each of them. The meeting with DPI staff addressed each of the challenge areas and solution suggestions offered by SFAs. DPI staff provided feedback, additional challenges not yet enumerated, and modifications to solutions that would likely make implementation more feasible. From this set of meetings, a final, comprehensive list of challenges and solutions was developed for review by June Paul of DPI and Jim Perry of DCF. This final list stimulated further discussion of the resource-intensiveness, feasibility, and overall impact of each solution proposed. The result was a scaled back set of recommendations which was still further delineated in to yes/no/maybe implement subsets during a final review by Paul. Before submission of the Implementation Grant proposal to USDA, the proposed improvements underwent additional fine tuning and assessment of viability once timing and finances were finalized.

## Recommendations for Implementation

Broadly, solution recommendations can be categorized under the following three objectives:

- Objective 1)** Develop, modify, and implement informational trainings, resources and support that better address existing direct certification challenges experienced by SFAs as well as be able to more quickly respond to new challenges as they emerge.
- Objective 2)** Explore, test, and integrate new technology that can address existing direct certification challenges by simplifying the workload of SFAs.
- Objective 3)** Develop or more fully implement means by which to provide additional support and accountability to SFAs

Specific activities included in each Objective are:

- Objective 1) Informational trainings, resources, and support**
  - a. Offer annual training on Direct Certification basics and updates (also archived online)

- b. Create Back to School packet reminding SFAs of direct certification purpose, support available, current requirements, and frequently asked questions to assist in problem resolution
- c. Provide enhanced guidance for SFAs regarding resolving near-matches (including the potential options to investigate discrepancies by using an online look-up system, or contacting county SNAP agencies or families)
- d. Provide enhanced materials/documents for SFAs regarding extending eligibility to all children in a household (including modifying the certification letter to allow for households to add names of other children living there)
- e. Create opportunities for software vendors to provide demonstrations and troubleshooting during existing state educational trainings for SFAs.
- f. Improve communication mechanisms between the DPI and SFA staff

### **Objective 2) New Technology**

- a. Integrate student placement data from state foster care system (WI SACWIS) into existing state direct certification SNAP and TANF participant database to assist with extending categorical eligibility to foster children
- b. Expand list of fields that SFAs can submit for direct certification match (e.g. county, city, address, parent name, sibling name)
- c. Implement Soundex technology for reducing overall number of near-matches.

### **Objective 3) SFA Support and Accountability**

- a. Conduct survey of SFAs regarding their satisfaction with software vendors and consider opportunity for establishing survey as annual event
- b. Establish/clarify guidelines for, and consider appropriate courses of action (e.g. specific types of corrective actions) for SFA non-compliance with successfully running direct certification three times/year

## **Future challenges**

There are several challenges related to some or all of the recommendations in this report, none of which are insurmountable, but each of which should be closely tended to as implementation of those recommendations is pursued.

If adding additional fields to determine a match and especially if an online look-up function is pursued, it will be important to adequately protect the privacy of TANF/SNAP recipients who show up as near-matches. Enough information needs to be provided to ensure a proper match while at the same time not disclosing information that is sensitive or otherwise protected by privacy and disclosure laws. Several other states provide an online look-up and should be consulted for advice on not only their software and processes, but also the legal and technological protections they have put in place.

Cross-agency coordination is critical, of course, and will become more critical as the potential for adding fields to match, other data (such as foster care children) are added to the matching system, and the expectations (federally and locally) rise for improved DC rates.

In order for improvements to be sustainable, each must be pursued as systems changes within – rather than on top of – current capacity. An Implementation Grant would allow for an increase in resources available to improve Wisconsin's DC rate, but those resources should be considered temporary and able to be maintained well into the future without additional funding from USDA, the state or SFAs.

It will be important for the entire system to become and remain nimble, able to absorb changes in state, local and federal policies and resources. Staff turnover at the state and SFA levels will be a constant challenge and may become even worse in the face of budget challenges yet to come. Additionally, the state is pursuing a statewide student information system; the DC process must be able to adapt to whatever system is chosen.

As was done through the Planning Grant that produced this report, stakeholders from DPI, DCF, SFAs, and others must be involved in the involved in designing and providing feedback on each of the specifics of each improvement pursued.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A: SFA Survey Instrument

### Direct Certification Survey

PII-001976 (New 03-11)

This survey asks questions about Direct Certification. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Direct Certification is the process by which schools use a web-based system to send a list of all enrolled students to Wisconsin's Department of Children and Families (DCF). Schools get back a list of those students who should be automatically certified as eligible for free meals. Schools throughout Wisconsin implement the Direct Certification process differently and some struggle to efficiently and effectively complete it each year. Responses to this survey will be used to improve the Direct Certification process such that agencies like yours can ensure that more eligible students receive free meals.

It is important that someone from your agency who has a role in the Direct Certification process responds to this survey. It has been sent to all Wisconsin schools' food service directors and other authorized representatives. If you do not have a role in the Direct Certification process, please forward the e-mail you received about the survey to any person(s) in your agency who does.

Please complete the survey no later than Friday, May 6. You will receive reminder e-mails between now and then reminding you of this due date. Once someone from your agency completes the survey, the system should discontinue sending the reminder e-mails. We thank you for your assistance and insights.

#### For questions about this survey contact

Allison Espeseth  
608-261-1455  
aehales@wisc.edu

#### General Information

Indicate the position of the person completing this survey.

Position:

Type of School/District or Agency

Public

Private

RCCI (Residential Child Care Institution)

Size of Student Enrollment

100 or less

101 to 500

501 to 1,000

1,001 to 3,000

3,001 to 5,000

5,001 to 10,000

10,001 or more

Indicate the county of your agency:

A. Describe the direct certification tasks for which someone is responsible in your agency

<u>Task</u>	<u>Person Responsible</u>		
	Me	Someone Else	Don't Know

Create database  
Submit database  
Receive database/matches  
Verify matches received  
Send certification letters to households  
Complete verification report  
Other:

B. About how long have you, personally, been involved in direct certification?

Months:

Years:

C. Including yourself, what is the total number of persons in your agency responsible for direct certification?

Number Responsible:

D. What is your understanding of the purpose and importance of direct certification?

E. What computer program(s) does your agency use to prepare a file for direct certification? Check all that apply.

Skyward  
Excel  
Nutrikids  
Lunchbox  
Powerschool  
Other:  
Don't know

F. What month did you first run direct certification for the 2010-11 school year?

G. Are you aware that you can run direct certification more than once per year?

Yes  
No

H. Does your agency usually run direct certification more than once per year?

Yes  
No  
Don't Know

I. From what sources have you received training, assistance, information, or other support to understand how to conduct direct certification? (Check all that apply)

WI Department of Public Instruction in-person training  
WI Department of Public Instruction staff  
WI Department of Public Instruction web site  
WI Department of Children and Families staff

County Economic Support Services staff  
CESA staff  
Software vendor  
Staff person(s) in school/district  
Staff located in another school/district  
None  
Other:

J. Do you feel you have the information and resources necessary to run direct certification as often as you would like?

Yes  
No

K. What aspects of direct certification do you find problematic or confusing?

L. What type of training, assistance, or other improvements do you think would help you with the direct certification process?

All Wisconsin schools/districts and agencies who do direct certification are invited to participate in a short site visit as part of this project. The site visit will be an opportunity to expand on information provided through this survey. The site visit will consist of a brief interview and an opportunity to demonstrate aspects of the direct certification process at your location. Visits will begin in April and will mostly conclude before the end of the school year, though some may be conducted during the summer months or at the annual Wisconsin School Nutrition Association conference, if necessary. Please contact Mary Unmuth at Covering Kids and Families, to express interest in or availability for a site visit: [mjunmuth@wisc.edu](mailto:mjunmuth@wisc.edu), 608/261-1455

## Appendix B: SFA Site Visit Interview Instrument

1. Cluster:
2. Trip:
3. Date of interview:
4. Time of interview:
5. Address:
6. Name of Agency:
7. Agency Code:
8. CESA #:
9. Type of School/District or Agency (Public, Private, RCCI):
10. Student Enrollment
  - 100 or less
  - 101 to 500
  - 501 to 1,000
  - 1,001 to 3,000
  - 3,001 to 5,000
  - 5,001 to 10,000
  - 10,001 or more
11. Free/Reduced Price Meals Enrollment
  - # Free
  - # Reduced
12. Interviewer:
13. Interview site notes (atmosphere, materials, other physical demonstration used, etc.):
14. Key Findings:
15. Names and Positions of those being interviewed:
16. About how long has your agency been involved in direct certification?
17. About how long have you personally been involved in direct certification?
18. How did you get introduced to and trained on direct certification?

19. How many times during the year does your agency usually run direct certification?

a. Would you like to run it more often?

20. What month did you (first) run direct certification for the 2010-11 school year?

a. How did you decide when to first run DC?

21. DC process.

a. Create list of names:

- a. Software used
- b. Steps involved to create list

b. Submit list of names to DCF:

- a. Software used
- b. Steps involved to submit list

c. Receive matches from DCF:

- a. Software used
- b. Steps involved to pull list from DCF back to school software
- c. # of kids with code Y (first run of year)

d. Verify matches:

- a. Software used
- b. Steps involved to update school records

c. What if:

DC	Paper App	Action (Send letter? Update database?)
Y	none	
Y	Elig: free	
Y	Elig: reduced	
N	Elig: free/red	

d. Siblings in HH: How do you connect siblings to ensure all can be directly certified?

e. Near- Matches.

- i. Do you ever get near-matches?
- ii. What do you do with those? (If nothing, reason?)
- iii. # of kids (first run of year)

e. Send cert letters to HHs:

- a. Software used
- b. Steps involved to create and send letters

22. From start to finish (a.-e.), how long would you say it takes you to run the process:

- At the beginning of the year (first DC run):
- (Subsequent runs):

23. When you need help, where do you go for help?

DPI memos/DPI User Guide

- DPI web site
- DPI consultant**
- DCF (Diana Gleichauff)
- County Economic Support
- IT staff within agency
- Other staff within agency
- Other schools/districts
- Software vendor(s)
- other:

24. **Have you ever provided DC assistance to other schools/districts?**

25. **Do you feel you have the information and resources necessary to run direct certification as often as you would like?**

- No, not at all
- Not really
- Yes, pretty much
- Absolutely

26. **Which tasks are most difficult, confusing or time-consuming?**

27. **Do you have ideas for what would make this process better/easier?**

28. **Is there anything else that would be useful for us to communicate to the state or USDA?**

## Appendix C: Interview Instrument for Other States

Purpose: Augment knowledge gained through the literature review by conducting detailed interviews with staff in states that have similar or higher direct certification rates to determine additional best practices, procedures, technology, communication, training and technical assistance provided.

1. Walk me through DC in your state
  - a. Do schools run it or does the State?
  - b. What's the process for matching school and state records?
  - c. Are student records matched against TANF and/or FDPIR data in addition to SNAP?
  - d. Are private schools, Head Start, or RCCI's submitted for match?
  - e. What fields are matched? Are exact matches on all fields required?
  - f. Are near matches identified and what can/should be done to determine if they are in fact a match?
  - g. How is categorical eligibility for all children in a household handled?
  - h. When is DC run?
  - i. Do you have DC guideline and other info on your web site I can review?
2. How often do districts/schools run direct certification? Are there set dates by which it must be run?
3. What is the process when an issue or concern related to direct certification is identified to you or your agency?
4. Do you see a difference in the way public/private, urban/rural, small/large etc run DC? What have you done to close the gap (if any)?
5. What types of training and technical assistance do you provide?
  - a. How often do you provide training?
  - b. Do you require the training?
  - c. What percentage of districts/schools have used your training/tech assistance?
6. Do all schools use the same software for DC or do they choose the software?
7. Who is in charge of investigating near matches, potential matches, etc?
8. Communication with districts/states: How often? How? Only when there is a problem? Do you check in?
9. To what do you attribute your general success? To what extent have your recent process improvements affected the DC rate?
10. For what reasons do you feel your overall state rate increased?
11. What resources do you have available for administering the direct certification process? How do you distribute resources appropriately statewide?

## Appendix D: SFA Survey Results – Summary Statistics

VARIABLE	N (%)	VARIABLE	N (%)
<b>Staff Position*</b>		<b>Agency County</b>	
Administrative Staff	229 (30)	Adams	1 (0.1)
Food Service Administrator	198 (26)	Ashland	3 (0.4)
Agency Mngmnt/Administrator	106 (14)	Barron	11 (1.4)
Business Office Staff	66 (9)	Bayfield	5 (0.6)
Food service other staff	62 (8)	Brown	25 (3.2)
Accounting/Bookkeeping	56 (7)	Buffalo	6 (0.8)
IT/Data management	18 (2)	Burnett	3 (0.4)
Manager, unspecified	18 (2)	Calumet	7 (0.9)
Human Resources	7 (1)	Chippewa	10 (1.3)
Other	12 (2)	Clark	12 (1.6)
Total	772 (100)	Columbia	9 (1.2)
		Crawford	5 (0.6)
<b>Agency Type</b>		Dane	30 (3.9)
Public	440 (57)	Dodge	17 (2.2)
Private	310 (40)	Door	6 (0.8)
RCCI	22 (3)	Douglas	4 (0.5)
Total	772 (100)	Dunn	5 (0.6)
		Eau Claire	6 (0.8)
<b>Student Enrollment</b>		Florence	1 (0.1)
100 or less	107 (14)	Fond du Lac	16 (2.1)
101 to 500	318 (41)	Forest	4 (0.5)
501 to 1000	130 (17)	Grant	14 (1.8)
1001 to 3000	144 (19)	Green	7 (0.9)
3001 to 5000	38 (5)	Green Lake	9 (1.2)
5001 to 10000	24 (3)	Iowa	4 (0.5)
10001 or more	10 (1)	Iron	1 (0.1)
No response	1 (0)	Jackson	6 (0.8)
Total	772 (100)	Jefferson	19 (2.5)
		Juneau	6 (0.8)
<b>Years of DC Experience</b>		Kenosha	14 (1.8)
<1	27 (3)	Kewaunee	9 (1.2)
1	74 (10)	La Crosse	13 (1.7)
2-5	532 (69)	Lafayette	9 (1.2)
>5	64 (8)	Langlade	3 (0.4)
NR	75 (10)	Lincoln	8 (1.0)
Total	772 (100)	Manitowoc	13 (1.7)
		Marathon	21 (2.7)
<b>No. Responsible in Agency</b>		Marinette	8 (1.0)
0	19 (2)	Marquette	2 (0.3)
1	452 (59)	Menominee	0 (0.0)
2	229 (30)	Milwaukee	104 (13.5)
3	52 (7)	Monroe	6 (0.8)
4 or more	8 (1)	Oconto	8 (1.0)
No response	12 (2)	Oneida	2 (0.3)
Total	772 (100)	Outagamie	26 (3.4)
		Ozaukee	8 (1.0)
<b>Software Used*</b>		Pepin	3 (0.4)
Excel	270 (35)	Pierce	7 (0.9)
Skyward	195 (25)	Polk	9 (1.2)
Powerschool	67 (9)	Portage	8 (1.0)
Excel + other	52 (7)	Price	5 (0.6)
Lunch Cashier	47 (6)	Racine	23 (3.0)

VARIABLE	N (%)	VARIABLE	N (%)
<b>Software Used (cont.)</b>		<b>Agency County (cont.)</b>	
Skyward + Excel	37 (5)	Richland	4 (0.5)
Infinite Campus	19 (2)	Rock	10 (1.3)
Nutrikids	6 (1)	Rusk	5 (0.6)
Skyward + other	2 (0)	Saint Croix	13 (1.7)
Lunchbox	2 (0)	Sauk	10 (1.3)
Other (single program)	31 (4)	Sawyer	4 (0.5)
Other (multiple programs)	3 (0)	Shawano	9 (1.2)
no computer used	6 (1)	Sheboygan	16 (2.1)
n/a	3 (0)	Taylor	6 (0.8)
no response	32 (4)	Trempealeau	9 (1.2)
Total	772 (100)	Vernon	8 (1.0)
		Vilas	5 (0.6)
<b>Month of First Run</b>		Walworth	21 (2.7)
January	7 (1)	Washburn	5 (0.6)
February	2 (0)	Washington	18 (2.3)
March	4 (1)	Waukesha	28 (3.6)
April	5 (1)	Waupaca	14 (1.8)
May	1 (0)	Waushara	3 (0.4)
June	6 (1)	Winnebago	12 (1.6)
July	104 (13)	Wood	11 (1.4)
August	381 (49)	Total	772 (100.0)
September	143 (19)		
October	36 (5)	<b>Aware Can Run &gt;1x Per Year</b>	
November	12 (2)	Yes	678 (88)
December	3 (0)	No	77 (10)
Have not run yet	42 (5)	No response	17 (2)
No response	26 (3)	Total	772 (100)
Total	772 (100)		
		<b>Training/Assistance Sources*</b>	
<b>Usually Run &gt;1x Per Year</b>		WI DPI web site	437 (32)
Yes	460 (60)	WI DPI staff	254 (19)
No	257 (33)	Software vendor	150 (11)
Don't know	42 (5)	On-site staff	131 (10)
No response	13 (2)	WI DPI training	96 (7)
Total	772 (100)	CESA staff	58 (4)
		WI DCF staff	57 (4)
<b>Have Necessary Info/Resources</b>		Staff in other school/district	50 (4)
Yes	613 (79)	Paper manual/mailings	12 (1)
No	146 (19)	State staff, unspecified	10 (1)
No Response	13 (2)	Self-taught	10 (1)
Total	772 (100)	Other	11 (1)
		None	70 (5)
<b>Confusing/Problematic Aspects*</b>		Total	1346 (100)
Formatting files (upload or download)	53 (7)		
Resolving mismatches	45 (6)	<b>Training/Changes Desired*</b>	
Overall process	34 (4)	In-person training/Webinar	91 (12)
Software difficulties	33 (4)	Detailed manual/Tutorials	39 (5)
Extending to other HH members	27 (3)	Improve personal assistance (state, county, vendor)	19 (2)
Initial set up/Logging in	23 (3)	Software specific assistance	19 (2)
Process changes every year	17 (2)	Regular reminders/updates	17 (2)
Results layout	14 (2)	Simple instructions "cheat sheet"	14 (2)
Uncomfortable with technology (rely on others)	14 (2)	Simplify matching process	13 (2)
Resolving questions of eligibility/parent refusal	13 (2)	Guidance on resolving mismatches	11 (1)

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
<b>Confusing/Problematic Aspects (cont.)</b>		<b>Training/Changes Desired (cont.)</b>	
Don't run frequently/Forget process	12 (2)	Anything	9 (1)
Time consuming	11 (1)	Results enhancements	9 (1)
Little or no assistance from state	10 (1)	State provides list of eligible students	7 (1)
Small school: few eligible students	8 (1)	Alternative solutions for small schools	6 (1)
Uncertain if running correctly	8 (1)	Guidance on extending eligibility to HH	5 (1)
DC process not Mac computer-friendly	5 (1)	other	18 (2)
Don't know what DC is/Haven't ever run	4 (1)	Don't know	35 (5)
other	20 (3)	None: praise	9 (1)
None: Praise	129 (17)	NR	451 (58)
NR	292 (38)	Total	772 (100)
Total	772 (100)		

\*Some or all categories developed from open-ended responses

## Appendix E: SFA Survey Results – Open-Ended Responses

*(Categories created post-survey)*

### What aspects of direct certification do you find problematic or confusing?

#### **DC process not Mac computer-friendly**

*Presently the system is running very smoothly. Previously our District had problems due to the state computer system and our (Apple) did not communicate well.*

*As we are a Mac district, we had great difficulty in accomplishing a successful transfer of our database the first year. However, DPI's consultant made changes to the program that made it much easier to get through the direct certification process successfully for this year.*

*Our district is a Mac platform and the direct certification, is not Mac friendly.*

*The program and my Safari on my Mac do not like each other.*

*The state could not accept my database because it came from a Mac Computer. I alerted them but they never responded to my problem.*

#### **Don't know what DC is/Haven't ever run**

*Haven't actually done this yet.*

*Don't know what it is*

*I am not aware of this process.*

*I never did it*

#### **Don't run frequently/Forget process**

*Nothing confusing just worry that I will forget something on the order!*

*I always have to re-read everything about doing the direct certification, to understand it before doing it.*

*Remembering how to complete the report each year. It usually takes several tries to complete the student file*

*The version I used this year was much easier for matching than in the 09-10 school year. File creation has been done by both myself as well as our IT department, as I don't run it all the time, it takes me a little while to remember all the steps*

*I don't do it enough to feel comfortable with it.*

*Remembering the process.*

*Not doing it often enough requires relearning how the system works each time*

*When we first had to implement direct cert. it was complicated and confusing. Since the changes were made it is much more user friendly.*

*Since direct cert. is only done a couple of times a year a good set of instructions to look back on is very important!*

*I do it once a year, in August, so it is a little confusing to get the process started. Last year, it was much simpler to run as opposed to the prior two years.*

*Whenever you only do something once or twice a year, it is difficult to feel comfortable with the process.*

*The part about where to save it and I need to review the procedure each fall, because I forget from one year to the next*

*Sometimes the 1st run of the new school year is a problem, since I may have not run it since Dec/Jan time, I have to just refresh my memory on the setup.*

#### **Extending to other HH members**

*When siblings are not included with families even though they are a member of the same family.*

*The new change that all "household" members are approved if one member of the household is approved. At times, we do not know what consists of a "household" in a particular home. At times, there are many people who live at the same address; however, we do not know their economic unit situation. We also have children who live in foster/group homes in our district. I know at one point and time, there was also a problem with matching students in our system who had a different last name than the state system (i.e. hyphenated last names, etc.)*

*When all siblings living in a household do not qualify for direct certification. Wood County is very helpful with those situations.*

*I have noticed that the past Lunch Secretary had to add names of siblings onto the family letters. It usually only stated the oldest child.*

*Extending it to others in the family.*

#### **IDENTIFYING HOUSEHOLDS**

*Multiple households with step siblings where parents share custody*

*It does not always identify every member of the household. If a household completes an application anyway, we still enter it in to make sure a family member wasn't missed.*

Match names with households. Example a family household has four children and the file comes back with only two of the children listed even though they clearly are part of the household and have always been. We have to bring up the student, find the members in the household then locate the students on the list.

Many times the spelling of the district name does not match the state file.

The review process takes over one week to match households and names. The process is very time consuming and not very efficient. After the school year starts, running the direct certification would add even more confusion.

Split households, split parenting, new students coming into the district where parents say they don't qualify but yet they show up in the system, only one child in the household listed but yet there are other children in the family.

I find it difficult when one child is missed in a family and families with different names in the same household.

Blended households and kids switching homes is a problem

It can be time consuming to extend eligibility to additional children in a household if those additional children are not on the direct cert list. Also if the child goes between two households and holds a case number, children in the second household are eligible.

Again, this is a time consuming process to review households.

Sometimes students, for whatever reason, do not come up direct certified and other members of the family are directly certified.

The process is very easy but I would like clearer information on who in the family qualifies. It gets confusing.

With Skyward, it is difficult to sort out students that have completed an application between first and second DC runs. Also, the DC makes the "family" free, instead of just the students. Each student must be looked at to determine if there are other children in the household that didn't match. Also, while we needed 4-K DC, they don't participate in services, but when they hit KD, they will, so we ended up with letters for all these children and if we send them, all the families call us to tell us they aren't receiving meals. So what do you do?

The identification of family members that might also qualify that were not approved through the process.

Multi families in household. Children with separated parents

Getting information from state back to our software program

You have to be sure to review students to make sure that they siblings are captured as Y as well. Often there is a problem with a sibling name/birthdate, something that doesn't match up so you have to be sure to capture those students.

When we began trying to pull the families out of the system we could not because the Dept of Children and Families was not set up.

The fact that all family members are now eligible for direct certification and the list received by us only shows one family member can be confusing because we have no way of knowing who all other family members are. A complete list of all family members eligible would eliminate our missing anyone who may be eligible thru direct certification.

Matching to all student living in same household

When siblings in the same household do not receive the same status from you, this adds much time and effort on our part to research if they are not part of the same household as we believe they are, or whatever the other possibilities may be. Then several months later then the missing sibling is added thru your system.....too late as we have already done all the investigations and came to that same conclusion earlier on our own.

The file information that comes back from Dept. of Workforce Development is minimal; only contains the first, middle, and last name of student and birthdate. Guardian name would be helpful with matching since we now need to direct certify household members. This can be a real challenge if all household members are not on the qualifying list. Then we have to create another file in Skyward with the additional household members and add them to the list of direct certified people. Matching all the information on the qualifying list with our Mealtime food service software is a tedious process to make sure the matches are accurate before the information is imported into our lunch software/application system.

Some sibling not all authorized for free even if they live in the same household.

The only problem I find is when I have siblings on my list and only one is approved via direct certification. Do I still need proof from the family then? Or does the whole family get approved because one has a case number?

Lack of consistency for entire family. Some children in same family - one might be direct certified and another is not.

### **Formatting files (upload or download)**

Making the student list and sending it to Madison and what format to print it in.

Uploading/downloading information. Getting programs to work together.

The student file layout can be problematic as we always seem to have to adjust our file to tab delimited format so it can be read when uploaded to the website.

The original set up was confusing. With the help of our technology person, it was completed. File paths, etc.

Creating the data base and Submitting it to DWD has always been troublesome.

Converting file to match specification for downloading.

Converting database into format for direct certification format.

Preparing the file would be the most complicated for me, but the technical director in our district is very good, and does that for me.

He also helps me submit it. The most work afterward is sending out the notices and figuring out what families the students belong to.

The downloading/uploading is always a challenge. There is never enough time to absorb the processes

*I find that my spreadsheet isn't always exactly spaced correctly for upload and it causes me problems.*

*Creating the file to send to the state*

*Configuring our student lists to match up with the direct certification acceptance.*

*It takes a lot of time to go through each student and make sure they are accounted for.*

*I have a little trouble when downloading the matched state file and transitioning the file in the desired format. I can see if they qualify but desire a better format which I have done from time to time. I think it is mainly a "me" problem.*

*I have trouble creating my student file, but that's why I pay the support fee to the software company.*

*Having to "adjust" the birthdates into the format that is necessary to get the list of students that I need. Removing children that haven't yet started school or wouldn't be eligible for meals.*

*Making sure our system name and info matches exactly with the DC site*

*The file format requirements for the Dept of Children and Families are so very precise that those of us who are not data base "experts" find it hard to make the upload files so they work and are not rejected for some small error. I realize that the direct certification matches information from our district upload to the state information, and if the two sets of information don't match, there are errors.*

*If there was an easier process, it would be easier to do.*

*Also, small district such as ours, late July and August are very busy months as the same person may be responsible for many reports and things other than food service.*

*Creating the student data base according to the specifications needed to submit it to the state*

*Working it in with our student data base*

*Having a problem only sending new student that register after a Direct Certification list was approved.*

*Making sure all computer settings have been correct for compatibility with state program. Web-based program is much easier and fewer problems with compatibility.*

*Setting up the file to upload to the State.*

*The first system was horrible. Definitely did not encourage doing a run more than once. The new web base is much easier. Getting the file in the correct format is the hardest part.*

*Uploading and downloading files to your computer*

*Reports area...More user friendly way of printing out the current eligibility lists.*

*The lists need to state the eligibility status more clearly - too much unneeded information listed on the reports*

*It would be nice if setup of the Excel formatted spreadsheet could be a little less complicated, caused by the .csv file requirement.*

*The final steps of transferring information to the State site.*

*Getting the names and numbers put in the system*

*Sending it back and forth*

*The system this year was much better than the previous year. The previous year I submitted the direct certification list multiple times but it was not going through because of firewall and other computer matching issues. This year was much easier. It still takes time out to format everything to match, type in all of the children's information and submit. I don't know if that can be made any easier or less time consuming though.*

*I can't seem to submit the database more than once unless I redo it.*

*When I try to run my list more than once, I can't. I only have Excel and the data doesn't stay line up in order to submit it more than once.*

*Uploading the file*

*Getting all info in to the computer*

*Creating the database can be cumbersome*

*Preparing it and sending it*

*The most difficulty I have had was first going through the "security" process and then the formatting of the document. I especially had trouble with the birthdate.*

*Matching our database with the state*

*Setting up the data base. It seems never line up correctly.*

*None- getting all the student information was the most time consuming especially the middle initial as we do not ask for that on our school registration form and had to get that additional information for another source or the parents.*

*It takes a long time to retype all the information into a database to send in.*

*Creating the "send list" for you. Finding it to send to you!*

*Setting it up*

*The process was much easier this year, compared to the past years. The main problem is getting the data base exactly right*

*Accessing the website and making sure the database is compatible.*

*Getting any new incoming student information from our preschool staff as I do not have direct access to that*

*Making sure the excel file is set up exactly right.*

*We do not have an IT department at our private school only volunteers. There has been difficulty at times submitting the files*

*Was not able to run school list to put into the direct cert format*

*Just entering in the data base. But now that I have record of it, I can adjust as necessary.*

*I feel it is easier to do the process now than it previously was. Probably my biggest complaint is whenever I want to just access the state site I have to each time go into my Excel file and save it as tab delimited even if I haven't made any changes to the file.*

*Apparently that process is not "saved" permanently and has to be done each time.*

*The hard part for me is saving the excel document in the correct form to upload it to the website.*

*The setup of new students and the removal of old students to the existing list*

### **Initial set up/Logging in**

*Just getting it all set up at the beginning of each school year.*

*Our first attempt with our new software program and uploading/downloading our student directory created some stress. After working through the process we've had few problems.*

*Getting passwords. Our tech person did that part, and now our tech people are changing so it hasn't been done twice this year, only once.*

*After I ran it the first time it was very easy to figure out. Just need to make sure the school's firewall will accept the program. That is the only problem we had a couple of years ago.*

*I cannot run the report as I do not have access to the user name and password. I have to ask our computer tech person to run the report*

*It is less time consuming this year than last year as I don't have to go through and put 0's in for SS #s for all students. It is time consuming the first time it is run to send out letters to all families.*

*Entering into the program in the 1st place is often difficult w/ passwords, etc. I just have not had enough practice. Also we changed software co.'s last fall.*

*I find that there are many steps to log into the database. This can be confusing and frustrating at times. However; the response time once the student data is submitted from our location is phenomenal.*

*Sometimes I am not able to get into the system. Changes made on the website.*

*Initially setting up the spreadsheet and going through the log-on process. Seem to have a handle on it now. I still have to refer back to my previous years sheets for recall.*

*Set up*

*Setup*

*Logging in to the system.*

*At first it was the process of submitting and getting a password.*

*It was very difficult to get signed up for the direct certification, we experienced computer/program issues, but changes in the process made it easier for us to complete it.*

*Switching it to a different department/agency this past year was confusing in that I had to re-establish ID*

*Access to the system requires several steps needs to be simplified.*

*Logging in*

*Initial setup was the most confusing. It seems to be going better now.*

*The initial set up.*

*Was not able to complete on-line form*

*Usually the first time of the school year that I run the program, I have trouble logging in.*

*I have trouble with direct certification every year the first time that I try to run it. It did seem to be better this year, but it could still be easier to use.*

### **Little or no assistance from state**

*When it was first required, there was no training other than finding it on the website. It was a search and find mission. Although the procedure changed again last summer, the procedure did run smoothly.*

*When the process first came out, it was hard to understand. There should of been more training involved for school districts were able to understand the process*

*This year, the file sent, but came back weird. I tried to contact someone to get some answers, no one responded.*

*The website was not helpful in getting information. I didn't receive any mailing with instructions and needed to call one of the staff members at DPI for assistance. The process was simple once I knew what to do regarding the direct certification.*

*I have only done it once on my own. I would find a training seminar helpful. We have a very small school.*

*I haven't had any training so therefore the process is confusing to me.*

*You send a lot of information out to us but due to the fact we contract*

*With a food service company, I never know what I should be doing.*

*I would just need directions on to run them.*

*Setting up the program. Was not given information on how to perform the task.*

*We are a small private school so in the past our server did not allow us to submit the information. I have not had very good support when I call with problems. What DPI does not understand is that we do not have an I.T. Department. Computer issues are dealt with when a volunteer has time in the evenings to look at things.*

*While we prepare the information and download, we are told the information is not compatible with the system used by the DPI. Numerous frustrating contacts have been made and no solution found or resolution made.*

### **Overall process**

*I have never really developed an understanding of much of the process. I inherited these duties as part of downsizing within our agency.*

*Overall program operational understanding is unclear.*

*Any and all are confusing. None are problematic as long as we are not required to do it.*

*Lots of uploads and downloads and passwords*

*The whole thing. I actually have our computer technician run the report for me.*

*The process of uploading and receiving the data*

*I don't understand it*

*Just not comfortable in the process yet.*

*Too many steps in the process*

*All of it*

*I have not done it by myself completely yet, so the whole process is still a bit confusing to me. I will be doing it on my own this coming school year.*

*I am new to the reporting-so I find it all to be confusing at this point.*

*Whole was a training issue*

*It is not an easy 1-2-3 process. Downloading and uploading is very confusing.*

*I do believe the process could be simplified, although it is A LOT easier now than it used to be.*

*The whole import and export is very difficult to understand in general -should be an easier way of doing this*

*The system overall is very complicated.*

*The whole thing. Especially transferring it to the site.*

*All of it.*

*The entire process is cumbersome and we do not find it helpful in our situation.*

*I found many! It took several attempts on several computers with the help of our technology teacher to get it to go through. There was not a lot of help from the DPI staff. Every year we have done DC we have not had any students eligible. We are a small private school and we wasted many hours on this and it had no benefit to our school or our students yet it was required of us to do it.*

*All*

*All the different log-ons, usernames, steps*

*You have to go through a lot of different steps to get the final results. It can be very confusing. It would be nice if you could enter the names and the answer would be given right away.*

*The whole thing.*

*It seems involved... all of the passwords set up...the saving and sending and returning are different named files it sometimes becomes confusing which one is which one.*

*The entire process could be simplified.*

*All of it!! It is not easy to make a file that is compatible to the web-based system. I usually need to call DPI 3 or 4 times before we can get the web to read our file. It is not easy to get the web system up and running. We have had no training with this program. Just paper instructions and walk through from DPI staff when we make a call to them.*

*I find it to complicated and I am not sure what to do and what not to do.*

*All of it. We use Mac's and the first year we had to do direct certification no one could make it work. I haven't tried again because I know next to nothing about computers and find it very frustrating to try to learn something by myself and when someone tries to help, they talk so far above me I don't know what they are talking about.*

*Everything*

*Right now, ALL of it. Too many acronyms to remember and lengthy, confusing information - especially since I am so new to the system.*

*Everything*

*I have had trouble with the direct certification as a whole....we are a small private school.*

### **Process changes every year**

*The changes in the state website. Learning the process added to our student software program "Infinite Campus".*

*I get frustrated that it has not been the "same" since it started. The process has changed each year.*

*The process for doing it has changed every year.*

*It would be helpful if things didn't change so often. (passwords, website address, etc.)*

*The process keeps changing between the state and our software vendor. Also the two use different verbiage for the same thing sometimes.*

*The biggest problem for me is that it changes slightly each year. I also feel that the state form is confusing/not clear.*

*When they change the system and we have to try and figure out the new way.*

*Password expires quickly. The procedure seems to change every year.*

*Seems like there is something different each year and therefore requires a call to the service desk for assistance.*

*Process changes (Different instructions 2 years ago-had to retool process) and having to reauthorize passwords.*

*When all of a sudden they change the program and you don't receive any directions.*

*The switch to the new way of direct certification was confusing. The more I do it, it gets easier.*

*The instructions and methods keep changing. Not user friendly.*

*1) DPI changing the process each year. Will it change again this year? 2) The number of steps and time it takes to create an account and get an approved logon/web access. I usually have to call for help on this. 3) The number of steps it takes to send in the student files. Sometimes it's hard to find the correct web page for submitting the information.*

*When the systems changed.*

*I find it confusing and question why things are constantly being changed by the DPI. If you find something works and people grasp it then it should be kept the same*

*The process has been slightly different each year because of software/computer changes at state level.*

### **Resolving mismatches**

*Codes following a student's name. Sometimes information we have in power school doesn't match with state records (spelling of names, etc.) Odd also that one student from a household appears as Y on the list, while others do not. I do understand however, that the eligibility is effective for all members of the family.*

*The fact that parents don't always use their child's legal name at school*

*Potential matches, parents aren't consistent with names (e.g. full legal vs. shortened name).*

*After working with the previous version of direct certification, this version is a breeze! However, with the students who don't certify because of birth day or first name I really don't know what the next step should be to check if our database is incorrect.*

*The unmatched names, initials, and birth dates.*

*One is the address match. When does it apply and when doesn't it?*

*Hyphenated names are hardly ever processed correctly. Is there a way to handle that problem?*

*Misinformation entered by the families and matching up with our student data base*

*In general all information is accurate and good, however Names must match exactly in order to appear eligible for benefits. It also does not link*

*Other children in the household.*

*The unmatched students can be confusing.*

*We need to know the name/address of parent/guardian who qualifies to be certain we are notifying the appropriate person. I asked DPI about this last year, and was told they had no authority, but would pass on to Children & Family Services. Never heard anything.*

*When you receive an error regarding birthdates/names do not match. Wish they would show what doesn't match so we can contact parents to have corrected.*

*Name of student doesn't match school data base*

*The only difficulty is when a student has a suffix at the end of the last name and this invariably kicks the student out of the system.*

*We then have to do the follow up to make sure the student receives any benefits due him/her.*

*Having to double check the matches against the changes made, unfortunately, I found out this year that skyward software often has "mismatches" that need personal correction.*

*The most problematic part of direct certification is the way in which names are entered. If the name is not entered exactly in both databases, it is unlikely a match will be made and that child may be missed.*

*Once in a while, there may be issues with the way the non-English speakers' names are listed.*

*Difficult in setting up format & then reading--different spelling of student names is also troublesome*

*Students within a household who don't match due to incorrect spelling of name or mismatched birthdate*

*The part I find problematic is having to call Green County Human Services to find out about unmatched names when the error message says it's a first or last name issue. When I call I'm told I need to speak with each family's case worker or they don't feel they should disclose any information. I am only trying to see how they're name spelling is different than ours. Our students' names are entered into the system as they are on the student birth certificates. How does Green County Human Services get the spellings? I find when the name don't match we have to ask the families to complete a paper application. We can't seem to resolve name discrepancies. I try to run Direct Certification every Tuesday. Sometimes I may miss a week but it is my understanding Direct Certification is updated weekly.*

When I view the unmatched results and see that a student did not import due to a first or last name difference it is hard to get help when calling Green County Human Services. We may have 2 Joe Smith's so the software doesn't know how to match. When I talk with GCHS they usually say I need to speak with a person specific case worker. I may have 20 unmatched results.

The problematic issue is - right now - these Errors showing up, and not being able to import the certification file back into our database (Skyward).

When the list comes back and there is an error, example, first name or birthdate error. It is hard to get the county to work with us on finding out what the error could be. They are also hard to get a hold of and they are leery about giving us any info.

Clearing up students who are who are mismatched due to name/birthdate errors. If I verify that our information is correct, how do I verify that DWD's info is wrong? Or whether or not the student qualifies for benefits? Also, many parents believe they qualify for benefits as long as they have a case number. They do not realize that they must be receiving foodshare or cash benefits to qualify. They think as long as they get any type of assistance (daycare benefits, BadgerCare, etc.), they are also entitled to free lunch.

Resolving students that do not match up properly in the data base. There also appears to be a misconception in the general public. Many families think they automatically qualify for free lunches because they have a case number and receive daycare assistance or badger care benefits.

Trying to get exact matches on students who are listed in our software with different names or misspelled names. I try to get the elementary staff to use legal names, but sometimes it still gets to us wrong.

There are always a few children that you know qualify, but sometimes the school has a wrong birthdate or the parent has not given us the student's full name. We usually end of confirming with the county offices.

I always seem to have some kids who come back as birthdate not matching. I have verified it with the kid/parent, and I always have it correct, so I'm not sure where to go next.

If everything is not quite right in the system, it automatically kicks a student out

Names and birthdates on the data bases do not match. Example: Katie Doe on our base, state has Kathryn Doe. Birthdates 08/01/1951 our data base, state has 8/01/51.

Dealing with the personal at the county level who may not be familiar with the direct certification process.

When a child's name comes back with a birth date wrong and I call the county to verify the date and they tell me that the date that is in their data base is correct. I then need to call the family to find out which date is correct. Sometimes the families are not so willing to provide the correct date because it is a "pride" thing that they are on county assistance. Also when doing the verification, if I happen to choose a student that is eligible for free meals through DC, it is somewhat confusing as to who to call in the county. I feel there should be something sent out prior to school starting in the fall as to who the contacts are for each county.

At the end when it says there are problems I don't know what to do.

Names of children sometimes do not match up. Schools use the child's legal name and if that name is not the same in the system, we do not have a match. Would like to see DCF use child's legal name.

If the birthdate, or first name, are not identical from our system to yours the student does not come up as qualified. We do not know how to reconcile this.

Just fixing student's that have a birthdate problem or name spelling problem.

If something doesn't match exactly, we really have no way of verifying it. The court house doesn't give us that information. There needs to be somewhere that we can verify.

If they names are exactly spelled right, or if they say their child's name is SamualJames (one word), but it is really Samual James (two words), and then making sure the file that you download is readable for the state.

The biggest issue I have with direct certification is that the students' names must match exactly with the names in the database. Our students' last names change often; parents add hyphenations, change the order of hyphenated names, or change their children's last names altogether. This presents an issue because our students' names are not the same every year, and the names I have to work with do not necessarily match FoodShare records exactly.

I find the resubmitting the database with corrected names or new names once I have submitted the list previously.

A little name confusion-otherwise, with Skyward-it seems things go really well

Name spelling, date of birth,

Format name and birth date

Having the names match up exactly.

The way names are listed at school and the way families apply for assistance

Only confusion is when the information doesn't come up due to the spelling or birthdate information is incorrect and the information doesn't come up on the database.

### **Resolving questions of eligibility/parent refusal**

Not sure that all eligible students come out on the list. Sometimes people will fill out a lunch application with a Food Stamp Case number and the student(s) do not come out from direct certification.

*The concept of year-long duration of eligibility for free meal benefits if a family is identified through direct certification is not confusing. However, implementing the concept can be confusing if a family is identified through direct certification early in the school year and then subsequently submits a free/reduced meal benefit application and either qualifies for reduced or does not qualify at all. Under the duration rule, the family would qualify for free all year long. But, this can be difficult to catch. When they may have already applied and they are reduced and then they also appear on the report. At times we also put someone on and then they reply that they do not want the benefits.*

*The only confusing part is when the family has already done an application and they are reduced and then they come through on the direct certification.*

*When parents turn it down even though their children qualify. We've had this happen several times.*

*Sometimes students qualify who have never received any benefits with the state.*

*It is confusing and very problematic when we have families stating they no longer need these services and to be dismissed they have to write a letter to the school stating they no longer need the services however their name still remains on the list for an extended period of time. This is ridiculous. When and how often is this program reviewed and updated?*

*Had one student who was on the list and parent declined - they say they never were on state or federal assistance.*

*There have been times when a family states that they are receiving FoodShare, but when I run direct cert. they don't show up. Sometimes not all children in the same family come through as approved.*

*Typically all of our students do submit applications for free and reduced lunch. However, I do find it confusing when the applications show the family qualifies for an assistance program, but the name does not appear in the direct certification process (even after checking the name and birthdate information). For example, some parents submitted letters showing that their families participate in FoodShare, but they were not on the direct certification list.*

*I also am confused by the verification process for DPI since our numbers of applications and those certified seems to be duplicated in some cases.*

*When families receive notice that their children can receive free lunch and they do not understand. Trying to explain to parents I think it is an invasion of privacy. Yes, sometimes it's frustrating when a family doesn't apply that you think would qualify or needs help. But that's their right. I also had one father very upset. His son qualified because his ex-wife received \$3.00 in food stamps because she put him down as a dependent even though the father had full custody. He did not accept the free meals and paid in full.*

*We ask the families to complete forms if they think they qualify and the direct certification process is mainly a double check to ensure that families who perhaps didn't fill out paperwork know that they are eligible. So it isn't necessarily a problem but its importance seems to be over stated.*

## **Results layout**

*The print out for direct cert. is very confusing.*

*Reading the download file.*

*The report could be formatted for easier readability.*

*It is really very easy the way it is set up now. The problem comes when you have to double check the names of those students that show up on the list the second time direct cert is run. These students already received letters stating that they do not need to fill out applications. So we have to be careful not to send the same letter again.*

*Last August when down-loading for the first time on the new system, the site said my file was loaded, but nothing came up in the list. It took quite a while to figure out that I was missing the / marks in the birthdates. It would have been very helpful if the site could have told me that there was an error and what the error was, or what to check for.*

*Last August when the platform was changed, I had trouble getting the list from the site, because when I uploaded my data base, it said it was successful, in reality it wasn't. It took a long time to realize the / marks were missing in the birthdates. Some type of error message would be helpful so that we know where to look to make corrections.*

*The database/match report received is too condensed and hard to read at times.*

*If anything does not match exactly, a match is not made and I wish the message I get when there are no new matches would say "There are no new matches"*

*Error reports sent back are difficult to decipher and correct.*

*The report that we receive is hard to read. You have to review it very carefully so as to not miss anyone.*

*When the report comes back it is squished and hard to figure out*

*Would like the codes ("N", etc.) to be lined up under column headings for ease of reading the report. Also, at the bottom of the report, it would help to have an explanation "key" to the codes.*

*The layout of the results page.*

*When receive the list back from the state I cannot open it with word or excel, it only seems to open with publisher.*

## **Small school: few eligible students**

*Lot of prep work for the small number of free and reduced we have*

*My first year seemed confusing but this current school year it seemed the instructions were easier to follow. We are a very small school and only have a few children receiving benefits, so the instructions seem to be geared to larger schools with lots of children.*

*I am a Provision II school and don't feel Direct Cert is needed. We service all of our students.*

*It just won't work for us no matter how many times it is submitted.*

*With only 1 or 2 applications a year, it is a waste of time for us.*

*I guess I didn't realize with so view in our school that I should do this*

*We are a small school it takes time to submit Direct Cert. Every family that needs help asks. The report that we received from Direct Cert. didn't even have the families that applied and were eligible in our school. So that report was of no use to us. Why do we have to spend time filling it out?*

*We are a small school and don't really see the purpose. We mail out information to all families so that they can decide if they want to apply for free or reduced priced lunches.*

*Why it's necessary to do this when we are a provision 2 school.*

### **Software difficulties**

*Have a new program every year*

*Problems with the software*

*This year part of our skyward was on the web and part was not. It still is half and half. Our food service module was not but our student side was so I had to create a file in one area and move it to the other. Send our data to get verified and then import it on the web not the PAC side. Somewhat confusing and I am looking forward to having everything on the web next fall which I hope will make this process easier and more clear thereby allowing me the time and ability to do it more frequently.*

*I do not trust our skyward software to run the program more than once efficiently.*

*Current lunch software over complicates exports of direct certification.*

*At this time, I have no issues with the direct certification process. The only times that I have had problems is when DPI and/or Skyward changes their program. I have excellent I.T. people who help plus I have had good response from DPI when I have had a question.*

*The only problems that I have happened is when DPI changes their access to their website and when Skyward changes their programs I had an error in our software when I went to upload the results in Skyward. The process actually changed ever to free. Since that I've been leery of going through the process again.*

*When a family has refused to receive free meals and has identified that to us, I can change it in the Word Ware program, but the next time I do Direct Certification it over rides the change and therefore each time I need to go back into the Word Ware program and change them back throughout the school year.*

*Because my food service area is new to Skyward I still feel like I need help creating, submitting and receiving the direct certification information. I get it done but it sure takes me a long time to figure it out.*

*I don't know if I have the capacities on Skyward to complete it.*

*The feature of our program that makes us choose "only new students". I think the "all student feature" should be the one we have to choose (as we only need to do it once) and not be the default. I sometimes have a problem when downloading the file match, browsing for it in the lunch folder and finishing the processing (I really think that is just me!)*

*The systems our district uses to conduct direct certification and the staff who pulls the reports*

*We had many problems this year with the process since we changed to a new Lunch System software (Skyward). Our inexperience with the new software and the way it matched names via home address caused some problems for us this year.*

*Right now with PowerSchool every time we run it we have to manually cross check the list which takes many hours. After the start of school if we do not run a check every day some we could miss new students. If the parents feel that they will just be approved because we have this options it again would be problematic if we did not run it everyday*

*If the software is working correctly...nothing*

*Skyward's inability to accurately import multiple d/c files without creating a duplicate approval.*

*The computer program (Skyward) is new to the district this year -it is a great system but it is just difficult to understand the process of sending and receiving the files and then trying to locate them in our system seems like a lot of time is wasted trying to get the list of students off the system-I wish there was an easier way to do this we always have to involve our technology supervisor to help us.*

*We had some problems at the beginning of the school year with Skyward pulling students in that do not have a "Y". This problem has been solved, but I still feel like I have to double check all of them when I get them back. I learned that there was a problem with this from Lori Ann at DPI.*

*Getting my computer to do it!*

*Many issues with Skyward software - we were doing a transition to Skyward over the summer and had many problems with direct certification and having too many students approved for free incorrectly due to the way Skyward matched names by home address.*

Each software company handles direct cert a bit different so the biggest issue is learning the way the lunch software works with direct cert.

Mealtime does not create it in the format you want, such as all capital letters for names and because of that I need to create an excel spreadsheet to manually change that information on 1500 students. We have a lot of transition in our enrollments and its very time consuming.

Our software does not download it into the format the state wants.

Because I haven't had to do it for very long - it seems a bit confusing. I feel that maybe the software that we have to use could be more user friendly. For example - why can't we just email our names, birthdays, etc., in an Excel Spreadsheet and you take the information from that format.

I have run Direct Certification for two years now and have had trouble each year, I believe because of the age of our computers or outdated programs. We just received updated Microsoft Word programs last week, so I am hoping that this will eliminate direct certification problems.

I have had difficulty running this program as we are school computers do not use Microsoft as a platform, but use Linux. Some outside programs are compatible, some are not. I have called with this problem before.

This year was done with Prairie du Chien Public School as we share the Skyward system. They ran the reports and gave us the information. Which was very helpful, as in the years before we always had issues with our computer system, and could never get the help needed.

Transferring my Excel file to government to run direct certification

I had trouble submitting it from some of the computers in our office. I could only do it from one.

Getting the program to run properly on Excel program.

I have had trouble making excel work for me. I don't even remember how many times I had to call for assistance. I find the new way of doing it much better but still a little confusing.

In the past computers talking to each other

We do not have the funds to buy the software to perform this function between us and the DPI, therefore we use an Excel spreadsheet to perform the function both in our school and for the needed things outside our school such as DPI certification, school pictures, etc.

### **Time consuming**

Sometimes just finding the time to prepare and run direct certification can be a problem. The process itself is not difficult.

The process has gotten easier, especially with the ability through Skyward to set up the student list and convert to excel. However, the entire process is time consuming and detailed. I have thought about running a 2nd or 3rd certification during the school year, but have not done so yet.

Seems cumbersome and time consuming running more than once. Difficulty running off eligibility letters after the first time run.

None - I just find it difficult to fit in more than once per year.

Not enough time to keep checking/matching.

I wish it was easier, I have a lot of responsibility here in the kitchen and sometimes I just do not have the time to figure out how to run the program. First off it takes at least 2 hours to get it going. It seems like every year there is a change to the program.

Finding time to run the report

The change-over from Access to Excel. Just time consuming and having various other duties, time doesn't always allow to do several times per school year.

Time consuming for us to create the report and submit it. We are not a large school and do a good job of making the DPI applications available to our families.

Its usefulness in our setting is an area of concern. In order to comply we follow the rules, however we have paper copies on all of our families and use those as well. Every family is required to have a face to face meeting in order to fillout not only kitchen paper work but all school paperwork as well.

Time consuming

### **Uncertain if running correctly**

I'm not really sure if I am doing direct certification or not. I think I am.

I don't feel I am knowledgeable in processing the file generated from the state to excel format...probably takes me longer than it should.

Report that comes off is SO long. Not confident in doing the steps to create the file.

First year we did it, we did do a 2nd run and it was very difficult to separate notification letters from families who qualified on the first run. Very confusing result the 2nd run, hence we only do it once per year now.

It always takes me about 3 tries before I have a successful completion. When it does go through I am never sure why it worked that time, but I am grateful.

I am unsure as I am learning as I go.

Trying to download the results for the direct certification is very confusing. I think I did it correctly, but can't get any information.

*I have not done the very beginning part when the initial forms are submitted. I am not sure when to do that, who the forms go to, or which form to use.*

*I am not even now sure that I have done the Direct Certification correctly. If it's just uploading a spreadsheet with students' names and birth dates, then I am okay.*

### **Uncomfortable with technology (rely on others)**

*The downloads and uploads are confusing to me - that's why the IT person does it for me.*

*This year, after help from another food service director in another district, I have found the process to run direct certification a lot easier. Before this year we had our I.T. employee running the program and it seemed very confusing to me. (She was putting all the students on an Excel sheet then submitting it)*

*Saving of files and other technical procedures*

*The whole process to get the report. I, for one, have our computer technician run the report.*

*I depend on an IT employee to pull the report and convert it to our system. So I just have her pull the information at the beginning of the school year.*

*I find the computer technology a challenge for me.*

*I need people to help me download the information*

*Not sure have someone that helps me do it.*

*I rely on our IT department to run the Direct Cert. I would be more comfortable if I knew how to do it myself.*

*Saving the file. Every time I need to add someone new I have difficulty saving the file again*

*I'm really not quite sure I didn't do it personally, we had a secretary do it I know she was very frustrated at the time, however she did get help from DPI She is no longer with us, We only have 7 students in our school this year so we really don't necessary need to do direct cert.*

*I'm not real computer savvy so I'm not always familiar with the terminology used.*

*My computer skills are limited and I sometimes don't understand the instructions, although the system this past year was much easier to work with.*

*Since I have not run any of it without assistance all of it is confusing. I am not looking forward to running the direct cert next.*

*As I am not the person actually DOING the process, and my former staff member who did this no longer works here, I have a new person who will be doing this for the first time for the 2011-2012 school year. What we need is a computer-based tutorial for training and a step-by-step process to follow as needed.*

### **Other**

*Not giving everyone in the area that should be directly certified.*

*The system would work more efficiently if there was a program bridge between DPI and lunch programs to automatically print the notice letters. Too much dual entry.*

*Remembering to download the file, I think the last time we did it, it was there almost immediately.*

*The DPI programming is not real user friendly.*

*I'm always concerned that running it will goof up our POS system.*

*To keep running the certification more than once.*

*How you get the Report. When do you get the report before the new school year starts.*

*Once the file is uploaded, it's cumbersome to match the files.*

*Trying to get a direct certification file back faster from Tyler.*

*Skyward could not help with the state side of it, and the state side could not help with the skyward side.*

*I wish that our enrollment would be completed by the last week of August but it never works out that way. Our person who inputs enrollment data, doesn't usually run direct cert until the end of Sept.*

*Navigating through the DPI website to find the link for Direct Certification.*

*Doesn't work well for boarding schools that draw outside of WI. In other words, non WI citizens that attend our school never come up even though I know they qualify because they are income assistance in their home state.*

*The large number of acronyms involved in anything from DPI. I do not speak that language.*

*Since I wear many hats in our district, it is simply the time it takes to complete and relearn as the system changes.*

*In a smaller district, you wear many hats, have so many varied responsibilities and deadlines for other important items, that it can be difficult to find time to run as often as you'd like.*

*Since this is my first year working with it at this level, I found the verification process a little confusing. Hopefully all will go well next year.*

*Problems understanding some of the reports that are needed to be filled out yearly.*

*The verification process and forms to fill out outline - who/which families need to be verified due to either direct cert or having a case number.*

### **None: Praise**

*I find that the process of direct certification is very easy. It takes very little time.*

*The system works fine for me. It's much easier than when it first started.*

*This new process is much better than the first time we had to do this. It's much easier to run and verify.*

*None, current system is much easier to use and set up than the previous system.*

*This year ran much smoother than the previous year. The program has been improved significantly.*

*The process is better now than it used to be.*

*Original direct certification process was quite confusing and not user friendly. New process implemented this year was much better.*

*Will try to run direct certification more often next school year.*

*I had some difficulties initially and when the department was migrating to the new site, but now find it very "user-friendly".*

*With the previous system, I encountered a number of problems, but with the new system, I find it very user-friendly.*

*The upload and matching used to be problematic but with the new system/procedures it is really easy.*

*I find the new setup is much, much easier than what I had to do five years ago with the ftp server.*

*Direct certification is MUCH easier to use this year than it was in the past. Thank you for making this task easier!*

*I LOVE the way it is set up now! Thanks for making this easier for us.*

*It was certainly easier this year with the change made in processing.*

*I think the new system is great. Is there a verification report (mentioned above) that we're supposed to be completing?*

*The process is no longer problematic or confusing. It was too complicated when it was first implemented*

*None, since you implemented the new web-based system. This program is easier to use!*

*Now that it is web based, it is a piece of cake!!*

*It was actually a lot quicker and easier this year with the changes from last year.*

*None. It is better then the only one. I could not run more than 1 time on the old one because I need help from wordware. The new one*

*I can run as many times I want to throw the school year.*

*Nothing at this time. The software our district has and the state system improvement made the process very easy to complete.*

*None. It is very easy to run.*

*In the beginning the file conversion and upload to the state was not easy. This year the state made some changes and the upload have gone very smoothly.*

*Nothing, the switch over to this easier method than the previous "mainframe" has been tremendously easier!!! It's a breeze.*

*Right now, I feel that direct certification is very simple. The first system that we used to upload to the State did not always connect, but I have no problems with our SIS software or the State database. I usually run a direct certification file each month to catch any new students to the system and have never encountered any problems. Skyward is very cooperative with programing what needs to be in the upload file.*

*None. Now that it is web-based, it is very easy to do.*

*The program right now is great. It is so easy compared to the first one.*

*None - new system is much more improved than the old way.*

*The direct certification process was simplified tremendously when it was converted to a web-based program. I have no problems at this time - I wish all reports required for submission were as easy as direct certification!*

*Uploading of student list, but it is a lot easier now that it has switched software.*

*I think the process is now easier than it was in the beginning, as far as creating and uploading files.*

*I think that direct certification has become easier to do compared to when we first had to do it.*

*None any more, much better with new system*

*It is now easier with the web base.*

*It has improved this year from the previous year.*

*I find it easy to use.*

*Since the process was updated this past year, it is an extremely easy thing to do.*

*I really like the newer version. I had experience on the older version and found that to be very confusing. However, it has been revamped and made very user friendly!*

*I can't think of anything. It has made the process of direct certification so much easier and the lack of having forms to prove certification is great.*

*None - at the beginning, the program for uploading was not user-friendly at all; but it has greatly improved and the procedure is much easier.*

*I can't think of any for this year. It is much easier and faster than the previous two years were.*

*Prior to the upgrade it was a difficult process but now it's rather simple. Once you were able to log into the website it was a breeze.*

*At first it was transferring data to ftp but this past year was better and much easier.*

*I have enjoyed using the direct certification. The problems I have had were skyward issues and have been fixed now. The issue we ran into was qualifying students at the same address when not all should have been qualified (example: foster families and actual children all at the same address) All has been great.*

*I haven't found it confusing since the change from the WAMS system. DPI continues on-going information regarding Direct Certification.*

*None-very simple*

*None. I like the new system; it seems more stream-lined and easier.*

*None, the new process has been flawless.*

*It was very difficult to set up initially. It is OK to run.*

*It is OK once it is set up and working. It was very difficult to set up initially.*

*Right now I don't have any problems, just needed help the first few times*

*That I ran it, confused a bit about where to save the data. Had gotten used to the other way and then had to relearn the new way.*

*Ok, now!*

*The new process is MUCH BETTER than the previous method. Quite honestly, I stopped using the old version as it was too cumbersome. The new version is much easier to use.*

*It has improved drastically from when we first did it.*

*This year it was MUCH better-no bumps*

*When the process first came out the system was difficult, there were so many steps that needed to be completed, the process was hard to follow and understand, also was new to everyone. I don't feel a lot of information was provided at the time and where the directions were located to complete the process and how to complete the process. There should have been more training, such as webinars. The system has since been updated and is more user friendly, more understandable.*

*I love the new system now!*

*Been doing it since 2005 there has been changes which have been good*

*I don't find anything problematic or confusing. It is very simple and easy to use.*

*In prior years the process was very cumbersome. This year is so simple to process and I love it.*

*None - since the system has been revamped, it is easy.*

*With the new website I no longer find it confusing. I also don't need to have my I.T. department process the file as I can do it on my own.*

*It seemed to be a little easier this year, than in the past.*

*The old way they did it was a nightmare. The new way starting in 2010-11 is a much better system and much more understandable.*

*The process that began this year has been a great improvement and very easy to run. Thank you!*

*It is much easier than the first few years.*

*I think the process has improved since it first began. It is much less cumbersome now.*

*The new process has simplified this program - it is so much faster and there are no problems.*

*IT IS MUCH BETTER TO RUN THE DIRECT CERT NOW THAT THE STATE HAS MOVED OUT OF THE 80'S TO NEW TECHNOLOGY; MUCH BETTER.*

*The changes that have been made this past year have made the process much easier for all parties involved.*

*This year it has been much more user friendly*

*Prior to the new system, I had problems creating a password because I had one in the system from a previous position in a public school district. I had so much trouble working between agencies that I eventually gave up and did not use direct certification.*

*When I used the new system, it worked very easily. Thank you.*

*This year I found the program to be much easier than last year.*

*I find it this year was a lot easier than prior years, where all the documents had to be renamed and saved a certain way.*

*Nothing! I love it! This makes everything a lot easier and we "save a tree" :)*

*None. It is very easy this year.*

*This year was easy.*

*None, the response time was a great improvement.*

*At first, (3 years ago) I just hated doing direct. cert. EVERYTHING about it was problematic and confusing..... right now, it is very simple, works very smooth...*

*It's not as confusing as the first year we had to run it. This last year was so easy.*

*I think it was easier this year than in previous years*

*Prior to 2010-2011 year, the process was very confusing. This year, I found it to be much easier and less confusing.*

*Submitting the data for direct certification in August of 2010 was significantly easier than when I did it first in December of 2009.*

*The first year was more difficult, but even the signup for accessing the system was simplified and I think it is pretty easy to use.*

*The change for this year is so much easier to understand. Once I got it done for this year, it was hard to add names. I just wasn't understanding it.*

*Now everything is working quite well. The first times I tried to use direct certification it was very difficult. Some changes were made that make the direct certification process much easier.*

*It has worked much better since I am able to use microsoft word*

*This year direct certification was very user friendly. I experienced no problems and the process was relatively quick.*

*It's so much better than it was, I wouldn't dream of offering criticism at this point*

*I think it is very easy.*

*It was way better this past school year compared to other years.*

*This year the Direct Certification was easier than the previous year. Last year I found it to be quite confusing. I put it on save before I did it your way because I didn't want to lose it if I did something wrong. That was my mistake. Your directions were great.*

*Can't recall as I did it almost a year ago. However, I do remember that it was much easier to accomplish last year. I have had no trouble running the current direct certification program. I spent hours trying to use the previous method and never could get it to work.*

*This year it was much simpler than in years past. I don't know if that is because the system has changed, or I have done it a few times. The directions are quite lengthy and the information isn't always easy to get to.*

*They were good improvements done this year and I had no problems submitted our information.*

*I think this year the improvements were great and I had no problems in submitting.*

*This new program is much much better than the previous one. The old one was very hard to run.*

*The improvements made over the past couple years have made using direct certification MUCH easier than in the past.*

*It was very confusing at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year when the program was changed. I was pleasantly surprised, though, when I found it pretty easy to use.*

*The new system is so much easier than the old one that it was a breeze by comparison. Because I don't run it often I need to refresh how to do it each time but that is minor.*

*The way you run direct cert now is so much LESS intimidating than when it was first introduced. When we first had to do it, the whole process scared the daylights out of me. Making the file was daunting.*

*Setting up the initial data base was difficult. Once it is set up everything else seems to flow well. This year the access site is more user friendly. Last year was a nightmare.*

*Nothing - It actually is easier to use now.*

*It is much better than in the past*

*Last year the computer programming provided many obstacles. This year it was much easier.*

*When we first started with Direct Cert the directions were confusing. It has gotten better.*

*None at this time. Since the system was updated last year, it is very easy to complete.*

*This year it was a lot easier to upload the student file.*

*I really had trouble last year.*

*At this time I feel I have resolved all my issues I was encountering. The web-based program is much easier than before.*

*It was greatly improved last year!*

*None. Quite simple*

*It has become MUCH easier this year. The past programs were much more difficult to access and understand.*

*The new system is NOT at all confusing or problematic. I find it easy and effective to use. Prior to the upgrade, I had multiple problems that I believe were result of me using vista.*

*Much better this year with the formatting*

*Thank you for changing the format to "web-based". The former way was confusing and very frustrating for me although I still would submit a report twice a year.*

*None. At first it was quite complicated but now very easy to use. I run it twice a month especially when there is a large loss of jobs in our community.*

*None, the system now is 100% better than the original system.*

*It was very problematic my first time running to get the database to match exactly, even though the directions appear to be so easy. It took numerous attempts to get it correct. This year it was much easier with the new system.*

*The first year was very difficult because of improper computer programs, this year was much better.*

*The updated version for the 2010-2011 school year was much easier to use than the previous years*

*None. This new verification process is extremely easy to use and fast.*

*Originally, it was very difficult to transfer information. If you were not an IT person you basically were at a loss as to how to send information. Now that changes were made probably due to how hard it was, it is much easier to send and get information.*

*New system is much simpler and better than the old original one!*

*Our school is so small we are only required to do a verification of just one application per year.*

*There are no aspects that are confusing. In fact, it is a very fast and easy process to import and export the information.*

*Had problems last year, but this year everything is running smoothly.*

*It was easier this year with changes on your part.*

*The previous year in 2009 was confusing but now that it is improved it's so much nicer to run and fairly quick.*

*I think the update this year has made direct certification very easy to use.*

## What type of training, assistance, or other improvements do you think would help you with the direct certification process?

### Alternative solutions for small schools

*Do not make it required if you do not have students that match the list.*

*Simply or eliminate process for small schools or schools that may have only 5-10 students requiring direct cert.*

*Eliminate this process for schools with a small free/reduced population.*

*It is simpler now than it was to get the info to you, but maybe just making direct cert for school districts and not private schools would help. We have just a handful eating free and have no problem with getting paperwork from families!*

*I think that schools of our size should be exempt from direct certification. I would like more helpful assistance when I call with problems.*

*Small schools should not have to do it.*

### Anything

*Yes, extra training always benefits!*

*A great deal of help.*

*Any and/or all information is always greatly appreciated!!*

*Any type of training would be helpful.*

*All the training that will be offered for Direct Certification*

*All of the above*

*I personally could use more information about the process of using Direct Certification*

*Nothing specific, but I'm always open to new and useful information.*

*We need help with every aspect. Our local school district has been of some help, but they, too, are not able to explain why we have the difficulty that we do.*

### Detailed manual/Tutorials

*Hand outs.*

*Handouts*

*I would like to understand if running direct certification more than once a year would be beneficial to our district and why.*

*Better instructions for the export/import file and upload/download process should be available. We don't have a tech person available at all times for assistance.*

*Bringing the files back into our system.*

*It would be helpful if the directions on the WI DPI website could include more detailed, step by step, screen shots. Also, when DPI training is done on the verification process, a session on reading the match report would be helpful.*

*It would be great to have a PowerPoint to walk you through each step with screen shots.*

*Step by step instructions*

*A directory of who we can call with questions on mismatched students or students whose parents submit a case number, but are not matched on our report. DWD says we should call their caseworker. I don't know who their caseworkers are or how to reach them.*

*At this time, the notes I have are good. Problems come when there are new procedures.*

*Receiving complete and concise directions - I received great help last year from Diana Gleichauf*

*Setting up the process could be made clearer*

*Written directions would be nice. I have learned by doing more than written directions.*

*A step by step process manual on how to complete the process with phone numbers for technical help.*

*Step by step instructions are always helpful. I have not had a problem running mine, but any updates should always be supported by documentation.*

*A training manual or a person to visit and explain.*

*The overall understanding of problems that could arise and how and where to go to fix them. I had to call different places to find out what I was looking at and why it was not correct. Then to go to correct it.*

*A step by step guide through the whole process.*

*A, simple to follow, "working" user manual with real-life examples*

*Database creation, upload and download before and after direct certification can be confusing due to various file extensions.*

*We would appreciate training in how to access a database with our students who may have defaulted to the program throughout the year but we are unaware of their status. If we could easily access this information we could run a direct certification more often.*

*Step by step instructions make it much easier. It's nice when the instructions show you screen by screen what's next to do.*

*Clear concise step by step written outline and directions.*

*More literature*

*Step by step*

*Detailed manual*

*Training: It would be pointless if there are changes every year. Also, it would be time consuming; at our small school we have no time to take off and go to a training session. Assistance: It would help that when we call the phone number listed for help that there's actually someone available to help. Quite a few times when I call the number, I'm transferred to another person or department, or I'm given a different number to call. Other Improvements: Make the directions and process more user friendly/less complicated. This is not something we do on a daily or weekly basis. If we do the Direct Certification a few times a year, we have to follow the directions/instructions; it's not something we recall from memory.*

*A step by step set of instructions for setting up the data base.*

*Directions that are provided are clear for me to understand*

*I am good at following written directions. I prefer to have the training written or a tutorial on the web would be good.*

*The directions along with the pictures of what each screen should look like are very helpful.*

*I would need step by step directions.*

*I need specific directions on paper to do this, since I am not the computer savvy*

*I work well with written instructions. I would probably print out on-line instructions.*

*How to set it up and run it.*

*More trouble-shooting assistance would be great with more examples on how-to resolve different issues.*

*Step by step instructions*

*The direct cert process is clear but who to verify and why is not. Not to mention the confusing verification form that needs to be submitted.*

### **Guidance on extending eligibility to HH members**

*The new process for direct certification is much easier and quicker than the prior process. I think that the above mentioned "K" response could be investigated further. Other than that, I personally don't have any issues with the process. Thank you for the survey.*

*Right now I am feeling OK with the process. It seems not all family members are always included in the matches.*

*This year a lot of the family members were missing. In other words just one child was direct certified. In the correspondence to the families we did indicate they need to call us if all the family members were not listed but a lot of people did not call us.*

*If the system had some capability of identifying family groupings and providing a family group code of some form, would be very helpful.*

*It would be great if the system somehow could match up siblings. So often now, the names are not the same, but they are related and live in the same house. It would save some research.*

### **Guidance on resolving mismatches**

*I am very pleased the 'upload' process is much simpler now. I like to think in 'black and white' so any students that have a code other than Y or N sometimes confuse me. Not sure what training can do for that issue though.*

*Knowing where to turn for the unmatched students.*

*If there is a way to submit the files with hyphenated names that would allow them to process correctly. Interpreting the results correctly as far as if it comes back with a B, does that mean that everything matches but the birthdate?*

*I think this is a vast improvement from the old system and I appreciate Diana's help at DHFS.*

*Fix the suffix problem.*

*When we receive the file back there are names that don't match because of birth date, first or last name. We do not have a way to verify which information is correct; the district's or the agency's. We cannot get from the agency what they have on their records.*

*Getting the county to work with us better when we encounter an error. First name, birthdate, etc. It has been hard sometimes trying to figure out what we have different than the state records.*

*The one improvement would be using the child's legal name. The rest of the process is much easier than it was several years ago.*

*What to do when students come back with an F or B next to their name. How do we verify these students?*

*We are good. The only issue we continue to have is with the students that come back unmatched because of birthdates and/or other issues. We have to take the time to find out why they didn't match and change information in our student data base in order for them to match.*

*Any improvement that helps certify the children whose last names change often would be wonderful.*

### **Improve personal assistance (state, county, vendor)**

*Web site, e-mails tech support*

*I think help from DPI is a "must" especially if state needs the most accurate information.*

*Maybe having a technical support person more readily available would help.*

*This system has improved so much since last year's system. It is now user friendly! My biggest problem is that the filter on our district prevents me receiving emails at times, so I may not know there are updates as soon as I should. Not sure how to prevent that from happening.*

*It would be nice to have a 1 person contact at Green County Human Services to work with on Direct Certification.*

*It would be nice to have a specific contact person at Green County Human Services assigned to the school district to deal with questions on unmatched students. I realize information is confidential but I am considered a confidential assistant and deal with confidential information every day. GCHS and I should be able to communicate about unmatched students. I understand their reluctance to give out any information but the goal for both of us is to assist these families.*

*As long as nothing changes, it had helped having the help line when first dealing with it.*

*The written instructions were helpful and anytime I had any questions I would simply call the numbers listed in the instructions.*

*Telephone walk through help.*

*Just getting a contact at the county and having them communicate with us more efficiently.*

*When a question arises about a family's eligibility it would be nice to have a contact at DWD to call. Or at least the name/numbers for each county who we should call. When I have had questions about a family's status or eligibility, I've been told by DWD to contact the family's caseworker. I have no idea who their caseworker is or what department/person to call. A contact list would be nice.*

*Contact person-for questions and additional yearly trainings.*

*Someone to talk me through the process once or twice might make it easier. I admit I need to do it more often.*

*I think it is always great to have someone to talk with on the phone when I'm experiencing some difficulty with the program.*

*I had a difficult time saving my Excel spreadsheet in the proper format. The DWD Service Desk walked me through it.*

*The thing that helps most when I run into problems is the availability of help on the telephone if needed.*

*Sometimes, it takes so long to get a response from the DPI on an issue.*

*A number to call if I have questions.*

*A set form for the structure would be helpful, so we just have to plug in names and numbers.*

#### **In-person training/Webinar**

*It would be great to have an understanding of what the process is about and how it applies to our program. Assistance in putting together a system of implementation that is effective.*

*Walk through how to file.*

*As long as nothing is expected from us, none. If that changes, then we'll need basic training.*

*This job was added in the middle of the year with 2 hour training, so the only thing I need is to find some time to go on the dpi website and also talk to my CESA rep for our program to get jumpstarted again. It will probably be when school is out for the summer.*

*Webinars.*

*Maybe some in person training would be helpful for anyone with questions.*

*I think a training course for everyone would be helpful.*

*The first year I took over this job, I went to a DPI sponsored training session and learned a lot. Refresher sessions along this line would be helpful. I also learned plenty just by listening to the other trainees and their questions.*

*Re-fresher programs in July, it is not a program used on a constant basis.*

*DPI website webinars are helpful.*

*A webinar would be helpful.*

*The DPI-In person training was the most beneficial for me. At this point though, having done the process several times I feel comfortable with the web site training.*

*Possibly webinar with DPI or more complete instructions for processing.*

*Webinar training thru DPI possibly to help clarify the steps needed to complete the process. I need simplification of the process.*

*Maybe a training during one of the business manager's conferences (spring or fall) or during the accounting conference in March.*

*Don't know if the food service directors have any annual conferences.*

*To get a step-by-step demonstration the first round through. I'm unsure on how long the whole process takes. I have a note from the previous secretary that says "run direct certification the beginning of the 3rd week in August." That's all I aware of at this point. My CESA Rep has offered to do a WebX when the time comes.*

*I usually call the help number when I do it to help me thru it. If I have a newer video to watch before I attempt doing the direct cert. that would help to refresh myself.*

*More training would have been helpful at the beginning of implementation. I'm not sure that the amount of students that are even picked up in our district warrant the need for this process.*

*Training on any changes in the process.*

*Webinar might be helpful*

*Your DPI summer training is sufficient*

*Have someone come to explain it*

*A brush up would be nice and a clarification of some circumstances*

*A refresher course would be very helpful to help us out with confusing circumstances.*

*Training with what needs to be saved and for how long for audit*

*I would like more training on the follow through. I run it. I send the letters. I just would like "formal" training.*

*Just to get some one to one training*

*Attending another training. Maybe a Skyward step by step on the process.*

*Reviewing the whole process of creating, submitting and receiving direct certification files.*

*I would like a person to walk me through the process, a support person from the state.*

*Webinar might be helpful since it is a program I only run 1-2 times a year.*

*An online class would be nice*

*I would probably take a DPI "refresher" course if it was offered in the summer.*

*Hands-on training*

*It would be great if everyone had to take training from the State agency on how to create the files, change dates and formats so that everything was submitted correctly. I do think that this year was the best by far as it was so much easier than in past years.*

*Only to have the access and to have someone show me how to run it.*

*To have informative webinars available and a primary contact for the schools*

*Skyward has written a new program to fix the issue explained above, but I am nervous to import the names again after having so many problems this year. The process is relatively user friendly, and there have been changes over the years to make it easier. I would attend a summer DPI session on this if offered, or perhaps could resolve issues via a site visit.*

*Nothing right now unless something changes in the process. If so, an on line training would be what I would use.*

*Once a year training would be great. for an overall review.*

*On hands training since I have not received any training.*

*Just having yearly trainings to keep us informed of any changes that may happen.*

*I would like to see some training maybe during the summer months that would deal specifically with the whole direct certification process.*

*Classes, webinars something to explain the process.*

*If there are any changes keep the process as easy as possible, don't have so many steps to follow. The fewer steps that need to be taken the easier the process will be to complete. Keep the letter guide that is understandable. Have more video or webinars to explain the process with step by step instructions. Visual is good.*

*Just to get the program run to the state and get it back*

*Just a refresher each year. And of course, updates as changes take place.*

*I would like some hands on training where I bring my excel program to a meeting and someone walks me through it.*

*Continue classes with the DPI*

*How about a webinar we could consult as often as we need to.*

*Personal training. When I was in Chicago for nationals SNA the person read off of a piece of paper. It was very frustrating.*

*Only training received has been written communication with phone numbers to call for assistance from state. It is not a difficult process and I have done okay without training. The main issues have been with technology and have had to have our computer tech assist with those.*

*Since the import/export of files is done by our IT Department, it would be beneficial for both them and myself to sit thru a complete training to know the whole process and to understand the ease of completing direct certification more than once per year.*

*I would like to go to a work shop, have the computers available, and do it right there under the supervision of someone who knows the program, DPI, State, Cesa.*

*I think all persons in charge of the program should receive formal training on the process - either in person or via web-based conference.*

*It did take Skyward a long time to figure out that they had not been doing anything with the returned "matched" data in the beginning, but they have since "gotten it"! If the training could have been prior to implementation, this would have greatly improved the ease of use.*

*Maybe webcam's or something of that nature to show how to get a file ready to upload to the State.*

*Printed step by step directions is what I use. Maybe during audits, the auditor could walk a person through the system as a good review. I have trouble formatting the returned list. It is useable, but not neat to look at.*

*More practice or a video help.*

*Ongoing workshops.*

*In person staff training worked best for me. I do not care for on line videos or live feeds.*

*In person training would be helpful.*

*I would like an inservice directly from the DPI. I suppose they have a webinar on their web page.*

*I am a one person office and can't take time off from work and our small school really can't afford to send me away for training. I think the training on the website was very helpful. If that could be continued I should be fine.*

*In person training in base year.*

Someone to come in one on one and set up the program and run it for us the first time through. I have in the past given our list to the NLSD and they have run it through with theirs

#### Online

I did attend 1 training over a year ago in Madison and I have called the DPI with questions about ordering, forms, etc. Class in Milwaukee so we do not have to travel far.

#### In-person training

I went to the state conference a few years ago and it was not helpful at all. I tried to set things up but I could not import a database and once I typed up the whole thing could not figure out where to put it. I am working on it now and hope to complete the process by the middle of the month.

I work best when I have personal training. I need to bring my file to the meeting and be walked through the process.

For me, any training would be beneficial. I called the Public Instruction helpline numerous times to make sure I was doing things accurately.

I am going to attend one of the seminars explaining the whole process of Direct Certification to help me understand all the reports.

For the first 12 years that I have been at St. Francis de Sales School we never had anyone apply or qualify, so it is all fairly new to me.

A Webinar would be of greatest help to me. Thank you.

I think that having more website training videos for people who are more visual learners.

#### Better online tutorial

Good instructions on the DPI website or a contact person in case of a question. A possible refresher class in the area.

District wide training would be nice. It may be available, but as a private school principal, I am not aware of any.

I would like a refresher course online (webcast) before submitting the report in the beginning of August, then someone on the phone to be available to answer a question. This August, 2010, I received great support from the DPI over the phone.

Training video with step by step instructions for small schools were face to face training is not available.

The training I had came in the form of instruction sheets from the DPI. It was rather confusing. I had to call a number of times for help. I think the new system is better but not perfect.

It would be very helpful if we could have hands on training with this program. Combining some school districts where we all could be on a computer and walk through a dummy school through the process.

I think the training/assistance that is offered is acceptable.

Having somebody walk me through the process step by step - knowing what steps are most important

On site help when the program started would have been helpful.

#### On site

##### In house training

I would like some training this summer, with set up etc.

A training that will explain the certification process step by step.

#### Regular reminders/updates

If you feel that schools are not sending a student file often enough, it might be helpful to send email reminders on a monthly basis.

Continue to update if changes are made to the program

Monthly updates on changes made to the process would be helpful. (To me, not the superintendent.)

Nothing at this point. Only if something changes.

Just to keep updated on any changes.

I would like updates in advance when there are changes as to logging into the system on DPI's website.

I would like to see information, sent from DPI, in advance prior to starting direct certification if they are going to be changing their program access or information. I would also like to see updates from Skyward directed solely to the person in charge of direct certification.

I feel as long as we are kept in the loop with all changes and updates the system works very well.

I'm fine unless there are changes made in rules or procedures.

Emailing a reminder detailing the process each year.

It would be beneficial to have an e-mail or mail sent to me in July or early August as a reminder that Direct Certification should be done before school.

I do think the new web-based process for direct certification was less confusing this year. It would be beneficial to me to receive reminders to run the certification process multiple times throughout the year, as this is something I do towards the beginning of the year and forget about during the second semester.

To be kept abreast of any changes.

Reminders to run direct certification more often

Perhaps a suggested reminder email that it would be beneficial to run it more than once per year but all-in-all - a very good system now

*Please send e-mails and links to remind us where to get directions to submit our lists, what type of file, etc. This past year's was much easier than the previous year's  
Maybe a reminder to all about the newest, easiest way of submitting the information*

### **Results enhancements**

*Clearer report format*

*Error screens stating how our down-load files are incorrect.*

*If there was a much easier way to access the report.*

*When we receive the matches back, it would be helpful if we had a parent name or address on the information we receive back. But I don't know if that is possible.*

*I would appreciate it if the report would print the date and time of the run directly to the report.*

*It would be better if the report we receive back has a date and time stamp on it. Right now we just write it on the report manually.*

*I think a live thread on the D.P.I website would benefit all those like myself who have multiple roles with Direct Certification. That way the communications would be ongoing and not just once or twice per year and we could chat with other people who may be experiencing difficulties as well as successes and be able to share information with each other.*

*Add column headings to the results page. Also, somewhere on the report page, provide a key to the codes (example, N=No, etc.)*

*Being able to receive the report in a form other than publisher.*

### **Simple instructions "cheat sheet"**

*A step by step hand out of the direct certification process.*

*There has got to be a simpler way to get the information we need from the state. Not sure what kind of training or improvements need to be made, but something much more "user friendly" would be helpful.*

*Check list to follow. Unfortunately, districts all have different software, methods of performing, so, a checklist would have to be district specific. Because this is done once to twice per year, it is easy to forget and be confused by what to do with it.*

*Something sent to schools that basically gives step by step instructions and a number and name of a person to contact if there are problems.*

*Simple, easy step by step instructions in a bulleted format. Something I can look at and complete very quickly because I am responsible for a lot of other paperwork, etc. at my school also.*

*Send updated directions each year that are LESS than 20 pages long.*

*Something simple that would show each step, when to do each step and which forms are needed and where to find them.*

*Would be nice to have a quick reference sheet.*

*Easier understanding of what to do*

*A mailing with the email address and directions would be awesome since this process is only completed once a year.*

*A simpler explanation of what to do to complete direct certification.*

*Something very simplistic needs to be developed*

*Written instructions to print out make it much simpler to use*

*Maybe just a "cheat sheet" listing what is the basic steps to help remember the process.*

### **Simplify matching process**

*Ease in getting into the program. I realize security is a big concern.*

*A program that is more user friendly*

*I think sometimes the process of how to transport the file and how to import it back into the software is confusing. It just doesn't always seem as simple as it should be.*

*Easier website to use with loading the data.*

*Easier method of uploading our student data for matching.*

*If it was easier, I would do it more than once per year.*

*Let two individuals/school have the user name and password*

*An easier way to get the list of students I think districts don't run it as much as they could due to the fact it is such a project trying to actually run the certification. Just my thoughts.*

*Why can't the State send us a list as families become eligible for Food Share and W-2? Don't they have the school district information?*

*A simpler program*

*Simplifying the uploading of the files*

*The simpler, the better as far as I am concerned. I will do my best with whatever is available.*

*Making web site easier to access. Need to jump through too many hoops to gain access.*

*Better format*

### **Software-specific assistance**

*Networking with other districts to see their step by step process esp. those that use PowerSchool to learn tips & tricks.*

*I am going to need skyward training on the web on how this is done again. If you do not do something weekly or even monthly, it tends to get forgotten more easily. If DPI could offer some training on this keeping in mind skyward as the software being used that would be helpful as well. It would be nice if the list of students on WMLS could be looked at per district and a list of students emailed to us that are approved for direct cert and then we could do a mass entry off this.*

*This is a Skyward problem - as indicated above. Once the student is certified the name should not have to come up again on the list. With the current software direct certification is long and complicated. With other software companies direct certification is a simple click process.*

*We would like the information directly linked to our food service software so we don't have to reenter the data.*

*Power Points*

*More software training*

*Skyward needs to be more knowledgeable about the program and willing to make changes to the software.*

*I would like training from the software people, or from CESA both seem very difficult to get training from. I think that CESA should offer a training program for every software that is used in the schools in the state of Wisconsin. I was thrown into this direct certification, didn't know how it worked or what needed to be done to make it work. I spent hours last fall working with a gal from CESA and from the software company, because the CESA person was on vacation during a critical time of schools completing direct certification. It was a HUGE MESS. Our student software is not compatible with our food service software, so I had to enter 3000 kids' birthdates in order to do direct certification. I still don't understand all of the computer aspects of direct cert with our programs. I would appreciate a training book, step by step how to complete direct certification with the software program that we use in our school. As you can see I am VERY frustrated with this whole process, mainly because of our software, and the little support that we receive from CESA. I have asked for training from CESA but so far the CESA support person has not set anything up for our district. I am sure that we are not the only district that has problems.*

*Have specific training sessions for those who use specific software (skyward, PowerSchool, lunchbox, etc...) in one group. That way we can concentrate on our specific software procedures and not have to worry about all the other ways to do the DC from other software programs.*

*Just training with the schools database program.*

*Just keep making easier and more compatible with software we use.*

*I would like to see a training held for each individual computer program run regarding this. I would either like an eye link so they can walk write through it with you so you can take exact notes for every single step that you do.*

*Training specific with the skyward program we have*

*Just some classes on particulars of each operating system and how the whole process works*

*I needed to use Microsoft Word as a last resort because the Excel program did not work.*

*I just need to improve my computer knowledge and I think it would be less difficult.*

*Having to type in all the names seems redundant and adding and deleting those no longer in attendance while maintaining the names of students who attend year after year would be most helpful.*

### **State provides list of eligible students**

*More time in the daily work schedule. With less office personal and added duties it is hard to find keep up. The easiest way would be to have the State just send a list and updates as they happen.*

*The direct certification process would be greatly enhanced if the process went one way.*

*Have the districts sign a confidential agreement and have the county/state send us a list where we can verify names. The state should have a number that relates to a household that a district can match.*

*Direct training from Skyward; the state could forward a list to the school based on enrollment*

*Part of it is the software going from one system to another*

*Checking from one school year to the next. Wish school would get notice of new family waiting to processed at school level, may be approved at county 1st of month and wouldn't show on school system until report is run which may be later in month and we can't back date effective date*

*Perhaps allowing us to run a new report as of a certain date. That way we only get the names that have been added since our last run and not have to go through the whole list again.*

*There's always room for improvement. Software could be improved. Perhaps state could follow students and notify schools of direct certification through student numbering system - (ISES?)*

*Make it simple to submit. Too complicated through the current state way of doing things. Just let us give you our database of students.*

### **Other**

*Training parents to be accurate and consistent in providing student data.*

*Have everyone on the same PAGE both agencies*

*I sometimes find that we have students who qualify for this program, but don't show up on Direct Certification - is the information complete at the county level? This has improved since DC first began also.*

*Make the system easier and once it works, quit changing it. It worked fine last year, but not this year.*

*We were unable to complete on line process several years ago...have not tried since*

*I am confused on the running more than once a year. I would be worried that it would change what I already have in place.*

*More time...*

*I'm not sure that I need more training. I need the help here in my district during peak times such as beginning of the school year.*

*More time to understand it*

*A single website where you can enter the name of each student and immediately get confirmation back*

*A software program where you could just enter names and have the information given to you right away without going through several different steps to acquire it.*

*I think just using the system more and learning how to run the process on a more regular basis.*

*I just need to practice more often. I still have Cesa help me each time.*

*The setup process is difficult for agencies that don't have a technology person available to help them. Once the process is setup correctly the DC is fairly easy. We run DC at least once a month, if not more.*

*A person who knows how to run a computer*

*Having the information download into the format needed to process it.*

*Create compatible software that's more user friendly.*

*An easier program to file it with.*

**None: praise**

*I have never had a problem, the lady at the state level always helped me and that made it much easier.*

*The process was greatly improved with this last update.*

*I appreciate the quickness of getting a match this year over previous years. Jack Cook of CESA 5 is very helpful with the set-up, training and troubleshooting for Wordware and the feature of Direct Certification.*

*The staff at children and family services and DPI were very helpful. They always answered my questions quickly and effectively.*

*I think the tutorials on the dpi site have been good*

*I feel that I can run through the process quite easily.*

*I feel the web site is quite clear.*

*I appreciate the support given to me by the DPI staff.*

*I had one small question and it was cleared up in minutes.*