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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Launches Medicaid Pilot Project

### *More Maryland Students Connected with School Meals; Minimized Paperwork for Families and Schools*

**BALTIMORE, MD (September 15, 2022)** – The Maryland State Department of Education is increasing access to free and reduced-price school meals for economically-disadvantaged students this school year through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Direct Certification Medicaid (DCM) pilot project.

Maryland is one of seven states newly approved by the USDA to participate in the Medicaid matching pilot demonstration, which expands the Maryland Direct Certification System (MDCS) to include electronic matching with Medicaid data for School Year (SY) 2022-2023.

Learn more about the Medicaid process here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/direct-certification-medicaid-demonstration-project>.

The benefits of this initiative, which launched on July 1, 2022, include the following:

- Increased student access to nutritious school meals by identifying students who are income eligible via Medicaid. These students are not categorically eligible for free meals and might not otherwise apply for meal benefits via completion of a household Meal Benefit Application (MBA).
- Streamlined process of identifying children eligible for free or reduced-price meals and reduced administrative burden for local education agencies (LEAs).
- Relief of the requirement for households to complete an MBA. This is especially important for SY 22-23 as LEAs return to regular school meals operations.
- An increase in the number of students directly certified for free meals could have a positive impact on an LEA's decision to expand the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

“Ensuring more children have access to nutritious meals during the school day is vital to our mission of providing them with an equitable and excellent education,” said Maryland State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury. “We thank all of our State agency partners and are excited about the launch of this partnership, which will not only strengthen our capacity to reduce the administrative burden on our schools but help us more efficiently provide additional assistance to those who need it most.”

The passage of House Bill 1300, Maryland’s Blueprint for Education, in early 2021 required Medicaid as a matching element to directly certify children for free meal eligibility. In November 2021, the USDA accepted Maryland’s application with a start date of July 1, 2022. As the lead agency to develop the data sharing agreements and processes, the MSDE OSCNP initiated a collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). The project also includes partnerships with the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) and the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS).

The USDA started authorizing States to use Medicaid as a direct certification eligibility criterion since the 2012-2013 school year. Nationwide, there are currently 26 states participating in the demonstration projects. The USDA found that more than 1 million students qualified for free meals and 260,000 students qualified for reduced price meals during the 2017-2018 school year through these projects.

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