



2023-2024 Direct Certification Report Measuring School Poverty

State Overview

Direct Certification (DC) is used to measure poverty levels of students in Georgia. Directly certified students include:

- 1) Students living in a family unit receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food stamp benefits,
- 2) Students living in a family unit receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits,
- 3) Students identified as homeless, unaccompanied youth, foster or migrant, and
- 4) **Students living in a family unit with a Medicaid income that does not exceed free or reduced-price lunch eligibility standards.**

School Year	Avg. DC % (District)	Avg. DC % (School)
2018-19	37.8%	35.5%
2019-20	36.3%	33.8%
2020-21	40.2%	38.3%
2021-22	33.3%	31.7%
2022-23	37.5%	35.7%
2023-24	62.8%	59.8%

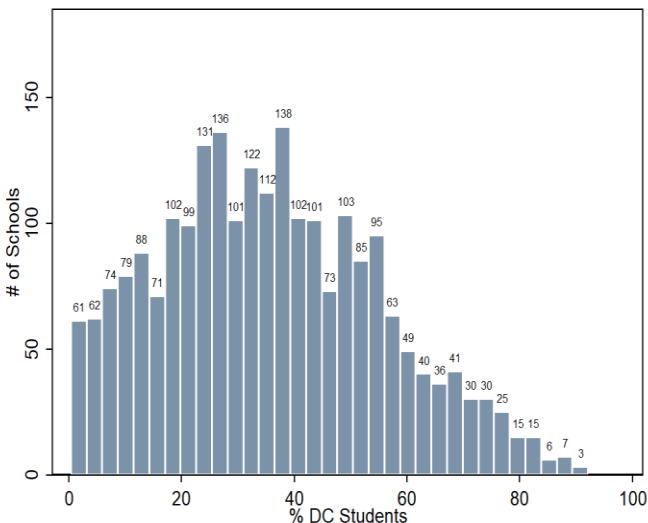
Changes to Direct Certification Definition. The definition of Direct Certification expanded to include four categories in 2023-24. The **fourth category** was added after Georgia began participating in the USDA's Medicaid Demonstration Project. Georgia's participation in the Project allowed for schools to use Medicaid income to determine students' free or reduced-price lunch eligibility.

By broadening the criteria, the number of students identified as Directly Certified for free/reduced-price meals (FRPM) increased. This was a particularly important policy change for students from low-income households who may have previously fallen through the gaps in the traditional FRPM application process.

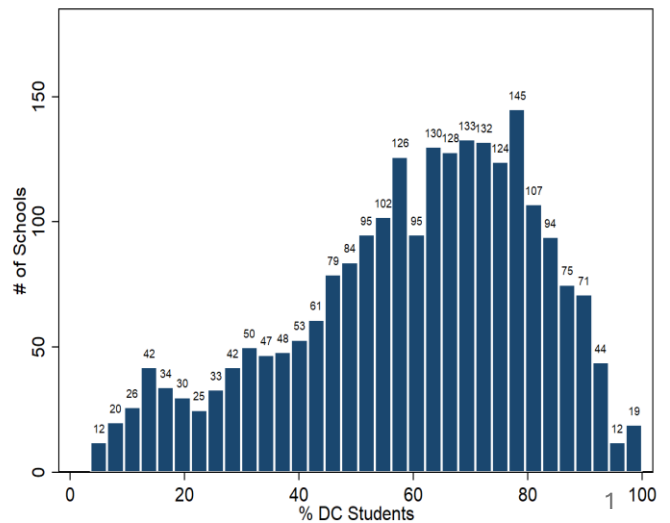
As a result of the definition change, the percentage of students identified as Directly Certified at both the school and district levels has increased substantially between 2022-23 and 2023-24. The increased rate of Directly Certified students, therefore, reflects a policy change and not a sudden increase in student poverty.

The graphs below show how the change in definition has led to an increased number of schools reporting higher rates of students identified as Directly Certified.

Spread of DC Levels in Georgia Schools (2022-23)



Spread of DC Levels in Georgia Schools (2023-24)

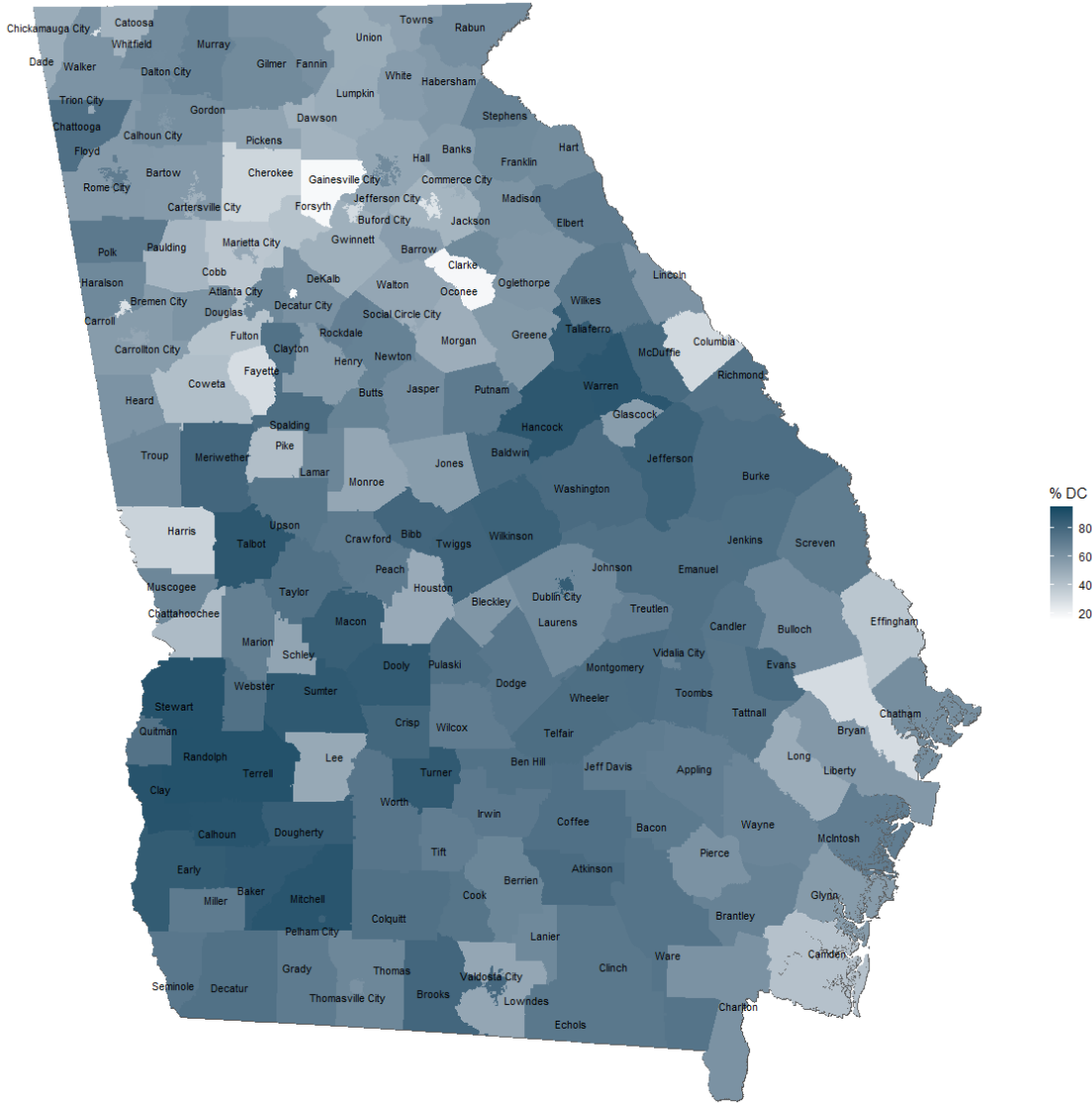




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School District Analysis

The map below indicates there is substantial variation of DC rates across school districts in Georgia. Darker blue signifies higher DC rates, and lighter blue/white signifies lower DC rates. The table below lists the five school districts with the highest and lowest DC rates in the 2023-24 academic year.



Five Highest Districts	DC %	Five Lowest Districts	DC %
Randolph County	89.6%	City Schools of Decatur	15.6%
Terrell County	89.6%	Forsyth County	18.1%
Stewart County	89.3%	Oconee County	18.6%
Clay County	88.8%	Chickamauga City	25.3%
Calhoun County	88.4%	Jefferson City	26.4%

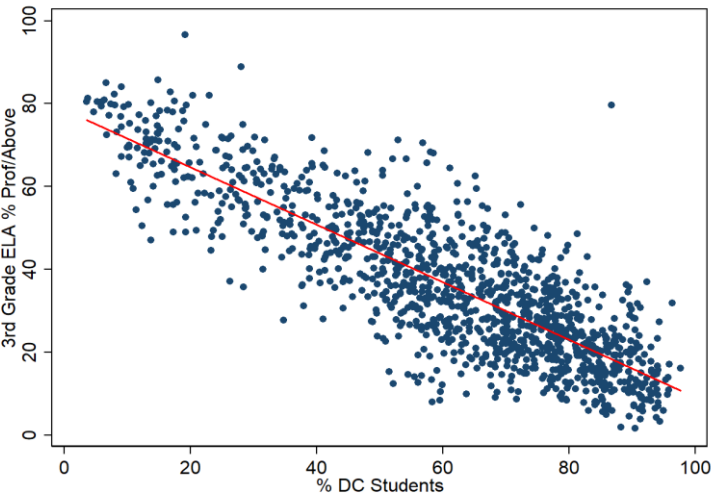


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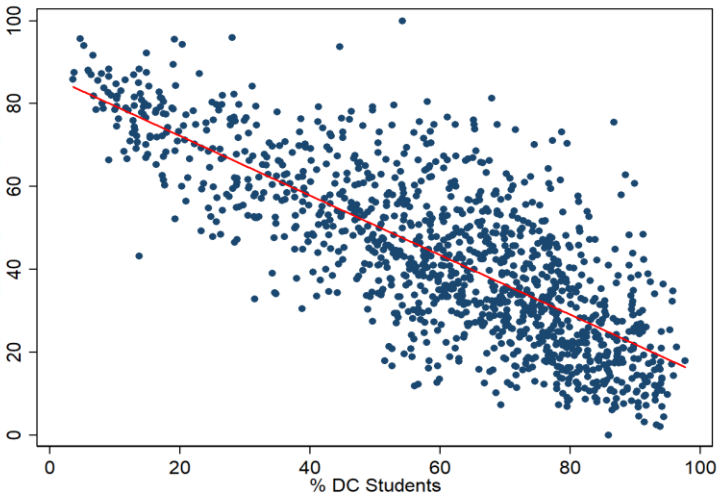
Direct Certification and Student Achievement

Research indicates student poverty is closely linked to student achievement. Limited access to resources, such as books, technology, and high-quality early learning opportunities, can hinder students' academic development. Research also shows student poverty can be associated with higher rates of absenteeism, which negatively impacts students' likelihood of graduation and limits students' post-secondary opportunities.

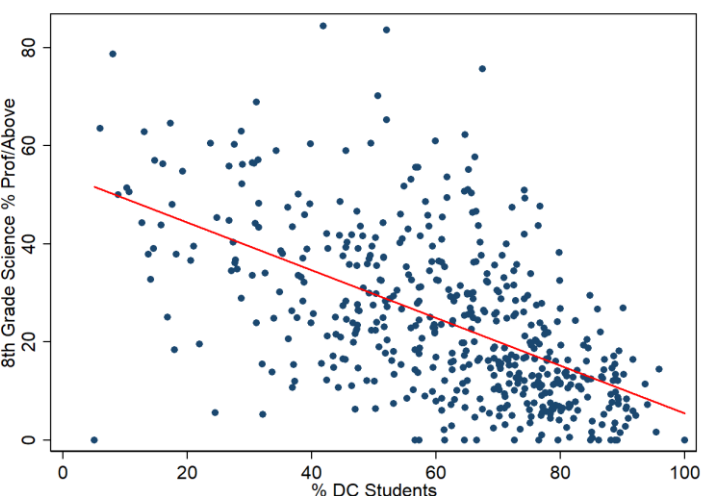
Direct Certification and Third Grade ELA Proficiency



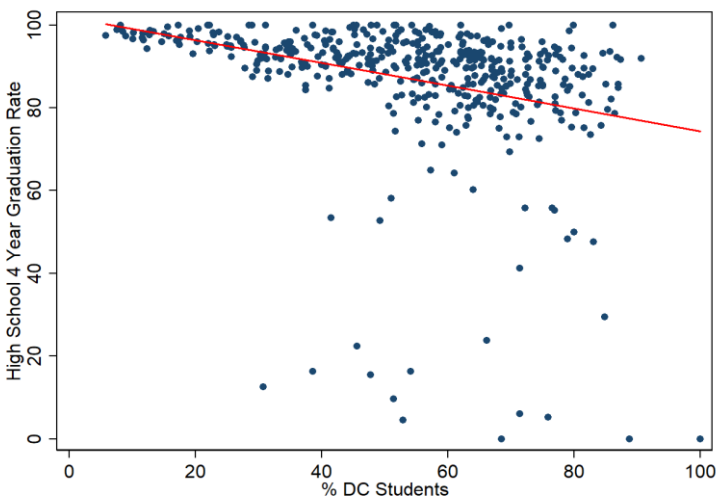
Direct Certification and Third Grade Math Proficiency



Direct Certification and Eighth Grade Science Proficiency



Direct Certification and High School Graduation Rates



The scatter plots and regression analyses shown above indicate that the percentage of DC students in a Georgia school is significantly and negatively associated with 3rd grade ELA proficiency ($\beta = -0.70, p < 0.05$), 3rd grade math proficiency ($\beta = -0.72, p < 0.05$), 8th grade science proficiency ($\beta = -0.49, p < 0.05$), and high school graduation rates ($\beta = -0.28, p < 0.05$). In other words, schools with higher rates of student poverty tend to have significantly lower test scores and graduation rates relative to schools with lower rates of student poverty. During the 2023-24 school year, schools with 80% DC students had 3rd grade ELA proficiency rates that were, on average, almost 30 percentage points lower than those schools with 40% DC students.

Appendix: Data Source and Methodology

Memo: 2023-2024 Direct Certification Report Measuring Student Poverty

1. Table: Average DC % for Districts and Schools
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school and district) 2023-24.
 - b. Notes: average of all districts' or schools' directly certified (DC) rates in that school year.
2. Visual: Spread of DC Levels in Georgia Schools (2022-23)
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school) 2022-23.
 - b. Notes: The X axis represents values of DC rates in a school, and the Y axis represents the total number of schools with that DC rate. The number of schools is showing on top of each bar.
3. Visual: Spread of DC Levels in Georgia Schools (2023-24)
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school) 2023-24.
 - b. Notes: The X axis represents values of DC rates in a school, and the Y axis represents the total number of schools with that DC rate. The number of schools is showing on top of each bar.
 - c. School District Analysis
4. Visual: School District Analysis
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (District) 2023-24.
 - b. Notes: Darker shades indicate higher district-level direct certification rates.
5. Table: School District Analysis
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (District) 2023-24.
6. Visual: Direct Certification and Third Grade ELA Proficiency
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school) 2023-24, Georgia Milestones End-of Grade (EOG) Assessments 2023-24.
 - b. Methodology: Linear Regression
7. Visual: Direct Certification and Third Grade Math Proficiency
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school) 2023-24, Georgia Milestones End-of Grade (EOG) Assessments 2023-24.
 - b. Methodology: Linear Regression
8. Visual: Direct Certification and Eighth Grade Science Proficiency
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school) 2023-24, Georgia Milestones End-of Grade (EOG) Assessments 2023-24.
 - b. Methodology: Linear Regression
9. Visual: Direct Certification and Direct Certification and High School Graduation Rates
 - a. Data Source: Direct Certification GOSA downloadable data (school) 2023-24, Georgia College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Reports.
 - b. Methodology: Linear Regression

Residential treatment centers (RTC) were excluded from the analyses.