



# Understanding TANF in Colorado's School Nutrition Programs

## USDA Regulations on TANF

- ❖ TANF is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, a federal program that provides cash assistance to needy families with dependent children.
- ❖ Children in a household receiving TANF may be classified as categorically eligible for free meals.
- ❖ Categorical eligibility for free meals is limited to beneficiaries in states with TANF standards comparable to or more restrictive than the federal Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEGs).

## How TANF Operates in Colorado

- ❖ In Colorado, TANF is known as Colorado Works.
- ❖ TANF operates in all counties and is administered locally by the county departments of human/social services.

## Types of TANF in Colorado

- ❖ State Diversion or Basic Cash Assistance (BCA)  
(Uniform statewide basic eligibility and minimum benefit levels)
  - Children in households receiving state diversion or basic cash assistance are categorically eligible for free school meals, as these households are at or below 130% of the federal poverty level.
- ❖ County Diversion  
(Income guidelines are based on levels determined by each county)
  - Children in households receiving county diversion TANF benefits are not necessarily categorically eligible for free school meals, as the county income guidelines may be too high – and more information is needed on household income and size, to determine if the household meets the IEGs.
- ❖ Child Only (May also be referred to as Child Only Basic Cash Assistance)  
(Cases containing children living with a caretaker who does not have financial responsibility; TANF considers the child's income only)
  - Children in households receiving child only basic cash assistance are not necessarily categorically eligible for free school meals, as more information is needed on household income and size, to determine if the household meets the IEGs.

## Qualifying for School Meal Benefits

- ❖ Meal Benefit Applications
  - Households receiving state diversion or basic cash assistance TANF may apply for school meal benefits by listing their TANF case number and the name of the person(s) receiving the benefit.
  - Households receiving county diversion or child only TANF will need to supply household size and income information on the application.

## School Food Authority (SFA) Responsibility:

- Determine as categorically eligible for free school meals only the children from households submitting TANF applications based on state diversion and basic cash assistance.
- To facilitate this, SFAs may need to provide additional instructions/guidance to applicants, regarding which types of TANF qualify for categorical eligibility.
- Retain documentation on how the child was certified for free meals, including the type of TANF and the date of certification.

## Direct Certification:

The Office of School Nutrition is currently working on incorporating state diversion and basic cash assistance into the Direct Cert system for automatic matching. This functionality will be available in the coming school years.

## References:

- Eligibility Manual for School Meals:  
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/eligibilitymanualwithhighlightedchanges>
- Colorado Works:  
<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDHS-ColoradoWorks/CCW/1251575230384>