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NM Human Services Department Works to Get More Kids Enrolled in Free and Reduced School Lunch Program

Children SNAP and TANF Clients Matched Monthly for School Lunch Program

Santa Fe, New Mexico – The New Mexico Human Services Department will begin monthly matches of children participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program with the Public Education Department to automatically enroll the children in the National School Lunch Program for free and reduced meals.

“Children who participate in either the SNAP or TANF programs automatically qualify for the National School Lunch Program,” said Kathryn Falls, Human Services Department Secretary-designate. “We believe a monthly match of new children participating in either program will allow more New Mexico children access to nutritious meals during the school day when they need energy the most.”

The eligibility guidelines for the National School Lunch Program are up to 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and up to 185 percent FPL for reduced meals. Current New Mexico eligibility for SNAP is also at 130 percent of FPL, while TANF is even lower at 85 percent of FPL. So a family of three, with a monthly income at or below \$1,984 would likely qualify for SNAP, therefore qualify the children for the National School Lunch Program.

The Human Services Department is in the process of implementing broad based categorical eligibility, increasing SNAP eligibility guidelines from 130 percent of FPL to 165 percent of FPL, which means an estimated 5,500 more families per month will qualify for SNAP benefits and about \$10.5 million additional SNAP benefits per year will flow into the state. A collateral benefit of this increase will result in the addition of up to 2,600 children per month receiving SNAP benefits who will qualify for direct certification for the National School Lunch Program. The Department plans to have this change in effect in early spring 2010.

In 2003 the Human Services Department began once-a-year direct certification with the Public Education Department for the National School Lunch Program. In 2009 there were two direct certification matches. However, with the recent increase of SNAP and TANF cases, growing by the thousands each month in New Mexico, the Human Services Department and the Public Education Department agreed to conduct a monthly direct certification.

In October 2009 there were 162,604 children participating in SNAP, a 23 percent increase from the same time last year, and 1,845 more children participating than just the month before.

On December 18, 2009 a list of children who have participated in SNAP or TANF between June and November 2009 will be shared with the Public Education Department who will then provide the lists to each school district for processing direct certification for the National School Lunch Program. Then beginning in January 2010 a monthly report of new children participating in SNAP or TANF will be shared for direct certification.

“Conducting these matches on a monthly basis means less of chance of a child missing a meal during the school day because they don’t have the money to pay for it,” said Veronica Garcia, Education Secretary. “We are very pleased to participate in monthly direct certification.”

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