

The KEYS Program --- Things to Know

Keystone Education Yields Success

Who is eligible?

- ✓ Pre-60 month TANF parents who are currently enrolled in community college or have an approved AMR stating that they plan to attend community college. The student must be in (or plan to enroll in) a career specific, credit bearing certificate or associate's degree program
- ✓ Post-60 month TANF parents who were attending the KEYS program at the time they reached their 60th month may continue to participate in KEYS.
- ✓ A KEYS student who loses TANF eligibility, but continues to receive food stamps and to attend community college, may remain in KEYS as a grandfathered participant. Those who do not remain eligible for food stamps may continue to receive KEYS services through the end of the semester.
- ✓ Up to 17 percent of the students served by the KEYS program can be "food stamp only" community college students. (Those grandfathered from TANF do not count toward this 17 percent.)

How does a TANF parent get into KEYS?

- ✓ Parents may come into the KEYS program at **any time** during their first 60 months on TANF, as long as they are a viable candidate for community college. For example:
 - A parent who is applying for TANF may elect to go to KEYS *instead* of being referred to the Work Support Component (WSC);
 - A parent who has been referred to the WSC, but who decides she or he would rather begin community college, may elect to leave the WSC program at any time. The parent must be referred to the KEYS program by the contractor, with notice to the CAO; and
 - A parent who is in the Career Development Component (CDC), but who decides she or he would rather begin community college, may elect to leave the CDC program at any time. The parent must be referred to the KEYS program by the contractor, with notice to the CAO.
- ✓ A TANF parent who is not subject to the TANF work requirements due to an exemption (e.g., disability or child under 1) or good cause (e.g., domestic violence) may volunteer to participate in the KEYS program. These students are not subject to hours requirements and may not be sanctioned. (Note that volunteers may be asked to meet reporting requirements (see below), but that they cannot be penalized if their hours fall short of the 20 or 30 per week required of mandatory work (RESET) program participants.)
- ✓ Food stamp only parents may get into KEYS (if there are slots available) by volunteering to be in the Food Stamp Employment & Training Program and asking that their attendance at community college be approved on their Employment Development Plan (EDP). (Note that such students may be approved for community college, even if there is no space for them in the KEYS program.)
- ✓ Importantly, every community college must follow an open enrollment policy, so that TANF parents may come into the KEYS program **at any time**, even if the semester is already in progress. These students will be provided with appropriate, countable activities to do pending the start of the next session.

What are KEYS participation requirements for TANF parents?

- ✓ The rule is 20 hours per week for TANF parents with a child under 6 and 30 hours per week when none of their children are under 6.
- ✓ Because DPW recognizes the value of education to parents and their families, the Department counts participation in KEYS toward the TANF work requirement for up to 24 months. This means that for 24 months students may meet their 20 or 30 hour per week obligation through a combination of classroom hours; study time; and, if necessary, work-related activities, such as

part-time employment, work study, paid work experience, or community service.

- ✓ An exceptions policy to the 24 month rule is still being negotiated. If an exception is granted, the parent would continue to be able to count a combination of classroom hours, study time, and work-related activities, as needed, toward the 20 or 30 hour per week obligation (whichever is applicable). If an exception is not granted, the parent would have to meet the core 20 hour per week requirement through a work-related activity (work, work study, paid work experience, community service) and the parent's classroom hours and study time would only be countable for any hours above 20 that may be needed.

Here are two other important things to note about the 24 month rule:

- ✓ 24 month clock began on October 1, 2006 for parents already enrolled in KEYS, or from the first month the parent enrolled in KEYS at the community college; and
- ✓ Any month that a KEYS (or postsecondary education) parent meets their 20 hour core requirement through a work activity (as opposed to vocational education) will not be included in the 24 month count. So, students who work during the summer for at least 20 hours per week, even if they also take a class or two, are *off* the 24 month clock for the summer months. Likewise, a student who works 20 or more hours per week while attending school during the Fall or Spring semester, will be *off* the 24 month clock for any month that they do so

What are KEYS reporting requirements for TANF parents?

- ✓ All KEYS students must have a weekly schedule showing what activities they are doing each day to meet their work requirement. In addition, community colleges have the option of requiring or not requiring students to sign in at the beginning of each day when they arrive on campus and at the end of each day when they leave campus.
- ✓ Students will be given one hour of unmonitored study time per credit. Supervised study time at designated supervised study sites on campus will be counted in addition to unmonitored study time if it is listed on the student's weekly schedule. Study time hours cannot exceed the hours recommended by the community college.
- ✓ Students are required to hand into the KEYS office at the end of each week an attendance sheet to verify program participation and activity hours.

Are there Supportive Services?

- ✓ KEYS parents, whether TANF or food stamp only, may be eligible for supportive services, including child care, transportation, clothing allowance, books, school supplies, school registration fees, tools and equipment, etc. from the CAO. Both TANF and food stamp only parents may also be eligible for enhanced supportive services from the college, including eyeglasses, hearing aids and extra allowances above the amount available from the CAO for car purchase, car insurance, clothing, and transportation.
- ✓ Gas cards will be issued by the community college as a performance incentive to reward students who met their work participation requirements.

What about Tuition?

- ✓ KEYS parents in the TANF program who do not qualify for financial aid, e.g., due to past loan debt, are eligible to receive up to one semester of tuition from the KEYS program to give students time to consolidate their loan(s) or otherwise address their eligibility for financial aid.

If you are receiving TANF cash assistance or food stamps and are interested in enrolling in KEYS, contact your County Assistance Office caseworker or the KEYS student facilitator on campus.