

Providing Paid Employment Opportunities for TANF Participants Engaged in Vocational Education Programs: Examples from Denver, Colorado; Kentucky; and California

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ABSTRACT

This practice brief profiles three programs, two statewide and one local, that provide work opportunities to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients who are participating in vocational education programs. We selected programs that combine vocational education and paid work because this strategy reinforces the emphasis of the TANF program on encouraging recipients to engage in work as quickly as possible. This also allows them to meet their core 20-hour federal work requirement through paid, subsidized employment and to use their hours spent in school to meet any required hours over 20 (i.e., non-core hours), as long as they are directly related to a specific job or occupation.

INTRODUCTION

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) established a framework for creating a time-limited, work-based assistance system that emphasizes a “work first” approach. It requires states to meet federally mandated work participation rates by engaging recipients in federally defined activities. All recipients with a work requirement must participate in one or more of nine “core” activities, of which vocational education is one, for 20 hours per week. Recipients with a child age six or older are required to participate for 30 hours per week and two-parent families are required to participate for 35 hours if they don’t receive federally-funded child care assistance and for 55 hours if they do. For any hours required over 20, recipients can participate in core activities for more hours or in three additional non-core activities, two of which may encompass vocational education—job skills training directly related to employment, and education directly related to employment (for recipients

ABOUT THIS PROJECT AND BRIEF

This practice brief is one of a series describing state and local *Strategies for Increasing TANF Work Participation Rates*. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) resulted in significant increases in the effective work participation rates that states must achieve. The series of briefs is designed to assist state and local officials in thinking about strategies that might aid them in meeting federal work participation requirements in their TANF programs.

The briefs in this series draw on information gathered from case studies of nine programs and describe approaches adopted by selected states and/or local offices that might be of interest to other program administrators. None of these programs has been rigorously evaluated, so their effectiveness is unknown. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services does not specifically endorse any of the approaches described in this series. All briefs in the series can be accessed at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp08/TANFWPR>.

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who have not completed high school or the equivalent).

There are two constraints on participation in vocational education programs: (1) an individual's participation can be counted toward the core 20-hour requirement for no more than 12 months, and (2) no more than 30 percent of recipients counted as meeting their work participation requirement can be participating in vocational education. Recipients participating in vocational education programs for longer than 12 months can count as meeting their work requirement as long as they participate for the first 20 hours in other core activities, such as paid employment, work experience, or community service, and the remaining hours spent in school are directly related to a specific job or occupation. In 2006 (the most recent year for which program participation data are available), recipients enrolled in vocational education accounted for only 17 percent of recipients who met their work requirement.

States might be able to use vocational education programs to increase their work participation rate in two ways. First, they can increase the number of recipients participating in vocational education programs. Second, they can provide work opportunities to recipients participating in vocational programs that last longer than 12 months if the hours spent in school are directly related to a specific job or occupation.

In keeping with PRWORA's emphasis on a "work first" approach, this practice brief profiles three programs that provide TANF recipients participating in vocational education programs with paid work opportunities. Two of these programs operate statewide in Kentucky and California and one operates locally in Denver, Colorado. California and Kentucky recently expanded their efforts to provide work-study opportunities to TANF recipients in an effort to make it possible for recipients to continue to participate in vocational education programs that last longer than 12 months. The Essential Skills Program (ESP), operated by the Community College of Denver, provides TANF recipients with opportunities to participate in a four-month vocational training program that includes a paid internship in their field of study.

Two features of these programs are distinctive:

- They provide opportunities to combine education and work, providing extra income, exposure to the world of work, and a strategy for meeting work participation requirements for TANF recipients.
- They hire dedicated staff to provide personal support to participants and act as a liaison between the community college in which the programs are housed and the TANF agency.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS PROGRAM (Denver, Colorado)

ESP, the centerpiece of the Community College of Denver's (CCD) Workplace Learning Project, was launched in 1998 specifically with TANF recipients' work participation in mind. And while the program is not exclusively targeted to TANF recipients, over the years about 70 percent of the participants have been from TANF. The four-month vocational certificate program prepares students for jobs in high-demand occupations through a combination of coursework and paid internships.

Three cohorts, each with approximately 50 students, enroll in the program each year. The specific vocational tracks offered respond to labor market demand and are selected for both the availability of jobs and the potential for career advancement. The program is targeted to individuals who are unemployed or underemployed due to a lack of vocational training or work experience. Minimum education requirements vary with the educational demands of the specific vocational track and may be as low as a seventh-grade score on a standardized test such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

ESP was created to address some of the unique circumstances of TANF recipients. The working theory underlying the program is that an integrated combination of work and school will help students transition from the crises that dominate their lives to a performance orientation that is more likely to lead to success.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS PROGRAM

Key Program Features

- Vocational offerings that change with labor market demand
- Preparation for jobs with advancement potential
- Work-focused classroom instruction
- Paid internships
- Comprehensive “whole life” approach
- Cohort structure that creates naturally occurring peer support groups
- Low staff/participant ratio
- Short duration (4 months)

Noteworthy Achievements

- 90 percent of participants in the education and internship portion of the program meet their TANF work participation requirement
- Among recent cohorts, 77 percent have completed the program

Key Program Components

Work-Focused Classroom Instruction. Coursework for ESP is divided into a “workplace core” and a “vocational core.” The workplace core, completed in the first month of the program, consists of 35 hours a week of soft skills (such as time management, conflict resolution, and communication) and work-readiness instruction and activities as well as preparation for work/life balance and the transition to college. The vocational core requires that students spend about 15 hours per week in the classroom during the following three months in which they are also completing a paid internship. The vocational core classroom work involves at least six credit hours of coursework in the student’s occupational track coupled with more general coursework, including reading, writing, speaking, communications for the workplace, and computer literacy. The full program carries 16 to 18 college credits, of which about one-half to two-thirds can be transferred if a student continues on in a related college-degree program.

Subsidized Paid Internships, Job Placement, and Post-Employment Support. After completing the workplace core, students in ESP are placed in a subsidized paid internship, where they typically work 20 hours per week for the remaining three months of the program. Current participants are paid \$7.50 per hour for all positions.¹ Their wages are paid with TANF funds but they are on the payroll of Employ America, a limited liability corporation that provides payment and back-office support for all TANF subsidized positions through a contract with the TANF agency. Employ America is a national organization that was established to provide TANF and other employment service providers with the same payroll operations provided to large corporations. Employ America handles all payroll, unemployment programs, tax filings, and benefits administration associated with the employment of low-income individuals. The TANF agency provides direct payment for workers’ compensation. Employers do not incur any costs for hosting an intern. Program participants complete a weekly timesheet that is signed by the supervisor and delivered directly to Employ America; they receive paychecks every other week. Since the primary activity during the vocational core is a paid internship, for purposes of TANF work participation that time can be counted as subsidized employment. In Colorado, two-thirds of the income that all TANF recipients earn (not just those in this program) is disregarded for 12 months, so all participants remain eligible for at least a partial TANF grant while they are in the ESP program. The amount of the grant for which they remain eligible is dependent on their individual circumstances, including the number of children in the household and other unearned income they may receive (such as child support).

Recognizing the importance of the first months of work in the successful transition to sustained employment, program staff supervise internships closely through cooperative agreements with employers. Participating employers sometimes hire the interns for full-time unsubsidized positions after they complete the program, but employers are not required to do so. The ESP program staff give priority to internships with open positions behind them to increase the chances that participants will be hired.

Employers have the option of converting the internship to an on-the-job training (OJT) position and

receiving a 50 percent wage subsidy, but few choose to do so because most say the reimbursement process is cumbersome. If employers convert the position to an on-the-job training position, the OJT program requires them to hire the ESP intern as a regular employee once the training period ends. The length of the training period varies by occupation and must take into account the content of the training and the prior work experience of the participant, as appropriate.

Personal Support. ESP staff are committed to giving program participants the support they need to succeed in the program. Thus, all staff provide intensive and ongoing personal support. The type and level of support depends on the individual participant and may include career counseling, mentoring, and linking recipients with other services to address personal and family challenges such as domestic violence or substance abuse. Staff also help participants obtain child care assistance and address transportation needs. Program staff are in regular contact with participants, either at school or at the internship sites, and they continue to maintain regular contact to provide support for one year after program completion. Staff also are developing a website to allow participants to remain in touch with staff beyond that time.

Job Search Assistance and Unpaid Community Service Placements. For those students who do not move directly from the internship into full-time work, job search services are available through ESP. Participants also can utilize all of the career counseling and job placement services at any of the local WIA One-Stop Career Centers. Unpaid community service placements also are provided to ensure that participants continue to build work experience and meet their TANF work requirements. Because labor markets tend to fluctuate, ESP staff members are in constant contact with current and prospective employers in order to develop internships, unsubsidized positions, and unpaid community service placements.

Service Delivery and Administrative Approach

Enrollment. Students typically are recruited to participate in ESP through a weekly employment services vendor fair at the TANF office, and most of them already have completed a month-long job-

readiness and career-planning program conducted by TANF. Additionally, candidates may be recruited by an ESP staff person who spends two days a week at the TANF office. ESP staff assess interested TANF recipients for basic skill levels, interests, and goals. Those who seek to enroll in the program must meet a seventh-grade literacy requirement. If they do not have a high school diploma or equivalent and they are close to earning a GED they can enroll but must simultaneously work on completing their GED testing with help from ESP staff. If TANF recipients are referred to the ESP program midsemester, they can gain work experience through “community-based training,” a new community service program that links participants to volunteer opportunities in a setting related to their desired track in the ESP program. This new option provides recipients with a way to meet their work requirement while keeping open the option of participating in ESP at the start of the academic term.

Staffing. ESP is delivered by a team of 10 staff members (eight full-time and two part-time) who are employees of CCD, each with a distinct role in the program. One or more staff positions are dedicated to each of the following responsibilities: (1) project management, (2) educational oversight and coordination, (3) assessment and recruitment, (4) track coordination and student support, (5) individual case management, (6) job development, and (7) job retention. This staffing results in a low staff/participant ratio (1:5), which provides staff with the time they need to respond to participants’ individual circumstances.

Administrative Structure. There are four organizations—three public and one private—directly involved in the administration and operation of ESP. The TANF agency provides funding to the Denver Division of Workforce Development which, in turn, contracts with CCD to operate the program. Staff from CCD are responsible for all day-to-day operations, including providing information to TANF staff on hours of participation in the program. Employ America acts as the employer of record and pays program participants while they are completing their internship. Another important contributor to the project is the constellation of community employers who advise program staff on high-demand occupations with opportunities for advancement and

provide internships and permanent jobs for program participants. Program staff conduct outreach to employers. Over the years, they have developed strong connections to employers in the fields in which they work and seek their input whenever they are considering program changes.

Funding. Denver’s Division of Workforce Development contracts with CCD to operate ESP. The annual budget to serve up to 150 students is about \$600,000. The college’s general fund contributes \$12,000 and the remainder comes from TANF. In the past, the program also received funds from the Welfare-to-Work grants program and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Students are assessed the usual CCD tuition rate of \$80 per credit hour, but most are eligible for enough financial aid to cover the costs, including books and supplies. In instances where they are not eligible for aid (for example, if they do not yet hold a high school diploma or equivalent), ESP has dedicated funds to assist them.

Program Results

Nearly 90 percent of TANF recipients participating in the training and internship portion of the ESP program meet their required work hours. Since its inception in 1998, ESP has served 795 students, including 536 TANF recipients. Between the spring of 2005 and the summer of 2007, 121 individuals enrolled in ESP; 93 of them (76 percent) completed the program, although only 70 (58 percent) completed the certificate.

ESP is a small program. Therefore, despite its apparent success in helping individual TANF recipients meet their work requirements, the contribution it makes to helping the county meet its TANF work participation rate is small. However, ESP staff believe that with additional funding, the program model could be operated on a larger scale and that its strength lies in providing TANF recipients with an experiential educational opportunity that provides them with the skills they need to work in high-demand occupations that have potential for earnings growth over time.

READY TO WORK

Program Highlights

- Links TANF recipients with existing vocational programs offered by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System
- Provides dedicated staff who support students and act as a bridge between the TANF and the community college systems
- Uses two tiers of work-study placements, one to focus on soft skills and one to build credentials in a chosen field
- Creates a formal pathway for TANF recipients in need of remedial education or activities to fill gaps before the start of a semester

Noteworthy Achievements

- Enrollment of large number of TANF recipients in community college programs (almost 10 percent of statewide TANF caseload)
- Substantial use of work study (50 percent of program participants)
- High retention rates (84 percent from one semester to the next)
- Higher average grade point average (2.73) than for all community college students (2.66)

READY TO WORK (State of Kentucky)

After passage of PRWORA, the Kentucky Legislature required the state welfare program to improve access to education for those on public assistance. This led to the establishment of the Ready-to-Work (RTW) program in 1999 on the 16 campuses of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). RTW is designed to support TANF recipients in the pursuit of post-secondary education by providing personal support, linking participants with services at the colleges and in the broader community, and providing work-study opportunities. The ultimate goal of the program is to prepare participants to qualify for higher-paying jobs. Work-study has been a significant focus since RTW’s early days, and that component has assumed even greater importance since the passage of the DRA.

A related program, Work and Learn (WAL), was created in 2003 as a feeder program for individuals interested in attending community college but who are not academically ready to do so or do not have a high school diploma or GED. Both RTW and WAL are offered statewide. While RTW operates similarly throughout the state (for example, there is an onsite coordinator on each campus), the information presented below is based specifically on a site visit to the Ashland Community and Technical College, which serves a five-county area in northeastern Kentucky.

Key Program Components

Vocational Education Through Existing Community College Programs. Rather than creating vocational opportunities specifically for TANF recipients, Kentucky's RTW program helps recipients participate and succeed in existing community college programs while meeting their work participation requirements. Recipients can pursue certificate, diploma, and associate-degree programs and are permitted to select any field of study offered by the participating college. In Ashland, TANF recipients most often pursue nursing, education, social work, or medical office systems—programs that align with employment opportunities in the area. Across the state, KCTCS offers a broad range of certificate and degree programs including dental hygiene, culinary arts, cosmetology, digital game design, horticulture, heavy equipment operation, radiography, and auto body repair, among others. Students who may eventually want to pursue a four-year degree also can initially earn an associate's degree through KCTCS.

Work Study With Tiered Placements. When TANF recipients enroll in RTW, they are eligible for RTW work-study benefits. They also may be eligible for federal work-study benefits. When participants are eligible for both, staff help them to maximize their use. For example, federal work-study funds cannot be used during school breaks or the summer, but RTW work-study funds can be used during these times. A key benefit of providing recipients with a work-study position is that it allows them to participate in a vocational education program for longer than 12 months and still meet their work participation requirement if the hours spent in school are directly related to a spe-

cific job or occupation. It also helps them meet their work requirements when school is not in session.

The Ashland RTW program uses two different types of work-study placements in a tiered system. The initial work-study placements focus on building basic job skills and allowing the individual to settle into a regular schedule of school and work. Most placements are at the community college or in nonprofit organizations. At the community college, participants work in such places as the library, a student support lab, or an administrative office doing clerical work. At nonprofit organizations, the work they do depends on the agency's focus and might include such tasks as organizing clothing at a thrift store or performing administrative duties such as filing or answering the phone. The primary goal is to find a placement in a nurturing environment where the individual can begin to build the soft skills (for example, time management and communication) needed to succeed in the workplace. Participants with multiple limiting conditions can be placed in the RTW office, where they perform clerical tasks and can be more closely monitored.

After participants have mastered basic work skills, such as working required hours regularly, they move to a second-tier placement, where they can begin to build skills in their field of interest. These placements are very individualized and are selected to help recipients gain work experience and credentials to qualify for jobs in their field of study once they have completed their education. Individuals who have work histories need less time to develop basic job skills and are placed into second-tier placements sooner. Those who are hired for a work-study placement complete an employment contract with the employer and are paid by the community college. The coordinator checks in regularly with the employer to make sure the placement is working out.

RTW participants are eligible for up to \$2,500 per year in RTW work-study benefits. Each community college in Kentucky sets its own wage for work-study; in Ashland, the wage is \$6.15 per hour and most students work 15 hours per week. Earnings from work-study are disregarded when calculating the amount of a recipient's TANF grant, but they are counted as income for calculating food stamp benefits. However, it is relatively uncommon for

recipients to lose food stamp benefits as a result of their work-study earnings because that income is usually offset by school expenses.

Remedial and Transitional Education Assistance.

The WAL program contracts with Kentucky Adult Education, the state agency that operates adult education centers in each of the counties across the state, to assist TANF recipients who are not college-ready but have an interest in pursuing an education path. WAL provides remedial education to recipients with a high school diploma or GED who are not performing at the academic level required by the college; it also helps individuals who do not have a high school diploma or GED to obtain one. Finally, the program provides a structured activity for recipients who are college-ready and enter TANF in the middle of a semester or during the summer.

WAL participants complete 10 hours per week of individualized basic education, which may include remedial education, GED preparation, English as a Second Language, or some combination of the three, and 20 hours per week of participation in countable work activities. This instruction is offered at county adult education centers. WAL participants are eligible for first-tier work-study placements, following the same structure and guidelines as students enrolled in the RTW program, or they can complete their 20 hours through community service or unsubsidized employment.

Unpaid Community Service and Work Experience.

To stretch the limited financial resources available for the RTW and WAL work-study program, participants in both augment their 15 hours of paid work-study with 5 hours of unpaid community service or work experience, almost always at the same agency. The duties for the community service or work experience hours are the same as for work-study. Recipients who have previously failed to meet their work requirements and are interested in attending the community college may participate in an unpaid community service position in a supportive nonprofit environment for 20 to 30 hours per week to demonstrate their ability to adhere to a fixed and demanding schedule.

Personal Support. The program coordinators who work at each of the community colleges are the back-

bone of the RTW program. They act as both local program administrators and case managers. They guide TANF recipients through each stage of the program, beginning with completing the community college and financial aid applications. Once TANF recipients are enrolled in the community college, the coordinators help them select courses, access the supports provided by the college, resolve conflicts, and identify work-study and permanent employment opportunities. They also work closely with other agencies in the community to help program participants find community resources to address personal and family challenges. Case managers for the WAL program provide comparable assistance to WAL participants. Ashland has been extremely successful at bringing a broad range of community agencies together to help TANF recipients pursue education. The agency heads meet monthly for at least half a day, and share new resources and discuss cases that may need additional support.

Service Delivery and Administrative Approach

Program Eligibility and Enrollment. In Kentucky, all recipients are permitted (and encouraged) to participate in vocational education, but the process of identifying those for whom post-secondary education may be most appropriate differs from office to office. The two criteria used by Ashland are education levels and performance in an initial job-readiness program. Although students can take remedial courses through the community college, staff encourage recipients to do their remedial work through WAL. All TANF recipients in Ashland also are required to participate in a four-week life skills and job-readiness program as their first employment activity. Those who demonstrate an ability to manage their time and complete the work required of them are encouraged to participate in RTW.

Participation in the four-week life skills and job-readiness program gives individuals the opportunity to identify an employment or career path that will allow them to achieve their goals and to learn and practice the soft skills they must master to succeed in a vocational education program or in the workplace (for example, time management, communication, and conflict resolution skills). Because the job-readiness program is highly structured (participants are required to participate 30 hours per week for four

weeks), it allows staff to identify recipients who cannot meet the demands of daily participation in a scheduled activity. The job-readiness program, therefore, serves as an effective screen for potential RTW and WAL participants, not only because it gives clients a taste of life in the classroom but also because it allows program staff to gauge clients' likelihood of adapting to a demanding program. While the decision to participate is ultimately up to the student, the process of determining a path for each client is a team effort that includes staff from the TANF office and other key welfare employment and education partners.

Staffing. The RTW and WAL programs in Ashland are operated by two full-time college staff: an RTW coordinator and a WAL case manager. Both work closely with the local TANF office. These individuals are—as is typically the case across KCTCS—human services professionals with a social service background. Their duties are similar; both provide case management and direct services to program participants, and both make referrals for supportive services, assist with work-study placements, monitor participation, and communicate with the TANF office. The RTW coordinator is also responsible for outreach to employers and the community, and serves as a job coach for students who have secured employment. These staff are supported by a regional and a state coordinator, both of whom work for KCTCS.

Administrative Structure. The RTW program is operated by the KCTCS. Through a statewide contract, Kentucky Adult Education operates the adult education component of the WAL program. The state TANF agency acts primarily as a funder of the program and ensures that the program design is consistent with TANF goals and requirements. The RTW coordinators and WAL case managers at each college provide personal support and day-to-day management for the program. TANF recipients also receive case management services through the local TANF agency. In Ashland, the coordinator works directly with the TANF case managers to monitor participation in program activities.

Funding. RTW and WAL are funded through a grant to KCTCS from the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. The \$4.4 million grant pays for the staff (20 RTW coordinators and 18 WAL case

managers statewide) as well as the work-study positions; the funding is split nearly evenly between those two elements. Each college has at least one dedicated staff member for each program. Program enrollment, the size of the TANF caseload, the availability of federal work-study funds, and prior-year use at each site are considered when work-study allocations are made.

Program Results

In the spring of 2007, 1,783 TANF recipients (close to 10 percent of Kentucky's TANF caseload) were enrolled in RTW college sites. More than half (1,027 recipients) participated in work-study. In Ashland, more than half of the RTW students consistently participate in work-study (funded by RTW), 15 percent participate in community service activities, and 20 percent participate in an internship or practicum (such as nursing). During fiscal year 2006-07, statewide, 451 TANF recipients participated in the WAL program and 286 of them (63 percent) participated in work-study. Ninety-nine percent of students enrolled in RTW and 90 percent of students enrolled in WAL met their TANF work requirement.

RTW's performance is evaluated against the same outcome measures that the community college monitors for all of its students: retention and academic performance. The retention rate from the beginning to the end of the 2007 spring semester for RTW participants was 96 percent; the retention rate from the fall of 2006 to the spring of 2007 was 84 percent. On both measures RTW surpassed the performance of the general community college population. The grade point average for RTW students during the spring 2007 term was 2.73 and 56 percent of RTW students exceeded the average college GPA of 2.66. The RTW program began tracking the number of RTW participants graduating from KCTCS colleges in the spring of 2001. Since then, 1,737 RTW participants statewide have graduated from KCTCS colleges and almost 800 participants continued their post-secondary education (for example, by attending a four-year college) after graduating.

Historically, Kentucky has been one of the few states to enroll substantial numbers of TANF recipients in vocational educational programs. For example, in 2006, the latest year for which work participation

data are publicly available for all states, Kentucky enrolled 2,180 TANF recipients in vocational education, accounting for 34 percent of all participating families in Kentucky, and double the fraction participating in vocational education for the country as a whole. Building on its longstanding commitment to providing TANF recipients with opportunities to increase their skills to prepare them for higher-paying jobs and creating an infrastructure to provide those opportunities within the existing community college structure, Kentucky has successfully used its work-study program to continue to provide TANF recipients with the option to pursue longer-term vocational training programs. The strategy Kentucky has used is one that could easily lend itself to replication in other states, especially those with a strong network of community colleges that offer a broad range of vocational and technical educational opportunities.

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE CALWORKS PROGRAM (State of California)

California established the California Community College (CCC) CalWORKs initiative shortly after the passage of PRWORA, just as Kentucky did. (CalWORKs is the name of California's TANF program.) CCC CalWORKs, a partnership between the CCC Chancellor's Office and the state's Department of Social Services (DSS), is a campus-based program focused on basic and technical skills development in fields with strong local labor market demand. It provides TANF recipients with comprehensive and coordinated support services that allow them to obtain the education and experience needed to transition off welfare and into a career. As in Kentucky, the CCC CalWORKs program is offered throughout the state, but local community colleges decide how to implement it. To understand how the program operates, we conducted phone discussions with program administrators from Long Beach City College (LBCC) and two community colleges within the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD), East Los Angeles College (ELAC) and Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC). While program operations and offerings vary from site to site, state law requires that all CalWORKs programs be tailored to the specific needs of program participants and not duplicate services already offered by the college.

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE CALWORKS PROGRAM

Program Highlights

- Links TANF recipients with existing vocational programs offered by local community colleges and creates new programs to address unique needs of TANF recipients
- Dedicated staff to support students who are TANF recipients and act as a bridge between TANF and the community college systems
- Dedicated funding for child care for students participating in community college programs
- Work-study programs tailored to local circumstances
- Targeted to TANF recipients who don't find employment after four weeks in job search
- State funding with local match requirements

Noteworthy Achievements

- Successful in enrolling large numbers of TANF recipients in vocational education programs; 18,749 recipients enrolled statewide in December 2007
- Substantial statewide expansion of participation in work-study, from 890 TANF recipients in December 2005 to 1,757 in December 2007

In 2006, as a part of efforts to increase the TANF work participation rate, the state legislature allocated \$8 million to community colleges statewide to increase work-study placements and \$1 million to provide additional funds for job development and placement activities. Community colleges were expected to use the work-study allocation to increase the number of off-campus placements and they were required to provide a dollar-for-dollar funding match. The additional placements were to be targeted to CalWORKs students who had an employment plan in place and needed hours to meet their work participation requirement. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) worked with both LACCD and LBCC to apply for these funds. LACCD received \$1.7 million to create additional placements and expand job development efforts, and

LBCC received \$300,000. The DPSS agreed to cover 25 percent of the cost of the work-study wages using TANF funds.

Work Program Activities

Vocational Education Through Existing and Newly Created Community College Programs. TANF recipients who do not find employment after four weeks of job searching are encouraged to pursue additional education and if they do, are required to pursue a program of study that will lead directly to employment. The community colleges in Los Angeles County and around the state have identified existing programs that meet this requirement and also have created new programs that address some of the special circumstances of TANF recipients. These programs include short-term training, certificate, and associate degree programs. The short-term training programs that are especially popular among TANF recipients include food service, computer/office skills, child development, and health occupations. Several of the short-term programs offer open-entry classes so TANF recipients can enter at any time. Statewide, a number of certificate programs were developed or redesigned, using CCC CalWORKs funds dedicated to curriculum development, to help CalWORKs students enter occupations where movement up a career ladder is possible. Some of the certificate programs created include pharmacy technician, geographic information systems, bookkeeping, and culinary arts.

Work-Study. Work-study is intended to help students meet their CalWORKs work requirements while offering them valuable work experience and an additional source of income. Since it is funded by the state and the counties, CCC CalWORKs work-study is not subject to the same restrictions as federal work-study programs, though state and federal work-study funds may be combined, in which case the federal rules would apply. (As an example, students participating in the federal work study program cannot work during school breaks and they cannot work for a private employer.) Students are eligible for work-study if they have completed at least six units of credit courses, are currently enrolled in six units of credit courses, and have a grade point average of at least 2.0.

LACCD and LBCC offer students three types of work-study placements: (1) on-campus; (2) off-campus, typically in small businesses or nonprofits; and (3) off-campus in Los Angeles government agencies. CCC CalWORKs requires that a work-study placement match a recipient's occupational goal, although in practice it is not always possible to achieve this. Placing students in government agencies was a major focus of the county's efforts to expand off-campus work-study opportunities, because many students have an interest in pursuing human service careers and employment has been expanding in the public sector. Several county agencies, including the social services, health and mental health departments, and the school system, agreed to accept work-study students. The typical wages are \$8 to \$9 per hour for entry-level positions and \$10 to \$11 per hour for students with work experience. Work-study wages below \$12 do not affect the student's CalWORKs grant.

The community colleges employ several strategies to increase the chances that work-study placements, especially those in the private sector, are successful. All students must have completed at least one semester of classes (a minimum of six credit hours) before being placed in work-study, a requirement that allows them to settle into college and also gives the staff a chance to assess students' readiness for work-study. Since demand for work-study funds may exceed supply, slots often are competitive and colleges are allowed to develop their own criteria for eligibility and priority beyond the state requirements. For example, ELAC expects students to attend at least three job-readiness workshops before participating in work-study. In order to identify students who may be most successful at off-campus placements, some of the community colleges require students to participate first in an on-campus placement where they perform a variety of clerical or administrative tasks.

LBCC requires students to participate in an unpaid on-campus work experience placement before receiving a paid work-study assignment. According to the LBCC job developer, the benefits are that students have a better understanding of what is required for work-study and they demonstrate their ability to meet the 32-hour participation requirement. Students are interviewed for the unpaid positions and are expected to exhibit professional behavior on the job. If they are turned down for one position, they can apply for

another. College offices submit performance evaluations for each student and the CCC CalWORKs program advisor assesses each student's attendance, initiative, customer-service skills, computer skills, and attitude on the job. These evaluations are used to identify students who are ready to move into paid work-study positions. Students combine the unpaid work experience with weekly professional development classes.

Work-study employers serve as the employer of record (except in the case of Los Angeles County government) and are responsible for paying 25 percent of a student's wages and all taxes (including FICA and Medicare). They also are responsible for covering workers' compensation. The CCC CalWORKs program covers the remaining 75 percent of the student's wage. Employers submit timesheets every other week, pay the full wage, and are reimbursed by CCC CalWORKs at the end of the fiscal year.

For work-study placements in county government agencies, DPSS covers 25 percent of the student's wages and taxes and CCC CalWORKs covers the remaining 75 percent. The participating government agencies do not contribute financially to the program. DPSS did not want to serve as employer of record and therefore contracted with the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to assume this role. The government agencies in which students are placed submit timesheets to the WIB every two weeks and the WIB delivers paychecks to the community colleges every other week for student pick-up.

Comprehensive Service Coordination. CCC CalWORKs is explicitly charged with interfacing with the county welfare office, other public agencies, and the broader community college infrastructure to facilitate students' transition into college and work and to ensure non-duplication of services and the efficient use of public funds. ELAC, LAVC, and LBCC programs take a basic case management approach, whereby program advisors identify student needs and make referrals to the appropriate office or agency. Examples of such referrals include services to address domestic violence, mental health issues, housing problems, financial aid, transportation assistance, and legal issues. CCC CalWORKs case management also involves communication with the student's

TANF caseworker, to report on the student's activity in the program and to advocate so that students receive the services they need. CCC CalWORKs case managers also handle the various subsidies for which CalWORKs students qualify, including childcare vouchers, clothing stipends, and reimbursement for the cost of books.

On-Campus Subsidized Child Care. Since most TANF recipients are single mothers of small children, accessible, affordable childcare is critical to CalWORKs students' ability to meet work participation requirements and be successful in their program of study. A substantial portion of CCC CalWORKs funding is dedicated exclusively to child care. CalWORKs students can place their child in an on-campus child development center or receive a voucher to purchase child care from another provider. Each LACCD college has a contract with the on-campus child development center to provide slots for CalWORKs students. Even so, finding child care placements in on-campus centers can be difficult, and ELAC and LAVC centers accept only children who are age 3 or older. If families cannot find a placement on campus, they must look elsewhere for a provider, but they can receive a voucher to cover the cost of the care.

Service Delivery and Administrative Approach

Program Entry. TANF recipients can enter the CCC CalWORKs program in two ways. First, students already enrolled in a community college program who become TANF recipients can continue their course of study and have access to all the benefits of the CCC CalWORKs program. Second, recipients who complete four weeks of job searching and do not find employment undergo a thorough assessment to determine the best employment or career path, with one of the possibilities being enrollment in an educational program at the community college. (Former CalWORKs recipients who received cash assistance within the last two years also are eligible.)

Staffing. Each CCC CalWORKs program has an on-site program coordinator or director employed by the local community college who is responsible for program operations, collaboration with local college officials, and coordination with the state CCC Chancellor's Office and the county welfare office. Pro-

gram staff on all campuses typically consist of case managers or program advisors, counselors, and job developers. Case managers are responsible for enrolling students in the program, managing their participation according to TANF rules, serving as liaisons with TANF case managers, and advocating for students vis-à-vis service providers within both the college and the welfare system. Counselors provide both academic (for example, course selection and education planning) and personal (for example, mental health) support for students, and they are typically highly skilled with advanced degrees in therapy or counseling. Job developers manage program relationships with employer partners, conduct job-readiness workshops, guide students through work-study, internship, and permanent placements, and collect timesheets.

Administrative Structure. DSS, which is under the California Health and Human Services Agency (HHS), oversees the CalWORKs program. The Welfare-to-Work division within DSS sets state policy and monitors the CalWORKs program. Each county is responsible for administering CalWORKs under the supervision of DSS. The California Department of Education administers adult education and vocational education programs that provide education, training, and job placement services to teens and adults, including CalWORKs recipients. The CCC CalWORKs program is operated out of the CCC Chancellor's Office.

Funding. The CCC CalWORKs program is funded through a combination of state and federal TANF monies and local matching funds. Since 2002, the statewide funding level for the program has been \$43 million, \$35 million of which comes from the state and \$8 million from the federal government. The state requires that \$15 million of the \$35 million that comes from the state be spent on child care. The community college districts are required to provide a one-to-one match for the \$20 million in state funds not designated for child care. Matching funding can come from federal, state, or local funds received by the district as well as from private sources. The \$8 million that comes from federal funds does not have matching requirements or restrictions on how it can be spent. The community college can count as matching funds up to 25 percent of the work-study wage for CalWORKs students who work on campus. Funds

are allocated to districts based on the number of CalWORKs students receiving services from the CalWORKs community college office in each district. Community college districts decide how to allocate funds to the colleges in each district. The CalWORKs program in LACCD has a total budget of \$8 million and LBCC's program is \$1.83 million. Los Angeles County provides just under half of the matching funds in both districts; the remaining matching funds come from a variety of sources, including student financial aid (that is, Pell grants) and state grants.

Program Results

Participation in vocational education programs has remained relatively constant in California over the last several years, with just under 30,000 CalWORKs recipients enrolled in community college programs in any one semester. The majority (16,230 TANF recipients) are referred to the community college by the TANF office. Most of the rest (13,282) are self-referred and a small number (363) have been off TANF for less than two years and are still eligible for the program. Participation in work-study, however, has increased substantially since the passage of the DRA. Between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, the number of TANF recipients participating in work-study increased by 38 percent, from 3,120 to 4,317 students. On-campus placements increased by 26 percent, from 2,642 to 3,339 students, and off-campus placements more than doubled, increasing from 478 to 978 students. Even with these increases, recipients participating in work-study in California account for a very small share of recipients required to participate in work activities. Consequently, the increase in the number of recipients participating in work-study likely contributes to only a small increase in the percentage of TANF recipients meeting their work requirements.

Two studies that predate the most recent policy changes have documented the role California community colleges play in helping students transition from welfare to economic self-sufficiency. One of these reports shows that welfare recipients attending a California community college increased their earnings by 42 percent on average in the first year after leaving college; average increases as high as 78 percent were reported for students leaving with a specif-

ic vocational emphasis.² A second follow-up study showed that CalWORKs students were twice as likely to work year-round after attending community college and the more education obtained in community college the greater the increase in earnings. Earnings increased substantially for CalWORKs students after college, including for those who entered without a high school diploma. CalWORKs students who completed a vocational certificate or associate degree program tended to have higher earnings and employment rates than those who completed non-vocational programs.³ An important limitation of these studies is that they do not account for differences in the characteristics of the recipients who chose to attend the community colleges that might have made them more likely to move into higher paying jobs and work more steadily even in the absence of participation in such a program.

CONCLUSION

For TANF offices, combining vocational education with paid or unpaid work opportunities, along with strong case management, can make the most of the limited time their clients can devote to vocational education activities to meet participation requirements. If recipients spend 20 hours working (regardless of whether they are paid or not), their simultaneous education activities need not count toward the 12-month limit on countable participation in vocational education, effectively extending their allowable time in classroom activities if necessary. At the same time, community colleges' historical role in work-force development places these programs in a good position to connect with employers who might otherwise be less willing or less capable of hiring and retaining low-skilled or inexperienced workers.

For TANF clients, the combination of vocational education and work experience also is potentially very valuable. Welfare recipients have often had unsuccessful experiences with educational systems, just as they tend to have had little time on the job. These

combined programs make schooling relevant by tying it to work, and they make work less intimidating by building participants' skills and confidence in the classroom. Because they focus on concrete steps from school to work to career, these programs may enhance clients' technical skills, build their experience, sometimes provide them with a credential, and set them on a positive trajectory for further education and employment.

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is interested in knowing whether readers of this brief found it useful and how it has informed their work and interests in this topic. You are invited to send comments on how you found out about the brief and whether it contributed to considerations concerning policy implementation. Please email your comments to pic@hhs.gov and include the title of the brief in the subject line of your email.

NOTES

¹ In the earlier years of the program, participants were paid the prevailing wage for the industry in which they were employed and were hired as employees of the community college which paid unemployment insurance and workers' compensation without any reimbursement from TANF.

² Mathur, Anita, with Judy Reichle, Chuck Wisely, and Julie Strawn. "Credentials Count: How California's Community Colleges Help Parents Move from Welfare to Self-Sufficiency." Report prepared by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for the Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2002.

³ Mathur, Anita, with Judy Reichle, Julie Strawn, and Chuck Wisely. "From Jobs to Careers: How California Community College Credentials Pay Off for Welfare Participants." Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2004.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS

The Deficit Reduction Act (Title VII, Subtitle A)

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Using TANF Sanctions to Increase Work Participation Rates

Kauff, Jacqueline, Michelle K. Derr, LaDonna Pavetti, and Emily Sama Martin. "Using Work-Oriented Sanctions to Increase TANF Program Participation." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., September 2007.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/welfare_employ/sanction_pol/reports/sanction_pol/sanction_pol.pdf

Universal Engagement and Working With the Hard-to-Employ

Kauff, Jacqueline, Michelle K. Derr, and LaDonna Pavetti. "A Study of Work Participation and Full Engagement Strategies." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., September 2004.

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/full-engagement04>

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