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**Levers for Change: Educational Opportunity
Centers and Welfare Reform**

This article examines the history and rationale behind restrictive educational policies in welfare reform and advises ways to increase access to higher education for welfare recipients. Many research studies have shown the personal and societal benefits of increased educational attainment. Six EOC's were profiled to exemplify successful strategies. The author offers specific recommendations for EOC projects to works with policymakers to reverse restrictive educational policies and unlock the doors of opportunity for welfare recipients.

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Levers For Change:

Educational Opportunity Center's and Welfare Reform

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In 1996 Congress passed welfare reform legislation entitled, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act (**PRWORA**). This legislation limited or restricted postsecondary education as an allowable work activity for welfare recipients. **TRIO** programs that serve adults, Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), Student Support Services (**SSSP**), and McNair programs have been adversely affected by the act. In 1998-1999 over 53% of EOC participants were engaged in welfare to work programs.

In the mid-1990s when welfare policy was developed the country was in the midst of a turbulent economic period. Washington lawmakers faced a huge budget deficit, growing national debt, and high welfare caseload numbers. Many lawmakers perceived welfare to be an ineffective and inefficient system. They developed welfare policy based on myths and stereotypes of welfare recipients.

Policymakers worked to end what some called the "culture of dependency" and adopted a "work first" model of welfare reform. A work first program moves people who have little or no work history to work quickly. Work first advocates maintain that education and training are more valuable and meaningful after a recipient has taken a job. They see work as the best learning tool. These lawmakers believed that a work first program would succeed only when there were no exceptions to the rules. Thus, prohibiting postsecondary education was essential. If lawmakers allowed recipients to attend college, it would undermine the premise of welfare reform-getting recipients to work (Dann-Messier, 2000).

The shift in public attitudes concerning who welfare should serve did not occur overnight.

It took sixty years after the first welfare program was enacted for a major revamping of welfare policy. When President Clinton signed welfare reform legislation that dismantled the entitlement program started in the 1930s, he declared that he was "ending welfare as we knew it." While this declaration could be interpreted as campaign rhetoric since the bill passed during a presidential election (between President Clinton and Senator Robert Dole), the act did fundamentally change the nation's welfare system.

PRWORA promotes work as the desired outcome for recipients, with education subordinate to the overarching current national welfare policy of work first (Brown, 1997).

PRWORA focuses on job search and job placement assistance as the path to self-sufficiency and replaced the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988. FSA encouraged education and training as the route to economic independence. Since the enactment of welfare reform legislation in 1996, the world has changed significantly. Nationally, the budget deficit has been eliminated, the federal budget has a surplus, welfare caseloads have dropped dramatically and most states have huge TANF surpluses due to the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) provision in the current legislation



(Schott, Lazere, Goldberg, & Sweeney, 1999, p. 1). As a result of the dramatic decline in welfare caseloads most states have met their work participation rates. All those factors could lead to a revision in the federal definition of allowable work activities to include postsecondary education now or during **TANF** reauthorization.

Revising the current definition of work to include postsecondary education for welfare recipients would increase their educational attainment levels thus enabling them to engage in the economic resurgence and become financially independent. Inserting higher education into the definition of work serves two purposes. First, welfare recipients could attend college by counting postsecondary education as an allowable work activity to meet work participation rates. Secondly, if enough individual's participate in approved work activities states could design a postsecondary education program for all low-income adults as a stand-alone activity (Cohen, 1998; Gruber, 1998).

The federal welfare regulations released in April 1999 acknowledged the importance of education for welfare recipients. Officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (**DHHS**) urged states "to adopt programs designed to take advantage of existing educational opportunities that encourage adults and children to finish high school, attain basic levels of literacy, and supplement their education to enhance employment opportunities by including postsecondary education in the 12 allowable work activities" (TANF Regulations, 1999, Preamble). The emphasis on education in the final regulations came as a result of pressure from outside the department, as noted in a memo by the Center for Women Policy Studies (May, 1999) which stated, "the most common issues raised by commentators on the preliminary regulations one was on access to postsecondary education and those comments had a positive and significant impact" (Stoll, 1999, p. 1).

Background

In order to fully understand welfare policy development in the mid-1990s one must recall the political and economic forces influencing policymakers in America at that time. Politically, a major power shift occurred in the White House and in Congress. In 1992 Bill Clinton was elected president, the first Democratic president since Jimmy Carter left office in 1980. Clinton defeated George Bush who had been president for one term after serving eight years as Vice President to Ronald Reagan. The most significant transformation occurred in 1994 when Republicans took control of the House of Representatives. This "Republican Revolution" set out to diminish the role of the federal government and give power back to the states through their reform program entitled, "The Contract with America." Reforming welfare was a major part of the Contract with America as was the elimination of the United States Department of Education.

TRIO Programs

In 1965, Congress passed the historic Higher Education Act. That bill was "rooted in the War on Poverty and the belief that the federal government should do all it could to equalize economics and social opportunities for all Americans," whether or not they receive public assistance (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998, p. 8). The act also established the TRIO programs in an effort to expand educational opportunities for low income Americans. Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) were authorized in 1972 to facilitate access to higher education for low-income adults. Currently EOC's serve over 152,344 participants with over half of those adults participating in welfare to work programs or receiving public assistance.

Rational for Expanding Post-Secondary Education

Continued growth and expansion of the economy relies on an increase in the number of available skilled workers. Large segments of the population who want to work are unable to take advantage of the current economic boom due to inadequate education and training. Many EOC participants fall into this category because they lack the education and skills to actively participate in this record era of economic expansion. The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) reported, "Almost 50% of adult recipients do not have a high school diploma. Welfare recipients between the ages of 17 and 21 read, on average, at the sixth grade level" (1996, p. 4). Other researchers estimated that "between 25% and 40% of welfare recipients have learning disabilities" (Cohen, 1998, p. 4). The latest literacy analysis, conducted in 1992, found "7 in 10 welfare recipients at levels 1 and 2, the lowest two literacy levels below what the National Education Goals Panel says are acceptable levels for adults" (Barton, 1998, Summary page). A United States Department of Labor report, issued in February 1998, noted that 63% of long-term recipients were high school dropouts without a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) (USDOL, 1998, p. 3). A national study conducted by Pavetti (1999) found that only 15.2% of women on public assistance at age 27 had more than a high school diploma (p. 17). These statistics illustrate the need to increase the education levels of welfare recipients, thereby enabling them to participate and profit from the expanding economy.

Individuals currently entering the workforce are required to have higher levels of education and training than in previous decades. A newly released report issued by Mass Inc. found that even many individuals with a high school diploma or its equivalent are not prepared to fill jobs in an ever-changing workplace. "A high number of people who work and have a high school credential have skills in the lowest two levels of NALS" (Cummings, J. Sum, A., Uvin, J., 2000). Carnevale and Desrochers (1999) documented skill levels of welfare recipients and compared them to current job requirements. In the executive summary of their report, entitled *Getting Down to Business; Matching Welfare Recipients' Skills to Jobs that Train*, they discussed the importance of skill development and continuing education for welfare recipients. The authors recommended that the next phase of welfare policy concentrate on what they refer to as a "think first" strategy instead of a "work first" strategy. The authors noted that, "Some 32% of all new jobs created through the year 2006 will require applicants to have skills similar to individuals with a bachelor's degree" (p. 8). With the change in the economy from high-wage, blue-collar jobs to high-wage, high-skill jobs, restricting access to higher education for adults receiving public assistance can hinder their ability to become self-sufficient.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

PRWORA heralded a new era in federal welfare programs by creating two new block grants to replace the welfare entitlement programs started in 1935. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced AFDC, JOBS, and emergency assistance programs. The Childcare and Development Fund (CCDF) replaced the Childcare and Development block grant, AFDC childcare, Transitional Childcare, and At Risk Childcare Programs. The block grants give states flexibility to design program services, define allowable work activities within the 12 categories listed in the regulations, and allocate funds. In return for the flexibility states must meet strict work participation rates and provide cash assistance to a family for only five years. Some states have elected to provide less than five years of benefits, and mothers with children under a year old are exempt from work activities. Before PRWORA was enacted, a family could receive benefits as long as needed. Mothers were exempt from activities until their children turned three years of age, and only 10% of the caseload were mandated to participate in work activities (Pavetti, 1998, p. 9).

The shift to work first at the expense of education and training is one of the more significant differences between the two pieces of federal legislation. To illustrate the differences, one needs only to compare the postsecondary education policy directives under **FSA** and **PRWO RA**. When **FSA** was law, only three states did not allow postsecondary education (Gruber, 1998). The State Policy Documentation Project released a report on the states' postsecondary education policies under **PRWORA**. As of October 1999 they noted that twelve states allow welfare recipients to participate in a four-year degree program, eighteen states participants could pursue a four year degree if they combined it with some work, four states allow counties to decide if participants could go to a four year degree program and seventeen states did not permit enrollment in a four year college program (<http://www.spdg.org>, July, 2000).

Benefits of Postsecondary Education

Thomas Mortenson, editor of Postsecondary Education Opportunity conducts research tracking access, enrollment, and graduation rates from postsecondary education. His monthly analysis demonstrates the benefits of increasing access to higher education for low-income families as one strategy to eliminate poverty. In the February 1997 issue, which examined the benefits of increased educational attainment, Mortenson stated, "since the 1970s, the number of workers with a high school education or less has grown, while 25 to 29 year olds with a bachelor's degree have remained flat at a time when the changing economy demands a more skilled workforce" (p. 5).



The Samuels Institute of City University of New York has been studying the impact of higher education on welfare recipients for decades. One study conducted in 1990 found that as a result of attending college only 13% of recipients were still on public assistance, 89% who graduated from college were employed since graduation, and over 42% of former recipients working earned \$20,000-\$30,000 (Gittell, 1990, p. 3). The original sample used in the study was composed of welfare mothers in New York. When the study was replicated in Illinois, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wyoming the same results surfaced (Gittell, M., Gross, 1. & Holdaway, 1.1993).

There is compelling evidence that welfare recipients derive the same benefits from attending college as other individuals. These results have been confirmed by several researchers (Boldt, 1999; Karier, 1998; Sequino & Butler, 1998). Karier's research at Eastern Washington University found welfare recipients who graduated from the university, between 1994 and 1996 had median wages of \$11 per hour and only four percent were still receiving public assistance. He stated "the returns from a college degree for welfare recipients are significant enough to make postsecondary education a promising avenue to financial independence" (1998, p. 1).

Individuals attending two-year post-secondary institutions earn ten percent more annually than those who were not enrolled in college, so concluded the researchers who analyzed the employment status of two- and four-year college attendees using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the high school class of 1972 (**NLS-72**) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (**NLSY**). Every educational level completed by a student increased earning capacity. Specifically, women earned 19% to 23% more with an associate's degree and 28% more with a bachelor's (Kane & Rouse, 1995, p. 9).

In 1997, researchers at the University of Maine surveyed **AFDC/ TANF** recipients in Maine and compared the employment status of welfare recipients based on educational level and found "20% of former recipients without a high school diploma or GED were employed, compared to 65% who had an associate's degree, and close to 89% who had a bachelor's degree" (Sequino & Butler, 1998, p. 26).

The same results surfaced in Vermont in a recently completed dissertation entitled, *From Welfare to College to Work*. An analysis of data from a sample of welfare graduates indicated more marketable skills, increased earning capacity, and higher aspirations for themselves and their families, and "the sample results showed that 84.2% who graduated from a four-year institution were working full time compared to 64.4% who had graduated from a two-year college" (Boldt, 2000).

A study conducted by Gruber (1998) at Northwestern University of welfare recipients found that those who graduated from college had low unemployment rates because they were better qualified and had access to higher paying jobs. The researcher found the opposite effect for those individuals with less education. There were few jobs available for recipients with low educational levels, particularly jobs that paid well. His research also confirms that not only did recipients with little education have limited access to good jobs, but they also had higher welfare recidivism rates. Gruber concluded that states and the federal government should revise the definition of allowable work activities to include four years of postsecondary education in order to reduce the chances that former welfare recipients will return to welfare.

A monograph developed by the Institute for Higher Education Policy separated the benefits of postsecondary education into two categories, public and private. The list of public social benefits that occurred as a result of attending college included reduced crime rates, increased charitable giving, increased participation in community service activities, increased quality of civic life and social cohesion, an appreciation of diversity, and an ability to use technology. The private social benefits included improved health and life expectancy, improved quality of life for children, better consumer decision-making, increased personal status, and increase in number of hobbies and leisure activities (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998, p. 20).

Mortenson also analyzed the private correlates of educational attainment using data from a variety of sources and found that individual's lives changed as a result of increased educational attainment. He concluded that the more education one has the greater the quality of life one leads (PSO, March 1999).

Research consistently shows that increasing educational attainment of individuals leads to lower family poverty rates increased earning capacity, stronger labor force attachment, and greater civic and personal responsibility. Those individuals who do not acquire postsecondary education are destined to move from welfare recipient to working poor.

In Practice

Currently there are 82 EOC's serving 158,036 adults. In an analysis of a 1998- 1999 EOC Project Director's Survey conducted by Mathematical Policy Research they reported that 53.3% of the projects reporting identified participants as either former welfare recipients or participants in welfare to work programs (Cahalan, personal correspondence, 2001). Of 70 projects reporting this percentage represents 81,274 clients! In the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act the conference report outlined the pivotal role for EOC'S in welfare reform.

Most EOC's have been working for years in partnership with welfare officials to expand educational opportunity. A sample of their practice along with contact information is below. This small sample is indicative of the depth of activities provided by EOC staff to welfare recipients.

Educational Opportunity & Resource Center-Tacoma, WA

The Metropolitan Development Council (MDC) Educational Opportunity and Resource Center (EORC) implemented a welfare reform component six years ago. At that time many participants were being withdrawn from their educational programs. EORC was one of the first community based organizations to contract with the Department of Social and Health Services to assist participants in coordinating employment readiness activities with postsecondary training on a fee for service basis.

The decision to engage in welfare reform services was obvious to MDC since over 60% of the annual 2,500 participants in the EORC program were receiving some public assistance and were likely to be mandatory reform clients. Since the initial service plan EORC has contracted with the Private Industry Council, now called the Workforce Development Council, the State of Washington Office of Trade and Economic Development and has had additional Washington State Department of Social and Health contracts. The most successful Washington State program has been Community Jobs. The program consists of a nine month, 20 hour per week employment placement program that is combined with GED and postsecondary education placement. Community Jobs (CJ) is the first and largest program of its kind in the nation. EORC provides the entire Department of Education short and long-range career planning services. Staff funded through Community Jobs provides weekly monitoring and support services. Participants receive childcare, clothing and diapers for children, car repairs, mileage reimbursement and various support services that are difficult to access under traditional financial aid programs.

EORC has found that the additional staff funded under these contracts result in more participants completing GEDs and in entering postsecondary programs. Participants in CJ received paychecks instead of welfare checks. Their self-esteem is raised and many have gained full-time employment to sustain them while they continue their education. Due to the success of this program the Washington State Legislature will be considering an expansion of postsecondary educational services during this session. In addition to these benefits the EORC has been able to purchase computers to provide its own computer lab for all participants to use in submitting admissions and financial aid applications electronically or in making virtual visits to schools.

Vermont Educational Opportunity Center-Winooski, Vermont

For many years, the Vermont Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) has maintained a close collaborative relationship with the Vermont Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition and Health Access (PATH) by providing information, counseling, and access to postsecondary education for welfare recipients.

For nine years, the EOC program has worked closely with PATH to provide specific services to welfare recipients including:

- ◆ Individual and group counseling focusing on career self-assessment, information and decision-making; postsecondary education options; college readiness; college selection and admissions; and financial aid.

- ◆ Coordination with case managers in the Department of PATH including referral and follow-up.
- ◆ Involvement with PATH in development of a statewide system for creating and reviewing individual education plans.
- ◆ Assistance in the development of individual education plans to all welfare recipients pursuing postsecondary education.
- ◆ Participation as members of regional cross-agency Education Review teams which review and approve participants' individual education plans.

Vermont has established a state- funded postsecondary education program for 300 parents in eligible low-income families. Beginning in July 2001, this program will allow participants to enroll in a program to obtain a two-year or four-year postsecondary undergraduate degree in a field directly related to employment. The program will use federal and state funding for tuition and provide a living stipend. Participants will not have to meet federal work requirements. EOC staffs have been integrally involved in the development of required legislation and regulations for this program. EOC will be a subcontractor of the state agency administering the program and EOC staff will lead a review of the system for development and review of education plans, assist all participants with development of educational plans, provide individual counseling and workshops, and coordinate the regional Education Review teams. EOC staff will also continue to provide counseling and support for welfare recipients not enrolled in the new program who wish to pursue higher education on a part-time basis while working.

The Maryland Educational Opportunity Center-Baltimore, Maryland

The Maryland Educational Opportunity Center has established an ongoing relationship with the Welfare Advocate Association. When attending meetings and conferences, the organization keeps the staff updated on various welfare to work issues.

MEOC is uniquely positioned to aid welfare recipients because of its emphasis on career and educational development. MEOC continues to provide services to local GED programs, career development centers and federally/private- funded organizations that target welfare to work clientele. Therefore, we have ongoing coordination with the Baltimore City Office of Employment Development, One Stop Centers, Head Start Family Support Centers, the Juvenile Justice program, childcare and early childhood programs, and substance abuse programs.

MEOC assists clients with the admissions and financial aid process. Clients that have been selected for the welfare to work program are provided with information on the evening and weekend college schedules so that they can coordinate their work schedules accordingly.

MEOC has a counselor/scholarship specialist on staff offering scholarship opportunities to welfare clients that are interested in enrolling in a postsecondary institution. For welfare recipients, five MEOC scholarships, of three hundred dollars per year, are awarded to clients who desire to attend community colleges. MEOC also has an emergency fund for students who need money for books, personal expenses, bus fare, admissions and test fees. Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. and the Continental Societies, Inc. Baltimore Chapter make these funds, for MEOC clients available.

MEOC is not a job placement agency, but it does keep welfare to work clientele informed about training in various areas, for example: nurses training, hotel maid training, hotel

management, telemarketing skills, computer skills, college admissions and specialized training opportunities.

Virginia Tidewater Consortium Educational Opportunity Center- Norfolk, VA

In order to continue to serve the welfare population, the Virginia Tidewater Consortium's Educational Opportunity Center has become the assessment component for several Departments of Social Services in the Hampton Roads area. The assessment module includes the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) the Self Directed Search interest inventor, and in some cases a skills checklist and barriers inventory.

With a signed waiver from the individuals, results of these instruments can be provided to social services workers. This enables them to better assist the recipients with employment goals. There have been some changes in the environment. Some of the workers now recognize that further education/training is the only way to truly assist clients in becoming self-sufficient productive members of society.

The EOC is also very involved in the Workforce Development initiative providing services in satellite locations at the designated One-Stop Centers. Additionally, the EOC Director has been appointed to the special populations sub- committee of the Workforce Development Board. This presence keeps concerns for higher education for the clients and potential clients at the forefront of the initiative.

Rhode Island Education Opportunity Center-Providence, RI

The Rhode Island Education Opportunity Center program established in 1979 provides assessment services to welfare recipients along with information on postsecondary opportunities and financial aid assistance.

EOC staff serves as a member of the state's Welfare Implementation Task Force. As early as 1989 after the Family



Pictured above are left to right Rhode Island EOC staff member Shamari Husband, Dorcas Place advisor Sharon E. Alexander-Reyes, Dorcas Place students Shawana Whetstone, Christina Navarro and Mariam Pagan, and Dorcas Place Career Advisor Freya Messias work on financial aid applications during a recent workshop. Photograph provided by Sheila K. Lawrence

Support Act was enacted, the RIEOC established a formal contract with Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Office of Higher Education. This contract allows for the expansion of educational opportunities to welfare recipients. The partnership was very effective in increasing access to higher education as noted by the Chair of the state's welfare advisory committee in a memo written to the Associate Commissioner for Higher Education. The chair noted, "Rhode Island has the highest percent of postsecondary education enrollments of welfare recipients in the northeast" (memo Drew, 1992). The collaboration continues with many DHS vendors and partners referring welfare recipients to EOC counselors for postsecondary education assistance and support.

Educational Opportunity Center - Benton Harbor, MI

The EOC at Lake Michigan College has been operating since 1994, serving 1,200 participants each year. Approximately 75% of the participants served are welfare recipients. EOC staff provides outreach services to all of the welfare to work programs in the four counties, along with services to correctional facilities, drug rehab programs, safe shelters, adult education programs.

The EOC provides assistance with developing educational plans, college research, academic advising, career workshops, career assessments and counseling, information on student financial assistance, assistance in completing college admissions and financial aid applications, tutoring and appropriate referral services.

Recommendations for EOC Projects

It is imperative as Congress prepares to examine the current law in preparation for reauthorization that TRIO programs work with policymakers to reverse the policy restricting postsecondary education. Changing national and state welfare policies to allow postsecondary education enables recipients to become self-sufficient and gain employment opportunities at higher wages.

Research conducted by this author investigated the rationale for restricting postsecondary education as an allowable work activity in the federal definition of work. In interviews of seven national and five state policymakers, data revealed that welfare policy was constructed at the national level based on politics and the economy. The lack of research and contributions from higher education officials also influenced welfare policy development and the decision to restrict and/or limit postsecondary education as an allowable work activity. All national interviewees believed that a change in the definition of allowable work activities to include postsecondary education should be recommended when TANF legislation is reauthorized (Dann-Messier, 2000).

The major factors that had inhibited postsecondary education as an allowable work activity when the legislation was enacted have changed dramatically. The economy is robust and caseload numbers are low and continue to decline. The political landscape has also changed. A study conducted by the Educational Testing Service reached the same conclusion. The authors stated that an expansion of postsecondary education is feasible because "pressure on states to put welfare recipients to work has eased, caseloads have dropped, states have TANF surpluses, states and colleges are learning how to make education and training work, and the political climate has moderated." (Carnevale et al., 2000, p. 21)

The following six recommendations are based on research and interviews and account for major factors that led to the sweeping changes in welfare policy in 1996 restricting or limiting postsecondary education as an allowable work activity.

1. Engage policymakers at both the national and state level in the debate on the need to expand educational opportunities for welfare recipients.

Engagement at all levels of government is important in order to educate lawmakers and influence welfare and higher education policy development and implementation. Methods of Engagement:

- ◆ Become familiar with national and state legislative timetables, how bills are written, reauthorized, and amended.
- ◆ Establish relationships with key legislators, their staffs, and other policymakers in order to describe the effect of previous policy decisions that restricted postsecondary education for welfare recipients.
- ◆ Educate elected officials at the national and state level and presidential appointments under the new administration on the need to include postsecondary education as an allowable work activity in the federal definition of work. Be aware of new committee assignments and leadership changes in Congress and state legislatures in order to educate and inform lawmakers responsible for welfare and higher education legislation. Work with lawmakers at the national and state levels who previously supported access to postsecondary education for welfare recipients.
- ◆ Establish a relationship with staffs from DHHS and USDE. Department staffs are responsible for promulgating rules and regulations on legislation passed by Congress.

2. Compile and disseminate data for national and state policymakers on the educational backgrounds of past and current welfare recipients.

In order to construct an educational profile of past and current welfare recipients, additional data must be collected. The comprehensive data collected can be disseminated to policy makers to assist them in making informed decisions that lead to an expansion of postsecondary education for welfare recipients.

Data Needed:

- Educational attainment levels of current caseload and former recipients who are employed who could benefit from and be eligible for postsecondary education immediately with additional supportive services and academic remediation.

Acronyms

ACF: The Administration for Children and Families (<http://www.acf.dhs.gov>)
AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children
APWA: American Public Welfare Association
CBPP: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org>)
CLASP: The Center for Law and Social Policy (<http://www.clasp.org>)
CPS: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Census (<http://www.census.gov>)
CWS: College Work-Study Program

DHHS: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (<http://www.dhs.gov>)
DOL: U. S. Department of Labor (<http://www.dol.gov>)
ESL: English as a second language
ETA: Employment and Training Administration (<http://www.doleta.gov>)
FSA: The Family Support Act of 1988. The previous welfare reform legislation that created the JOBS program.
GED: General Equivalency Diploma
IWPR: Institute for Women's Policy Research (<http://www.iwpr.org>)
JOBS: The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program
MOE: Maintenance of Effort
NCES: National Center for Educational Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov>)
NIFL: National Institute for Literacy (<http://www.nifl.gov>)
NLSY: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
PRWORA: The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
WIN: Work Incentive Program
WORK FIRST: Job Search and Job Placement Assistance

Carnevale et al. (2000) noted that by increasing the educational attainment levels of recipients, who could benefit from education immediately, would result in higher wages. "With as little as one semester of full time training, the skill improvements could provide access to jobs that pay up to \$10,000 more a year" (p.12).

- ◆ Recipients currently enrolled in two-year postsecondary educational institutions that could benefit from continuing their college studies and acquire a bachelor's degree.
- ◆ Recipients enrolled in model-state funded postsecondary education programs.

State Data Needed

- ◆ State specific caseload educational demographics.
- ◆ State research results that correlate increased educational attainment to reductions in family poverty rates and other positive factors.
- ◆ Costs to the state for expanding education programs.

Past practice tells us that data alone do not tell the full story. It takes a combination of research on the benefits of increased educational attainment, an analysis of caseload demographics and personal stories of welfare recipients attending college and no longer receiving public assistance that will result in welfare policy changes.

3. Encourage alternative strategies at the state level for welfare policy development and implementation that lead to an increase in educational attainment levels for welfare recipients.

Staff who implements welfare policies must be included in policy deliberations in order for them to understand and to support the rationale for the decisions made. Staff involvement minimizes resistance to changes in policy direction, and closes the gap between policy and implementation. As Kates (1999) noted, "there is a disconnect between economic trends that indicated education and training levels of workers should be raised and public assistance policies that have greatly reduced access to education and training for hundreds of thousand of

women who are entering the workforce" (p. 52).

4. Promote models of state funded postsecondary education programs for welfare recipients to policymakers.

The flexibility that states have to design their own welfare programs is illustrated in the model state funded postsecondary education programs from the states of Maine, Wyoming, and Illinois. These states were consistently cited in research because of their innovative approaches to improve access to higher education for welfare recipients. A comparison of the salient points in those programs and other states initiatives moving in that direction are described in a publication of The Center for Women Policy Studies (1999) entitled, *Getting Smart About Welfare, an Action Kit for State Legislators*. Information on model programs should be disseminated to facilitate replication of those models.

Encourage these strategies for states that restrict access to postsecondary education:

- ◆ Use TANF and state Maintenance of Effort funds (MOE) to support postsecondary education by creating a separate state program. Funds can be used to pay for tuition, educational fees, childcare, transportation and other supportive services, and cash assistance to meet basic living costs (Greenberg, Strawn, & Plimpton, 1999, p. 6). If state dollars are used, recipients do not have to adhere to rigid federal time limits for participating in education (Carnevale et al., 2000, p. 35).
- ◆ Count postsecondary education as an allowable work activity. "Use CWS and other campus based work related programs to satisfy employment and training requirements" (www.nasulgc.org/welfare_facts.htm 1/19/00).
- ◆ States can operate under a federal waiver to allow postsecondary education as an allowable work activity. States continuing waivers may be able to broaden the circumstances under which postsecondary education can count toward participation rates (Greenberg et al., p. 12).
- ◆ Fund education programs using national or state funds that are not TANF related.
- ◆ "Stop the clock" on time limits for recipients who attend college and meet other program requirements (Greene, 1999).
- ◆ Use TANF funds to provide financial assistance and support services for postsecondary education after families enter employment through a range of approaches, including Individual Development Accounts." (Greenberg et al., 1999, p.21)

Definitions

The Family Support Act of 1988: The previous welfare reform legislation that created the JOBS program.

The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program: A transitional program geared toward helping parents become employed and avoid long-term welfare dependence. States provided a "broad range of education, training, and employment related activities including postsecondary education" (GAO/HEHS-98-109).

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996: Under this legislation allowable work activities are defined as:

- ◆ unsubsidized employment
- ◆ subsidized private sector employment .unsubsidized public sector employment .work experience
- ◆ on-the-job training
- ◆ job search and job readiness assistance (up to six weeks)
- ◆ community service programs
- ◆ vocational education (not to exceed 12 months) .job skills training directly related to employment
- ◆ education related to employment if a recipient has not received a high school diploma or GED
- ◆ satisfactory attendance in a secondary school or in a course of study leading to a GED for recipients who have not completed secondary school
- ◆ providing child care services to an individual who is participating in a community service program

Note that higher education is not included in this definition

TRIO Programs: Programs designed to help students to overcome class, social, academic, and cultural barriers to higher education. TRIO services include: assistance in choosing a college; tutoring; personal and financial counseling; career counseling; assistance in applying to college; workplace and college visits; special instruction in reading, writing, study skills, and mathematics; assistance in applying for financial aid; and academic assistance in high school or assistance to re-enter high school.

5. *Involve the higher education community in welfare policy development.*

The absence of higher education officials in welfare policy development has negatively affected the ability of recipients to pursue postsecondary education.

- ◆ Encourage higher education representatives from two and four-year colleges and the state offices of higher education to participate in welfare policy development that supports access to postsecondary education. Higher education officials throughout the nation must articulate the importance of post- secondary education and the true costs of attending college. They must inform policymakers that most welfare recipients are eligible for federal financial aid assistance.
- ◆ Support an expansion of postsecondary education with or without additional funds by providing incentives to colleges and universities who serve adult students on public assistance.

6. *Conduct research on the benefits of increased educational attainment.*

The need for additional research on issues of access and retention to higher education for welfare recipients and the benefits of increased educational attainment is long overdue. Welfare and education policy development research is sparse.

- ◆ Conduct research on issues related to access, retention, and graduation rates of welfare recipients
- ◆ Disseminate findings from research currently underway as they become available.
- ◆ Conduct additional research on model- state funded postsecondary education programs to promote replication of best practices in other states that will enable greater percentages of welfare recipients to enroll in higher education.

Conclusion

The benefits to increased educational attainment for welfare recipients cannot be underestimated for the long-term stability and growth of the economy as well as for individual recipients and their families. Yet all too often, policy- makers deem expanding education opportunities for low-income individuals as too costly and politically unpopular. In today's economy with the growing need for a more skilled workforce, national policymakers must eliminate the restriction to postsecondary education as an allowable work activity and promote access to higher education for welfare recipients. College officials must do their part, as well, and welcome welfare recipients to campus by providing support services that ensure access, retention, and graduation for all that aspire to continue their education. EOC's can lead this effort and work with appropriate college officials by sharing best practices and model programs.

The six recommendations are offered to reverse the downward spiral of welfare recipients denied access to post- secondary education. The recommendations encourage EOC staff, policymakers, and advocates to wear many hats as they fight to unlock the doors of opportunity for welfare recipients. All must be advocates, researchers, policymakers, and program implementers not only because it is the right thing to do but also because increasing the educational attainment levels for welfare recipients will strengthen individuals, their families, and the nation. The advantages of increased educational attainment accrue to the entire family. Our nation also benefits with a more educated citizenry that can actively participate in all aspects of the economy. This will be an arduous journey for many, but one that all eligible welfare recipients should be allowed to embark upon with support and assistance from EOC staff, policymakers and college officials.



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Dr. Dann-Messier received her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Johnson and Wales University. Her dissertation focused on Welfare Policy and Access to Higher Education.

Selected Welfare Websites

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<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/>
<http://www.apbsa.org/>
<http://epinet.org/>
<http://www.jff.org/>
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<http://www.urban.org/>
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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS

<p>Educational Opportunity & Resource Center Nancy Davis, Director 622 Tacoma Avenue Tacoma, WA 98412 Phone: 253-764-5326</p>	<p>Vermont Educational Opportunity Center Linda Schiller, Director Champlain Mill P.O Box 2000 Winooski, Vermont 05404-2601 Phone: 802-1655-9602</p>
<p>The Maryland Educational Opportunity Center Ellen D. Howard, Director 2700 Gwynns Falls Parkway Baltimore, Maryland 21216 Phone: 410-728-3400</p>	<p>Virginia Tidewater Consortium Educational Opportunity Center Agatha A. Peterson, Director 121 College Place, 2nd Floor Norfolk, VA 23510 Phone: 757 683-2312</p>
<p>Rhode Island Education Opportunity Center Philomena Fayanjuola, Director 1 Hilton Street Providence, RI 02905 Phone: 401-455-6028</p>	<p>Educational Opportunity Center Curtis Warren, Director Lake Michigan College Benton Harbor, MI 49022 Phone: 616-927 8100</p>

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Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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Barton, P., (1998). Welfare: indicators of dependency. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.

This report looks at data on twelve trends that affect an individual; ability to become independent. These are: literacy; poverty; employment prospects; early sexual intercourse; births outside marriage; establishing fatherhood; child support enforcement; intergenerational dependence; teenage violent crime; adult incarceration; welfare choice; and deprivation indicators, such as hunger, cold, overcrowded/unsafe housing, ill-clothed.

In looking at the trends that favor or inhibit independence, the author points out that data are often available for one point in time. For example, we know that literacy is key to employability at a sustaining wage, yet literacy was only assessed once in 1992, so it is impossible to identify trends.

**Carnevale, A. P. & Desrochers, D.M. (1999).
Getting down to business: matching welfare recipients' skills to jobs that train. (Executive summary). Princeton: Educational Testing Service.**

This executive summary, part of a larger report, utilizes the National Adult Literacy Survey to identify the skills needed to transition welfare recipients to jobs that will pay good wages, provide training and a means to move up. The author's found that there is a mismatch between the skills of many recipients and the skills needed for jobs that will lead to self-sufficiency. To avoid moving people from "welfare traps to poverty traps", locating jobs that provide on-the-job training will be critical in helping recipients with low skills maintain employment that will support them.

The authors suggest that strategies to match recipients with diverse skills to job opportunities must be flexible and customized and include:

- Assessments of skills
- Opportunity cost analysis of the benefits of education, training or work
- Counseling and placement

In addition, they recommend an examination of the labor market and analysis of jobs and career paths to better match recipients with jobs that provide training and movement.

Cohen, M. (1998). Postsecondary education under welfare reform. Welfare Information 'Network, Washington, DC: The Center for Law and Social Policy.

The 1996 **PRWORA** stresses a work first approach, making it more difficult for welfare recipients to pursue a college education. States must increasingly place individuals in work activities outlined by the **PRWORA**. This article identified some of the work activities allowed under the new regulations that can be provided by postsecondary institutions, such as "vocational educational training: job skills training" and "education directly related to employment"

The author points out that non-vocational postsecondary education is not approved, but students can still be counted if they are also fulfilling the required number of hours in work-related activities. In addition, if a state has enough individuals in approved work activities, they can allow others to participate in post-secondary education as a "stand-alone activity".

This article examines policy issues, such as the following:

1. The extent to which TANF recipients should be supported in non-vocational postsecondary education
2. The development of shorter training programs.
3. The role of community colleges in providing vocational training and employment services.
4. How college education can be combined with work to meet the TANF requirements.

The article also highlights research findings that support the investment in postsecondary education and cites some innovative practices implemented by states to support higher education.

Fact sheet: Efforts to help working college students combine education and employment. (1998, April 20). U.S. Department of Education.

The fact sheet addresses five initiatives regarding current State and Federal initiatives that help TANF students to remain in school while meeting the TANF work requirements:

1. Federal work-study programs enable students receiving TANF benefits to stay in college because the students can meet the TANF work requirements. The work-study programs allow colleges to work with State and local welfare officials to provide jobs tailored to fit into academic schedules for students. Federal law does not limit the number of federal work-study hours that a student may work.
2. State welfare funds may be employed to aid college students receiving welfare. The State of Maine uses funds to provide assistance to students attending Maine colleges. Since State funds are used separately from Federal funds, the TANF work requirements or time limits are not applicable.
3. Handling "vocational educational training" as work will enable college students to attain their training. The inclusion of teen parents in fiscal year 2000 will limit the amount of adult recipients in vocational education for purposes of the work participation rate by States.
4. Treating postsecondary education as "job skills training" enables the State to achieve a more skilled labor force under tightly controlled circumstances that ensure a work focus. Wyoming treats certain TANF recipients as engaged in work under a TANF statute, which defines work to include: "job skills training directly related to employment."
5. Students enrolled in college while on welfare receive the most financial assistance from the Pell Grant program. There have been increases in the Pell Grant appropriation requested in the President's fiscal year 1999 budget, which will enhance the pool of resources available to TANF recipients who are members of the student college population.

Institute for Women's Policy Research. (1998, April). Welfare reform and postsecondary education: research and policy update. Welfare Reform Network News, 2 (1). Washington, DC: Author.

This publication examines the limitations of women's opportunities for postsecondary education under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and looks at the ways some states are addressing this issue. Although the intention of the new work requirements is to move welfare recipients quickly into employment, the jobs they often get are low paying and promise no growth. For those individuals who try to juggle work/community service and education, the burden combined

with financial responsibilities often proves too great. Consequently, many colleges have seen a decline in enrollment among welfare recipients.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research has studied the impact that obtaining college degree or vocational certificate can have on a women's earnings and the amount of time spent at paid jobs and has determined that among other things, a college degree is worth an additional \$3.65/hour for working mothers.

This newsletter also discusses current and proposed state policies, legislation and legal activity relating to postsecondary education. Some states have created separate state-funded public assistance programs, which allow individuals to enroll in two or four year post-secondary education programs. As benefits are provided through state funds, students are not subject of TANF restrictions.

Johnson, C. & Kaggwa, E. (1998). Work-study programs for welfare recipients; a job creation strategy that combines work and education. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

College work-study programs are an example of one of the most successful public job creation efforts in the United States. There are strong reasons to build on lessons learned and creating new work-study initiatives to meet the needs of welfare recipients.

This paper encourages the development of additional work-study initiatives by identifying program design and implementation issues to be considered. After giving some background on education and welfare reform and the federal and California's work-study programs, the authors discuss issues related to tailoring work-study for welfare recipients. These issues include the following:

1. designing an effective administrative structure
2. which funding sources to use to finance the program
3. types of placements
4. eligibility criteria
5. how to avoid reductions in future student financial aid
6. how to prevent displacement of current federal work-study participants

Work-study initiatives alone won't address all the challenges of developing welfare-to-work activities, but the combination of work and learning it offers can give individuals the opportunity to acquire new skills and eventually secure stable employment.

Levers for Change: Educational Opportunity Centers and Welfare Reform is part of a continuing series of National TRIO Clearinghouse short papers that condense current research on topics relevant to TRIO and other educational opportunity programs. The purpose of the short papers is to provide a research frame work for project practice. These papers are available as reprints and are downloadable from the national TRIO Clearinghouse Web site at <http://www.trioprograms.org/clearinghouse/> [Clearinghouse Publications].

The National TRIO Clearinghouse, an adjunct Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Educational Opportunity affiliated with the ERIC Higher Education Clearinghouse, collects and disseminates information, applied program materials, resources, and research related to TRIO Programs and TRIO students. Housed in the Center for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education, the National TRIO Clearinghouse is funded by a grant from the United States Department of Education. For Additional information about the Clearinghouse, contact Andrea