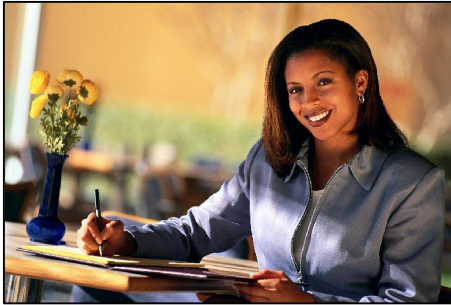




Greater Hartford Literacy Council TANF Workforce Literacy Pilot Project Executive Summary

The full report will be released in the early spring of 2006



This executive summary of the TANF Workforce Literacy Pilot Project report provides an overview of the key issues and recommended action steps that address the educational needs of people with low literacy skills who are receiving Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). While the educational needs of TFA recipients is the focus of the report, many of the issues and recommendations have implications for the educational needs of more than one million Connecticut adults who have low literacy skills.

Introduction

Making a valuable contribution to the state's economy is currently beyond the reach of 41% of Connecticut's workforce due to their limited literacy skills.¹ Low literacy is the common denominator that connects many of Connecticut's most serious challenges. Low literacy retards economic development, erodes workforce competitiveness, compounds poverty, and undermines health and educational achievement. As more jobs require advanced degrees and certifications, those with low skills do not make the cut.

Numerous state agencies, publicly and privately funded programs, and businesses operate with pockets of funding in varying amounts that address different aspects of adult education and/or workforce training. **Most of these programs do not provide the integrated mix of educational and workforce training that has been proven in research and by this Pilot Project to be effective.** Most education and workforce training services are not adequately funded or sufficient in design to meet the needs of Connecticut's current and future workforce.

Connecticut's economic success will ultimately depend on its ability to create a seamless system of education and workforce services that will consistently produce a highly skilled workforce.

Facts about a Growing Segment of Connecticut's Workforce - people with low literacy skills

- 95% of a sample of Connecticut Jobs First Employment Services customers in the north central workforce region have skills below a 9th grade level in math and 55% are below a 9th grade level in reading²
- 37% of the Connecticut adults receiving Jobs First Employment Services lack a high school diploma³
- Studies in three states indicate that 25% to 30% of welfare recipients have learning disabilities⁴

¹ National Adult Literacy Survey, U.S. Department of Education, 1992.

² The Connecticut Department of Labor's Welfare to Work program is called Jobs First Employment Services, providing employment services to TFA recipients. Data is from Capital Workforce Partners, October 2005.

³ Connecticut Department of Labor: At a Squint, January 2005; Welfare to Work Annual Report: July 2002-June 2003.

⁴ Greater Hartford Literacy Council compilation of promising practices research.

Relevant Research and Promising Practices

Results of a national search for promising practices demonstrate that:

- Many effective programs use a mix of education and workforce training supported by individualized instruction, small-group instruction, and computer-assisted learning strategies⁵
- Job-search-first programs may speed up the entry of welfare recipients into the labor market, but the jobs tend to be neither long-lasting nor high-paying. Two decades of research by MDRC⁶ demonstrate that a mixed approach combining education, training, and job search created more than double the earnings gains for welfare recipients when compared to programs using any of the approaches alone. [Click here](#) to view a snapshot of this study and [link](#) to a seven minute video explaining the results in detail. (Or go to http://www.mdrc.org/area_fact_18.html)

Workforce Literacy Model

Developed by the Greater Hartford Literacy Council and based on national research, the Workforce Literacy Model incorporates the components proven by the TANF Workforce Literacy Pilot Project to be effective for quality workforce literacy programs. The model can be replicated in various settings and is explained in more detail in the full report.

The model integrates workforce training and education within four components of effective program design and is most effectively implemented when coupled with ongoing technical assistance with instruction and program development. The program design should be based on current research and the needs of participants. The four components of the model are:

1. Comprehensive assessment
2. Individualized instruction and scheduling
3. Qualified, dedicated staff and administration
4. Supportive case management services

Overview of the TANF Workforce Literacy Pilot Project

The Greater Hartford Literacy Council developed the TANF Workforce Literacy Pilot Project in response to recommendations in our 2003 report, *Take Action for Literacy: The Status of Literacy in Greater Hartford*. In 2005, the Connecticut General Assembly provided \$250,000 for the Pilot Project which was administered in partnership with Capital Workforce Partners and involved several other project partners.

Characteristics of the Pilot Project:

- Conducted in Connecticut's north central workforce region primarily with Hartford residents
- Involved more than 70 recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) with literacy skills roughly below a ninth-grade level
- Included the development of two workforce literacy programs offering 15 week cycles of intervention and ongoing technical assistance to integrate education and workforce training services at the two sites:
 1. Corrado Center for Careers integrated pre-vocational training with basic reading and math instruction for participants whose primary language is English
 2. New England Farm Workers' Council integrated pre-vocational training with instruction in English reading and listening with limited English proficient participants

⁵ Greater Hartford Literacy Council compilation of promising practices research.

⁶ Hamilton, Gayle (July 2002) *Moving People from Welfare to Work, Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies*, MDRC.

Goals of the Pilot Project:

- Test our workforce literacy model
- Increase the literacy skills of program participants, thus improving their prospects for family-supporting employment
- Capture a snapshot of the educational needs and levels of TFA recipients and evaluate the process through which they are screened and referred for services

Key Pilot Project Results

Assessment tools used:

- Corraro site: Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR)
- NEFWC site: Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) English Reading and Listening
- Both sites: Test of Non-Verbal Intelligence (TONI-3)

Assessment results at program entry:

- 100% had literacy skills at or below a 9th grade level* in some tested areas
- 86% had literacy skills at or below a 6th grade level in some tested areas
- 38% had “low average” or “borderline intelligence”

Assessment results at program exit:

- 100% improved by one or more grade levels in at least one of five reading skill areas at the Corraro site
- 83% improved by one or more grade levels in reading and/or listening skills at the New England Farm Workers’ Council site
- While significant gains were made, a 15-week cycle of services was not long enough to raise all literacy skill areas above a 9th grade level
- 75% still had skills at or below a 6th grade level in some tested areas

* To help the report reader understand the assessment results, scores have been converted to an approximate grade level equivalent.

Recommendations for Improving Employment and Literacy Outcomes for TFA Recipients with Limited Skills

Improve Assessment at the CT Works One-Stop Career Centers

- To determine the appropriate mix of education and job training services that will lead to family-supporting employment, broaden the current skill assessment process into a tiered system of skill assessment with screening for vocational interest and aptitude and additional assessment for those with 1) Low reading and/or math skills, 2) Limited English proficiency, and/or 3) Learning disabilities or differences
- Better equip frontline staff to conduct assessments at the One-Stop Centers by reducing caseloads and providing more training

Improve Adult Basic Education and Job Training Services

- Combine educational and job training services into integrated offerings that effectively address all skill areas
- Increase the intensity of courses, provide case management services, upgrade curricula and improve instructional methods with services delivered in the context of employment
- Increase professional development and technical assistance opportunities and redesign these services to provide primarily hands-on and ongoing assistance with integrating education and workforce training services and improving educational outcomes

Allow More Time for Skill Development

- Allow more time for TFA recipients to develop basic skills by easing the policies for granting extensions of time on assistance when literacy is a barrier to family-supporting employment and participants are actively engaged in education/training (Current Connecticut policies allow for 21 months with up to two additional six month extensions. Additional extensions up to the federal timeline of 60 months are rarely granted.)



Bridge Traditional Divides Across State Agencies and Funding Streams

- Make the paradigm shift needed to create an effective, seamless system of integrated workforce literacy services
- Work across departments, agencies, and organizations to develop new, comprehensive approaches that will improve existing programming and reporting relationships
- Provide new or redirected funds to implement this report's recommendations
- Explore regional coordination and pooled funding strategies consistent with the previously used Coordinated Education and Training Opportunities (CETO) model that could be implemented on a greater scale across and within state agencies

Conclusion

Developing a seamless system of highly effective workforce literacy services requires all stakeholders to re-examine the silos of funding and service delivery that have characterized services in the state for so long. Many government and private agencies – each with their own resources, accountability, mandates and constituencies – bear some level of responsibility for addressing the problem of low literacy among TFA recipients. However, the scope of the present challenge exceeds the capacity of any one of these organizations. Success in adequately addressing these issues demands more effective coordination and integration than exists today. Successfully strengthening the connection between literacy and workforce training will require stakeholders to examine existing levels of coordination and to confront the hard issues.

The time is now to reform and revitalize services and funding mechanisms to more comprehensively address the educational needs of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) recipients and all adults struggling to meet the demands of Connecticut's 21st century workforce. **We must be willing to invest in the economic growth of Connecticut by working across agencies to develop effective workforce literacy programs and ensure a role for all residents in the workforce of the future.**