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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of education and training in today's economy, and the role that TANF can play in helping low-income parents obtain economic opportunity and better the lives of their children. I am here on behalf of CLASP, a national nonprofit group focused on federal, state and local policies that strengthen low-income families and create pathways to education and work. In my own day-to-day work, I am much more often outside of Washington D.C. than in it, learning from the efforts of very dedicated teachers and administrators in adult basic skills, job training, and postsecondary education, so I am especially happy to be here today with these accomplished fellow panelists from Oklahoma, Kentucky and Washington.

Past welfare reform debates have often centered on the question of which route is more effective to economic independence, education or work. I've followed research and practice in this area for more than 20 years, and it now seems quite clear that the answer to the education or work question is yes—both education and work experience are critical for economic success. It seems just as clear that it is not always possible for people to be good students, workers, and parents all at the same time, given the daunting logistical, financial, and time requirements of each of these roles. I would like to respectfully suggest that it is time to put aside old debates and start a different conversation, one that grapples with three new realities:

- 1) **Changes in our economy have made it increasingly hard for workers with only a high school education or less to earn enough to support a family.** Workers without even a high school diploma have been especially hard hit. According to administrative data, 41.5 percent of adult TANF recipients have less than a high school degree, and more than half have exactly a high school degree. Less than 5 percent have any postsecondary education.¹
- 2) **Education and training services for adults are adapting to respond effectively to this economic change.** Leading edge states and communities are creating new pathways to careers for lower-skilled adults and combining them with the financial support and advising services that low-income adults, especially parents, need to succeed. Federal policies across a range of programs need to be updated to support these reforms.
- 3) **TANF policies are more often part of the problem than the solution.** Federal policies, especially the work participation rate calculation, force a preoccupation with the minutia of program participation rather than attention to the long-term economic outcomes we want to achieve for low-income families. While a few states, like those on our panel today, are managing to provide effective education and training services for low-income parents in spite of federal policy barriers, their achievements are the exception, not the norm. Too many states are frozen in the policies they adopted in the mid 1990s and have not recognized the ways in which both the economy and educational systems have evolved over the past decade and a half.

A changing economy

The first new reality that TANF policies need to address is the changing structure of our economy over the last 20 years, which has placed a growing premium on education and training beyond high school. Those who have at least a two- or four-year college degree have seen their earnings hold steady (and for women, rise), while the earnings of those with only a high school

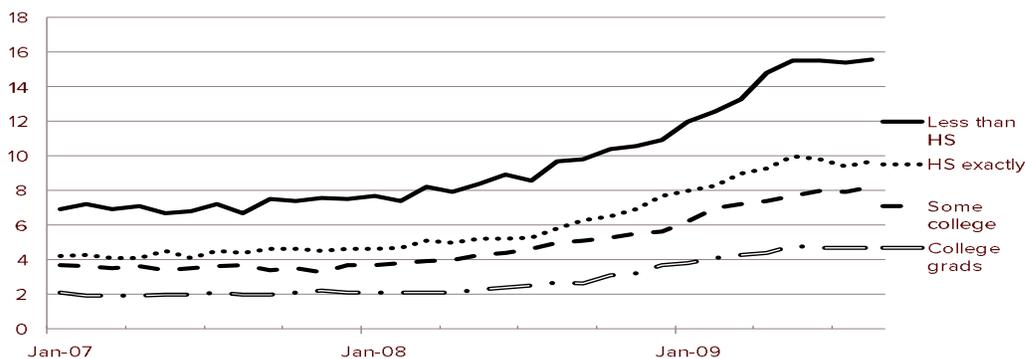
diploma have dropped substantially—for men, by about a third. High school dropouts are the worst off – their earnings have fallen almost by half.ⁱⁱ For students at community colleges, where working adults are especially likely to enroll, a postsecondary education especially pays off for those who pursue education or training in high-wage fields, such as health care, science, and engineering, or for those who transfer and go on to complete four-year degrees.ⁱⁱⁱ This increasing demand for skilled workers is expected to continue. Between 2008 and 2018, almost 30 million new job openings—nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of job openings—will be filled by workers who have at least some postsecondary education and training, whether that is an occupational certificate, diploma or degree.^{iv}

Even in these tough economic times—perhaps especially in these tough economic times—education matters: high school dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed than those with a four-year degree. And workers who finished high school but didn’t go any further in their education are twice as likely to be unemployed as four-year college graduates. Those with two-year college degrees are in the middle—less likely to be unemployed than workers with only a high school education or less, but not as well off as four-year degree holders.^v (Figure 1)

Figure 1.

Sharp Increases in Unemployment for Least Educated Adults

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2007-2009



And since one of the biggest costs of pursuing credentials is the loss of earnings and work experience while in school, a poor job market can be a good time for workers to improve their skills if they can obtain financial help to meet their basic living expenses while they do so. Both the federal government and many states are taking steps to support workers who are unemployed in returning to school to improve their skills so that they can qualify for the jobs of tomorrow. However, most TANF agencies are still enforcing policies that were designed for an economy where jobs were plentiful.

Beyond these economic benefits to individual workers, there are other ways in which our society is strengthened by enabling more low-income adults to enter and succeed in a range of education and training opportunities. A key finding from welfare to work research is that when low-income parents increase their knowledge and skills, this success spills over to their children, who

then become higher achievers in school, with all that implies for their life chances and for the communities they live in.^{vi}

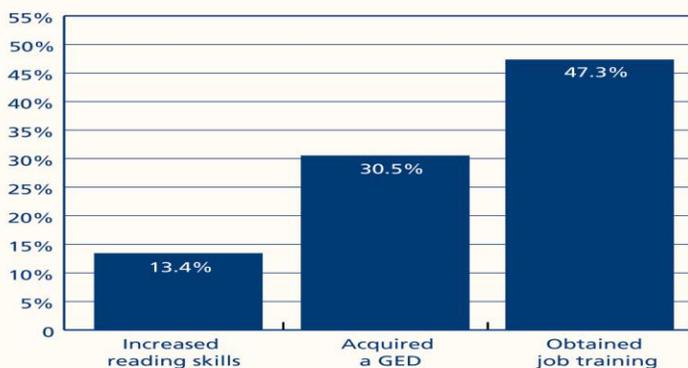
Lessons learned from research

Helping lower-skilled workers adjust to this changing economy and earn marketable credentials requires new approaches to basic skills, job training, and postsecondary education services for adults. Welfare to work evaluations of programs operating in the 1980s and 1990s were among the first studies to flag problems in how these services are provided. Unfortunately, too many in the welfare field took away from these studies the overly simple message that “education and training don’t work for welfare recipients.” In fact, the results were more complicated than that. These welfare to work evaluations provided three invaluable lessons:

- First, programs where caseworkers were able to assign clients to individualized services, choosing from a range of possible education, training, and employment services, were more effective than programs that used a one-size-fits-all approach—whether that one size was job search or education.
- Second, when lower-skilled parents enroll in education and training, these services paid off for them most when they enrolled in job training and other postsecondary education, and not just adult basic skills and GED classes. (Figure 2)
- Third, too few lower-skilled parents got access to job training and other postsecondary education when they started out in traditional adult basic skills and GED services.^{vii}

FIGURE 2

Increase in Earnings for Adult Education Participants in Welfare-to-Work Programs, by Educational Outcome



Source: Bos, J., Scrivener, S., Snipes, J., & Hamilton, G. (2001). *Improving basic skills: The effects of adult education in welfare-to-work programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; and U.S. Department of Education. Available at www.mdrc.org.

This research, combined with other studies of basic skills students in Washington, California, and elsewhere, prompted states and communities to step back and create new strategies for helping low wage workers and other adults improve their basic skills while making progress toward economically valuable occupational certificates or degrees. I’ll talk more about one of these strategies, Washington’s I-BEST program, in a moment.^{viii}

Other research identified financial constraints as another key barrier to low wage workers seeking postsecondary credentials. For example, a 2007 study found that after all financial aid had been awarded, working poor students were still left on average with nearly \$4,000 in unmet need.^{ix} This financial gap forces low-income adults to work too many hours while in school in order to make ends meet, leading to lower program completion. Data from the US Department of Education finds that job and financial demands are the most common reason that students seeking to earn occupational certificates or degrees drop out, with family demands being the second most common reason for these students leaving school.^x In a separate study, the Department also found that students working 15 hours or more were much more likely to report that work interfered with their schooling by limiting their class choices and schedules, the number of classes they could take, and their academic performance.^{xi} New research from the University of Michigan confirms that too much work interferes with academic success. It further finds that students who work more than 20 hours per week take significantly longer to complete degrees.^{xii}

Low-income parents may find juggling work and school even more difficult than other low wage workers. An evaluation of Riverside Community College’s New Visions program for working TANF recipients found that conflicts with work were the single most common reason for students leaving school.^{xiii} This is not simply a matter of work cutting into study time—although anyone juggling working, parenting, and classes will surely tell you that there are never enough hours in the day. The problem is that low-income parents, including current and former welfare recipients, are most often employed in the retail and service sectors. These jobs, in addition to being low-wage, are characterized by highly variable and unpredictable schedules.^{xiv} This means that workers have little control over their hours of work. If they ask not to be scheduled for shifts that conflict with their classes, employers may comply, but will often not schedule them for alternative shifts. As a result, their earnings drop significantly.

In addition to these basic skills and financial issues, low-wage workers and other adults also often do not have enough academic or career counseling available to navigate through education and training services and weigh various career options. This is unfortunate as ongoing, personalized coaching can be especially important for low-income adults who may be the first in their families to enroll in postsecondary education, and who may lack the confidence and family support to persist.

Examples of state innovation in pathways to marketable credentials

Low basic skills and financial constraints, compounded by a lack of help in overcoming these barriers, are serious challenges to low-wage workers earning new credentials that lead to higher employment and earnings. Fortunately states and communities have been engaged in education reforms that address these challenges and can provide models for federal policy reform.

Examples of these reforms include:

- Creating career pathways for adults in such states as Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin
- Combining basic skills with job skills, including postsecondary certificates, through career pathway bridge programs in Illinois, Minnesota, Washington and Wisconsin

- Expanding student aid and career coaching for low-income adults. Kentucky’s Ready-to-Work program, Pennsylvania’s KEYS initiative, Arkansas Career Pathways, and Washington’s Opportunity Grants are all excellent examples of this strategy.^{xv}

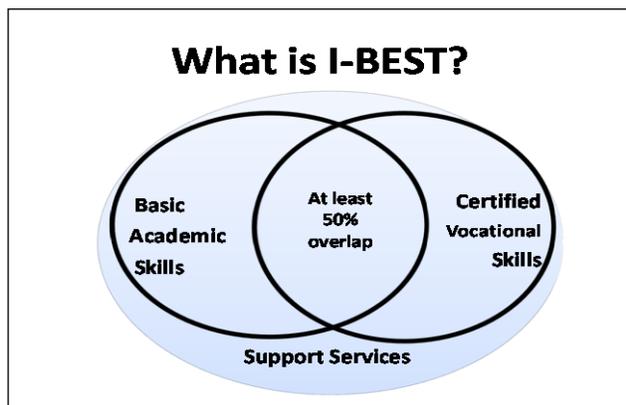
Some of these programs were specifically designed for TANF recipients. Others, including those that are part of the Joyce Foundation’s Shifting Gears initiative^{xvi}, were aimed at a broader population of low-wage workers who need skills upgrading. One of the key lessons that we’ve learned over the past decade is that TANF recipients are not a distinct population that is somehow different than other low-wage workers. The services and strategies that can help other low-wage workers successfully obtain credentials with value in the labor market can also work for TANF recipients if they are combined with the support services, such as child care, that are needed for single parents to participate.

I’m going to highlight just three of these state efforts to help convey a sense of the exciting innovations in education and training underway around the country and what they can achieve for low-wage workers, including low-income parents. These three efforts are Washington State’s I-BEST program, Wisconsin’s RISE Career Pathways and Bridges, and the Arkansas Career Pathways initiative.

Washington’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST program)

I-BEST began after Washington State studied education and earnings outcomes for thousands of basic skills and community college students over a five-year period and found that there was a “tipping point” for substantial increases in earnings, which was about one year of postsecondary education and an occupational certificate. Basic skills students who reached the tipping point had the biggest increase in earnings among any group of students, but too few basic skills students achieved that milestone. The goal of the I-BEST model is to help basic skills students earn a for-credit occupational certificate and raise their basic skills levels to what is needed for the next step in a career pathway. All I-BEST programs must be part of a one-year certificate program or other occupational program with a proven ability to place graduates in higher wage jobs. To do this, I-BEST contextualizes basic skills to the career pathway and basic skills instructors team teach students together with professional technical instructors. (Figure 3) Students attend full time for one to three quarters, depending on the pathway.

Figure 3



(Source: Washington State Board Community and Technical Colleges)

A May 2009 independent study of I-BEST compared its participants to a similar group of students and found that:

- 55 percent of I-BEST students earned an occupational certificate as compared to only 15 percent of the matched group.
- 90 percent of I-BEST students earned at least one college credit versus 67 percent of the other group.
- More than three-fourths of I-BEST students (78 percent) persisted into a second year of postsecondary education v. 61 percent of other group.

Wisconsin RISE Career Pathways

Wisconsin is among several states replicating the I-BEST model and adapting it to local needs. In Wisconsin, basic skills bridge instruction is part of the state's broader RISE career pathways initiative aimed at helping working adults advance to better jobs over time. (Figure 4) RISE career pathways are expressly designed to allow workers to complete meaningful occupational credentials in smaller "chunks" than traditional postsecondary programs, with each credential in the pathway articulated to the next higher one and building to postsecondary degrees over time. Each education step in the pathway is connected to specific job opportunities in that sector. RISE pathways are connected to complementary policies in workforce development efforts, such as Workforce Investment Act services, apprenticeships, and Wisconsin Industry Partnership initiatives, and are part of the Shifting Gears Initiative.

Figure 4



(Source: Wisconsin Technical College System)

One example of RISE career pathway bridge instruction is Moraine Park Technical College's I-BEST Artisan Baking certificate. The seven-credit technical certificate is supplemented with three credits of contextualized adult basic education; students are team taught by basic skills and

technical education faculty some of the time. The May 2009 Artisan Baking certificate pilot resulted in a 92 percent completion rate, with improved employment outcomes for more than 80 percent of the certificate completers (even in a struggling regional economy). In addition, since the certificate is the first step in a career pathway sequence, many of the participating students are continuing to work toward higher-level educational goals. Another Wisconsin RISE bridge example, from Northcentral Technical College, is the new one-year technical diploma in Manufacturing Electronics Maintenance, with two embedded certificates that include bridge instruction. Credits earned in this technical diploma program count toward an associate degree that articulates to a bachelor's degree program at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. A third example is Chippewa Valley Technical College's Welding bridge model which provides a nine-credit technical certificate, with integrated adult basic education instruction, embedded in a one-year Technical Diploma program.

The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) is one successful career pathways program funded entirely through the TANF block grant. CPI serves students at Arkansas' 22 two-year colleges and at three technical centers associated with four-year institutions. When students sign up for CPI, they are presented with information about the courses and degrees/credentials they need to enter various high demand careers that pay family sustaining wages. The individual career pathways are designed by CPI administrators at the individual colleges with the needs of low-income students in mind. Additionally, the flexibility of federal TANF money allows CPI to use TANF funds to provide up to \$1,500 a year per participant for tuition and support services, including child care and transportation assistance. This student aid is critical. Research shows that students who access financial resources and supportive services, such as scholarships or emergency cash assistance, stay in school longer and are more likely to graduate.^{xvii} However, it is worth noting that many CPI participants are not TANF recipients: students are eligible for CPI if they are adult caretakers of children under 21 and have incomes below 250 percent of the federal poverty line. Parents who participate (or whose children participate) in certain other means-tested programs are automatically eligible.

As an example of one CPI career pathway, Southeast Arkansas College at Pine Bluff (SEARK) has designed and implemented a Fast-Track Nursing Program as part of its Allied Health career path, which allows students to take developmental (remedial) courses that are contextualized specifically to the nursing profession, rather than the standard developmental course curriculum. This option has greatly decreased the time required to complete developmental coursework, which has increased completion rates: more than 95 percent of students in the Fast-Track program have successfully completed their Fast-Track Health Developmental Education, compared to 50 to 60 percent of students in traditional developmental education programs at SEARK. A majority go on to complete their practical training and pass the licensing exams.

Current TANF Policies Severely Limit Access to Education and Training

As you know, the primary performance measure under TANF is the work participation rate requirement. States are required to engage 50 percent of adults in families receiving TANF-funded assistance in a limited number of countable work activities for a specified number of hours per week or face financial penalties. Education and training activities can only count toward these hours to a limited degree. No more than 30 percent of individuals counting toward a

state's work participation rate can be counted in vocational education or high school attendance (for minor parents), and no individual can be counted as participating in vocational education for more than 12 months. After those first 12 months, hours spent in education and training programs can count as job skills training or education related to employment, but only when combined with at least 20 hours of participation a week in employment or another core TANF work activity.

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) for the first time imposed the work requirements on recipients of assistance funded with state-only money that is claimed toward the TANF maintenance of effort requirement, and made other changes that had the effect of increasing the effective work participation rate targets that states must meet. Additionally, the regulations implementing the DRA require that all participation hours be verified and documented, which poses significant challenges to both institutions educating TANF participants and the students. While a few states have worked to maintain access to education and training for TANF recipients in spite of these rules, they are the exceptions. In FY 2008, the most recent year for which participation rate data are available, only six states were taking full advantage of the ability to count recipients toward the participation rate based on vocational education and training or secondary school completion. In thirteen states, less than 10 percent of those counted toward the rate were engaged in these activities.

While we do not have hard data on the types of training that are being counted as vocational education, it appears that this is largely very short-term training (often lasting three months or less), rather than postsecondary certificate programs that connect to longer career and degree pathways. In Washington state, though I-BEST is recognized nationally as a ground-breaking approach, and the state's own data shows that it moves lower-skilled adults farther and faster than any other TANF education and training service, relatively few TANF recipients have received access to it.

The net result of this is that very few TANF recipients have access to education and training. Nationally less than 8 percent of "work-eligible" adult TANF recipients are engaged in education or training activities.^{xviii} Moreover, the small number of welfare recipients in educational activities is not simply a reflection of declining caseloads. One study estimated that implementation of welfare policies that limited access to education and training reduced all single mothers' postsecondary attendance by 20 to 25 percent.^{xix} These results are simply inconsistent with TANF's stated goal of promoting job preparation and work.

Recommendations

There is a broad consensus that parents should work to provide economic support for their families. There is an equally strong consensus that today's economy requires some education or training beyond high school to qualify for many family-supporting jobs. As this Committee prepares for the upcoming reauthorization of TANF, it is critical that it acts to strengthen TANF both as a safety net and as a pathway to opportunity.

The participation rate calculation, as it currently exists, provides no incentive for states to create effective pathways to economic opportunity. All it measures is whether clients spend the

required amount of time participating in countable activities. For education and training specifically, the participation rate simply measures how much time a client spends sitting in a chair in a classroom, not whether she learns a skill and earns a credential that is valued in the labor market. The recipient who sweeps leaves from the park is counted exactly the same as the nursing student who does an internship in a hospital. States are required to spend resources tracking and documenting attendance, rather than investing strategically in preparing low-income parents for jobs in demand by local employers.

Ultimately, we believe that the current work participation rate calculation should be replaced by outcome-based performance measures that will help foster and improve the effectiveness of programs serving recipients. However, we recognize that while some states have expressed strong support for replacing the participation rate with outcome measures, others are not yet prepared for such a transition. We also recognize the importance of refining possible measures, collecting data, and establishing baselines before mandating the use of these measures.

As an interim step, states that are willing to be held accountable for the outcomes they achieve in their programs, such as employment entry, job retention, or poverty reduction, should be allowed to opt out of the process-focused participation rate either for the entire TANF population or for groups participating in specific programs such as career pathways initiatives. To the extent appropriate, these outcome measures should be aligned with outcome measures for other federally supported programs. Performance measures and targets should be negotiated between the states and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with adjustments for populations served and economic conditions. States taking up this option should be required to report data that demonstrate that they are not “creaming” or setting up barriers that discourage services to less employable participants. HHS should also monitor population-based indicators of child well-being and hardship for possible adverse trends.

For states that choose to continue under the participation rate requirements, the work participation rate should be revised to give states flexibility to serve recipients with a range of work activities that will allow caseworkers to respond to individual needs and circumstances, including appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities and access to mainstream education and training programs. TANF recipients have a broad range of work histories and personal experiences and are poorly served by one-size-fits-all approaches.

Education and training, including at the postsecondary level, should be countable without arbitrary federal time limits or numerical caps. This does not mean that we believe that education and training is the appropriate activity for every recipient, but rather we believe that this decision should be made by states and by caseworkers, not this Committee. This is not 1996, and TANF is not AFDC. In the context of a time-limited program, both caseworkers and recipients are well aware of the need for education to lead to employment in a reasonable amount of time. The federal government no longer needs to worry about sending a signal about the importance of work. That message has gotten through loud and clear. At a minimum, the limits on education and training should be lifted during periods of high unemployment so that recipients will be qualified to obtain better jobs when the economy improves.

Congress should also take steps to reduce the burden of tracking attendance, especially in blended programs. Many of the most promising programs combine work, learning, barrier reduction and support services in different ways, and these integrated approaches should be allowed without having to track each component separately.

The caseload reduction credit is also of concern because it rewards states for reducing their welfare rolls, whether or not parents are employed in jobs that pay family-sustaining wages or receive other income supports. It should be replaced with a system that rewards only successful outcomes.

Finally, we note that the question of the role of education and training in the TANF program cannot be separated from issues of access to the program and funding. It is of limited value to allow TANF recipients to engage in education and training activities if hardly anyone is able to receive benefits. It is also important to acknowledge that doing education and training right does cost money. For example, the I-BEST model requires two teachers in the classroom instead of one. These investments pay off when recipients get better jobs, have less need of public benefits, and become taxpayers. But it is not reasonable to expect that states will be able to make these investments in the context of huge state budget deficits, rising demand for assistance, and a TANF block grant that is shrinking in real terms.

For a fuller discussion of CLASP's priorities for TANF reauthorization, see: Elizabeth Lower-Basch, *Goals for TANF Reauthorization*, CLASP, January 6, 2010. <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/TANF-Reauthorization-Goals.pdf>

ⁱ Table 25, Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of TANF Recipients, FY 2008, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/character/FY2008/tab25.htm>

ⁱⁱ College Board 2005, as cited in Susan Dynarski and David Deming, *Into College, Out of Poverty? Policies to Increase the Postsecondary Attainment of the Poor*, NBER Working Paper, 2009. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15387> See also *College is Still the Best Option*, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, September 2009.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Diana Furchtgott-Roth, Louis Jacobson, and Christine Mokher, *Strengthening Community Colleges' Influence on Economic Mobility*, Economic Mobility Project, Pew Charitable Trusts, October 2009.

http://www.economicmobility.org/assets/pdfs/PEW_EMP_COMMUNITY_COLLEGES.pdf

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^{vi} Katherine Magnuson, *Investing in the Adult Workforce: An Opportunity to Improve Children's Life Chances*, Casey Foundation, March 2007. <http://www.aecf.org/news/fes/dec2008/pdf/Magnuson.pdf>

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- ^x *Students Entering and Leaving Postsecondary Occupational Education: 1995-2001*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, March 2007, as cited in Jennifer Wheary and Viany Orozco, *Graduated Success: Sustainable Economic Opportunity Through One- and Two-Year Credentials*, Demos, February 2010. http://www.demos.org/pubs/graduated_success_Final.pdf
- ^{xi} Ali Berker and Laura Horn, *Work First, Study Second: Adult Undergraduates Who Combine Employment and Postsecondary Enrollment*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, August 2003. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003167>
- ^{xii} John Bound, Michael Lovenheim, and Sarah Turner, *Increasing Time to Baccalaureate Degree in the United States*, Population Studies Center, University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, April 2010. <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/pdf/rr10-698.pdf>
- ^{xiii} David Fein and Erik Beecroft, *College as a Job Advancement Strategy: Final Report on the New Visions Self-Sufficiency and Lifelong Learning Project*, Abt Associates, Inc., January 2006. http://www.abtassociates.com/reports/New_Visions_Final.pdf
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- ^{xv} For more information on the Arkansas, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania programs, see Josh Bone, *TANF Education and Training Series*, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), April 2010. http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=temporary_assistance&id=0007
- ^{xvi} The Joyce Foundation’s Shifting Gears initiative [<http://www.shifting-gears.org>], is helping six Midwest states—Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin—pursue system change in adult basic education, workforce development and postsecondary education to help more low skilled adults earn marketable postsecondary credentials.
- ^{xvii} See Thomas Brock, Lisa Matus-Grossman, and Gayle Hamilton, *Welfare Reform and Community Colleges: A Policy and Research Context*, MDRC, May 2002. <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/71/workpaper.pdf>
- ^{xviii} U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, “Chairman McDermott Announces Hearing on the Role of Education and Training in the TANF Program,” press release, 15 April 2010. <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/press/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=11134>
- ^{xix} Data is for single mothers ages 24-49 without a college degree. Dhaval Dave, Nancy Reichman, and Hope Corman, *Effects of Welfare Reform on Educational Acquisition of Young Adult Women*, NBER Working Paper, November 2008. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14466>