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Pathways to Opportunity

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Introduction

This paper discusses how the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) system can use new funding and flexibility under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to implement cutting-edge workforce education and training strategies that can help low-skill adults and out-of-school youth gain the skills and credentials they need to fill the pipeline of skilled workers for jobs important to local economies. It focuses on career pathways as a framework for strengthening employer engagement and linkages among workforce education and training programs; and as a model for improving how training and related services are delivered in the WIA adult, dislocated workers and youth programs.

Using Increased Funding Under WIA to Create Multiple Pathways to Marketable Postsecondary Credentials and Middle-Class Employment

By Evelyn Ganzglass and Julie Strawn

In his budget address to the nation, President Obama asked every American to commit to one year or more of higher education or career training, including community college, a four-year school, vocational training or an apprenticeship. He said that this is essential for maintaining the country's economic competitiveness and for advancing the economic prospects of all Americans.

Enabling everyone to attain the workplace skills and postsecondary educational credentials needed to access stable, middle-class employment will require changes in policies and practices within and across the workforce, adult education and postsecondary education systems.

This paper discusses how the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) system can use new funding and flexibility under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to implement cutting-edge workforce education and training strategies that can help low-skill adults and out-of-school youth gain the skills and credentials they need to fill the pipeline of skilled workers for jobs important to local

economies. It focuses on *career pathways* as a framework for strengthening employer engagement and linkages among workforce education and training programs; and as a model for improving how training and related services are delivered in the WIA adult, dislocated workers and youth programs.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

The ARRA is intended to preserve and create jobs, promote the nation's economic recovery and assist those most affected by the recession. Congress made clear that it expects the WIA system to:

- Increase services to low-income, displaced and under-skilled adults, and disconnected youth.
- Provide more and longer-term training with necessary supports to enable people to participate and succeed in training.
- Integrate adult education and English language services, as appropriate, with occupational training to accelerate learning and help people expeditiously move to jobs and further learning.

To help the system achieve these expectations, the ARRA reiterates that services to public assistance recipients and other low-income individuals are a priority use for WIA adult funds. The ARRA also allows contracting with institutions of higher education and eligible training providers if it: facilitates training of multiple individuals in high demand occupations; doesn't limit customer choice; and specifies that the funding can support the provision of needs-related payments and support services. Further, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration encourages the workforce system to think about how funds can be used to further transformational efforts to effectively enable future economic growth and advance shared prosperity for all Americans.

Career Pathways

A number of states, including Arkansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin, are using a career pathways framework for connecting workforce education, training and related services. Such a framework can make it easier for individuals, particularly low-skill and low-wage adults and out-of-school youth, to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in a given industry or occupational sector. Each step in a career pathway is designed to prepare students for the next level of employment and education. Ideally, pathways begin with short, intensive remedial "bridge" and "pre-bridge" programs for those at the lowest literacy and English language levels and extend through two-year and four-year college degrees.

For example, in Oregon, the career pathways framework serves as the basis for systemic reforms to help students move easily from secondary to postsecondary education, from pre-college adult education "bridge programs" to credit-bearing postsecondary courses, in and out of flexible modularized degree and certificate programs, and from community colleges to the university system. Oregon's career pathways system focuses on demand occupations in local and state labor market. In July 2007, the State Board of Education approved a new Career Pathways Certificate (12 to 44 credits), which bundles skills and competencies needed for specific

entry-level employment or job advancement in demand occupations. To date, the state has developed 118 Career Pathways Certificates. Colleges have developed new certificate options for students to blend school and work while providing opportunities to enter or return to work with increased skills and wages. To help students navigate pathways to better jobs and increased earnings, Oregon's 17 community colleges have developed more than 200 roadmaps that are posted on community college websites (http://www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php/career-pathways/156-career-pathways-roadmaps). As illustrated by the appended Lane County (Eugene, Oregon) Community College roadmap for the Administrative Assistant Career Pathway, the Career Pathway Certificates and roadmaps that were developed in partnership with Employer Advisory Committees depict coursework, competencies, skill requirements and credentials needed for related occupations in an industry sector.

Workforce Bridge Programs

Workforce bridge programs are often a key first step in a career pathway. These short, intensive remedial courses help students move expeditiously toward their educational and career goals. Adult education/ English as a Second Language (ESL) bridge programs help students who have below ninth-grade-level reading and math skills build academic and English language skills within the context of exploring postsecondary options and careers. Other bridge programs help adult education/ESL or college remediation students learn academic and English language skills within the context of exploring a variety of postsecondary options and careers. Students move into credit-bearing postsecondary education after completing the bridge program. As an Illinois guidance (http://www.shifting-gears.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78:bridge-definition-and-core-elements-&catid=38:state-progress&Itemid=58) indicates, bridge programs can be provided through adult education, credit and non credit departments of community colleges, community-based organizations, or other types of providers that offer non-credit workforce training. In Chicago, for example, the Carreras En Salud bridge program, which helps limited English proficient individuals advance to licensed practical nurse positions, involves 11 major employers, the local Workforce Investment Board, two community-based organizations (Instituto del Progresso Latino and Association House of Chicago), Wright College, Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center and the National Council of La Raza. Other states, including Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Oregon and Wisconsin, also have state-led workforce bridge initiatives underway.

Sector-Based

Career Pathways are sector-based and embody a dual customer approach. Wisconsin's Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE), which is led by the state's Technical College System and Department of Workforce Development, aims to make career pathways a central part of Wisconsin's education and job training systems and to engage the business community at the state and regional levels in addressing the skill needs of major industry sectors. The RISE guidelines (http://www.risepartnership.org/pdf/guidelines_revised.pdf) suggest that industry sectors

appropriate for pathway development are those that need skilled workers and also contribute to the economic growth of the region. Employers, in cooperation with unions in sectors where they represent a significant number of workers, recruit individuals to participate in career pathways education as well as commit to hiring, retaining and advancing successful career pathways students. Industry partners help align program content with industry requirements and, whenever possible, link curricula to industry skill standards, licensing and certification requirements.

Promising Program Design and Instructional Practices

Career pathways and bridge programs often incorporate the following program design features and instructional practices that show promise for supporting student learning and strengthening connections to employers and local labor market requirements:

- **Chunked programs, modularized curricula and embedded certificates.** Career pathways can be structured as "chunks" within two-year degree programs. Each chunk may be broken down further into short modules or mini-courses that enable the learner to move in steps toward increased skills, marketable credentials and better labor market outcomes. In some cases, modules are tied to required job skills and different levels of industry recognized credentials. For example, three to five certificates are embedded in the Industrial Maintenance Career Pathway program operated by Moraine Park, Gateway and Milwaukee colleges in Wisconsin. Maricopa Community College in Arizona worked with local healthcare providers to develop a sequence of four credit-bearing certificates that lead to an associate degree in health information technology.[i] Portland Community College offers a 12 to 44 credit Machine Manufacturing Technology program that includes modules that lead to an Employment Skills Training Certificate, which qualifies students for entry-level employment. The program also provides links to advanced certificates and degrees.[ii]

- **Intensive Instruction.** Compressed programs allow students to receive the same number of hours of instruction in fewer weeks by scheduling more class hours each week. Accelerated formats allow students to cover more content in fewer hours by moving through content at a faster pace. Either approach allows students more quickly to complete courses and programs and earn credentials. For example, Southeast Arkansas College's Career Pathways initiative compresses two semesters of remedial reading, writing and math into one semester and integrates basic health-career concepts into the Fast Track curriculum to help students move more quickly to allied health courses. Fast Track students are four times more likely to complete the remedial courses than students in traditional developmental education classes.[iii]

- **Student Success Services.** Wrap-around support services such as academic advisement, tutoring, career guidance, intensive case management, child care, transportation and other services have been shown to support student persistence and success. So can helping participants navigate unemployment insurance, trade adjustment

assistance and financial aid systems, and providing needs-related payments for those without other sources of financial support. A national study of student success services found that these services positively affect student grades, the number of credits earned and education persistence.[iv] Often, a collaboration of employers, unions, educational institutions, and other community organizations provide support services.

- **Contextual Instruction.** Customizing reading, writing, math and/or English instruction to students' occupational goals helps them recognize how what they are learning ties to their life and career goals. Program and course content can be contextualized to specific occupations or occupational clusters. It can also be contextualized to more general career exploration and planning content. For example, bridge programs in manufacturing might cover blueprint reading and statistical process control while those in health care might cover introduction to human biology and vocabulary and math related to health careers.

- **Flexible Scheduling and Delivery Modes.** Career pathways often employ other flexible instructional delivery modes such as distance learning and flexible scheduling—for example providing instruction in concentrated blocks on weekends—to help students meet school, work and family responsibilities. For example, Ivy Tech's College for Working Adults in Indiana combines classroom instruction and technology-enhanced learning in classes that are conducted in compressed 8-week sessions. Students' schedules for their entire 2-year associate degree program are set for the same days and times so that they can schedule work, child care and other arrangements. The bridge program offered by Lewis and Clark College in Illinois uses team teaching and combines on-line and in-class learning, and internships leading to an entry level Water and Wastewater Operations Certificate in the Manufacturing Technician Certificate program.

- **Dual and Concurrent Enrollment.** Dual or concurrent enrollment options blur the lines between high school completion, GED and ESL courses, and postsecondary education and training. They can benefit students in a number of ways. For example, students who are co-enrolled in WIA Title I and Title II programs can accelerate time to postsecondary credentials by simultaneously working toward their high school diploma and postsecondary credentials. Co-enrollment can allow adult education students access to wrap-around supports such as child care and case management, which have been shown to improve student success in gaining marketable credentials. Washington's I-BEST program, operated through the state's community and technical college system, is an excellent example of a program that uses concurrent enrollment in community college and adult education to increase the number of adult education and English language students who attain at least a one-year occupational certificate, the tipping point for accessing substantially better jobs in Washington. The I-BEST program design integrates basic skills and English language instruction and occupational training as part of a career pathway. I-BEST instructors co-teach with occupational training instructors at least half of the class time. The program also offers supplemental basic skills classes. The

percentage of I-BEST students who attempt college level courses is substantially higher than that of other basic skills and English language learners. These students' attainment of key first year achievement points along a college level pathway is also higher.[v] I-BEST students also achieve increased gains in adult basic education and English language relative to other students. Several projects are now concurrently enrolling 16-24 year old out-of-school youth in I-BEST and WIA Title I to provide these students with WIA-funded job placement, follow-up and student success services. This is intended to help these youth complete at least the entry level step of a well-defined pathway to professional technical credentials.[vi]

- **Cohorts or Learning Communities.** Students in learning communities or student cohorts take linked courses together to provide mutual support and encouragement. Creating learning communities also can help students gain a deeper understanding of the content they are studying and promote more interaction with their teachers. [vii] For example, all first-time freshmen who test into developmental reading at the Jefferson Community and Technical College in Kentucky are advised into SuccessNow Career Pathway Learning Communities in which students are supported by a Cohort Advising Team made up of an educational case manager, the students' reading and academic success course instructors and the developmental advising coordinator. Emphasis is placed on timely intervention and referral to other services to address academic and non-academic problems as they occur.

- **Tangible Rewards for Learning.** Tangible and immediate rewards for learning help motivate students to do well and persist in their studies. In career pathways programs, the curriculum is designed in conjunction with employers so that each step in the pathway increases learners' skills and improves their career and earning opportunities. Ideally, workers receive pay increases as their skills expand and they complete certain modules or milestones. Other examples of rewards for learning include performance-based scholarships through which students receive payments for persistence and good grades. Performance-based scholarships in two Louisiana colleges showed promising effects on student academic achievement and persistence. Based on these results, MDRC is currently testing the effectiveness of this approach with a broader set of students and institutions in New York, Ohio, New Mexico and California (http://www.mdrc.org/project_31_91.html).

- **Internships and Work Experiences.** Internships and work experience provide students with practical on-the-job learning and exposure to the work environment and career opportunities. Internships and work experience are especially important for many inner-city and minority youth who lack access to such opportunities through other means. Indiana's Embedded Skills pilot projects, wherever feasible, combine contextualized remediation with part-time paid internships in the field of study.

- **Mentors.** Youth in particular benefit from sustained interaction with caring and supportive adults and opportunities for one-on-one instruction and tutoring. Successful youth employment and apprenticeship

programs provide community and work-based mentors, who offer guidance and encouragement to further the character and competence of the younger person, forming a personal bond over time.[viii] A meta-analysis of evaluations of mentoring programs for youth found that disadvantaged youth were more likely to benefit from such programs than less disadvantaged youth, but that program quality varied and affected program effectiveness.[ix]

Implementing These Strategies under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

The ARRA provides State and Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) with an unprecedented opportunity to scale up implementation of the kind of innovations discussed in this paper. States can provide leadership by aligning federal and state workforce education and training programs, easing transitions among programs and accelerating learning by encouraging dual enrollment, and adding rigor and intensity to the educational experience. They can also provide guidance, as Minnesota has done, to encourage local adoption of career pathways programs and practices.

States can set a minimum percentage of local formula funds that must be spent on training and training-related activities. For example, Maine is setting an 80 percent threshold for the expenditure of new ARRA funds, which includes training, support services and needs-based payments, and Minnesota is planning to set a 70 percent floor. Since 2007, Illinois has required that at least 40 percent of adult and dislocated worker funds be spent on training and training related services. http://www.illinoisbiz.biz/NR/rdonlyres/7F4375E9-9527-4ABE-838A-12455F174C18/0/07PL40TrainingExpenditureRequirements.pdf ; http://www.illinoisbiz.biz/NR/rdonlyres/62BE10A0-683D-49E6-8E4C-6D9A912D63EB/0/07NOT25TrainingExpenditureRequirementClarifications.pdf.

States also can use their WIA discretionary funds to advance this transformative agenda. For example, Maine is using WIA discretionary funds to support a competitive skill scholarship program for low-income students. Wisconsin is using $1. 5 million in WIA discretionary grants to support Opportunity Grants to pay for short-term postsecondary training that is not covered by financial aid. The state also is using $300,000 of WIA discretionary funds to fund Skills Jump Start Grants to help individuals who lack a high school diploma complete their basic education and concurrently receive job training at technical colleges for employment in high-demand sectors such as manufacturing and health care. To be eligible for regular discretionary funds, statewide discretionary ARRA funds, or state endorsement for U.S. Department of Labor competitive grants, local WIBs must, among other requirements, comply with state policy and expend 70 percent of ARRA WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds and 35 percent of formula WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds on training.

Local WIBs can use their expanded contracting authority to fund cohort training and expand the capacity of existing career pathways and bridge programs to help more low-skilled people gain the requisite skills and credentials they will need to advance in the economy as it emerges from recession. For example, the South Central Workforce Council in Washington is using ARRA funds to contract with the community college so that WIA participants in the adult and dislocated worker programs can participate in I-BEST bridge programs. States can facilitate local contracting by, as Wisconsin has done, negotiating lower rates for

contract training at community colleges for local workforce boards. Local workforce areas and states can build career pathways approaches, including bridge programs, into their applications for sector-based discretionary grants to expand opportunities for low-skilled individuals.

Finally, states and local areas together can engage employers and unions involved in ARRA's infrastructure and other job creation efforts as partners in pathways and bridge programs to create an inclusive pipeline of skilled workers for these jobs and sustainable careers as the economic recovery proceeds. More than half of the 3.7 million jobs created through the ARRA will require some college experience, according to estimates[x]

Conclusion

CLASP is interested in learning about innovations in workforce development policy and practice resulting from the infusion of resources in the WIA system under the Recovery Act. Please let us know what you are doing to create pathways to marketable credentials and good jobs for low-income populations so that we can learn from your experience and share promising examples with others. Contact Evelyn Ganzglass at eganzglass@clasp.org.

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[i] Ohio Stackable Certificates: Models for Success, Columbus State Community College Business and Industry Division, 2008.
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Ibid.
[iv] Interim Report National Study of Student Success Services: Third Year Longitudinal Study Results, US Department of Education, 1997.
[v] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, *Increasing Student Achievement for Basic Skills Students*, Research Report No. 08-1, 2008. http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/education/resh_rpt_08_1_student_achieve_basic_skills_003.pdf
[vi] Governor's Discretionary Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Proposal: Out of School Youth Partnership Project, jointly submitted by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBTC) and the Washington Workforce Association (WWA), 2007.
[vii] Mazzeo, Christopher, "Supporting Student Success at California Community Colleges: A White Paper for the Bay Area Workforce Funders Collaborative," 2008.
[viii] Lerman, Robert and Pouncy, Hillard, *Why American Should Develop a Youth Employment System*, Policy Report No. 5, Progressive Policy Institute, March 1990, http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=107&subsecID=175&contentID=2003.
[ix] Dubois, D., Holloway, B., Vallentine, J., and Cooper, H., *Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth: A Meta-Analytic Review in American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, April 2002.
[x] Abdul-Alim, Jamal, *Most Stimulus Jobs Require College Experience*, in YOUTH Today, February 20, 2009. http://www.youthtoday.org/publication/article.cfm?article_id=2673

Appendix:
Lane County Community College Administrative Assistant Career Pathway