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Welfare Reform and Community Colleges

A Policy and Research Context

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Contents

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Contents

List of Tables and Figures

For almost as long as there has been welfare, there have been efforts at reform — but none so dramatic as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), passed by Congress in 1996. PRWORA replaced the nation's primary cash assistance program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). As a result, welfare recipients can no longer collect benefits indefinitely, and are under strong pressure to find work. Community colleges — which have long been players in helping welfare recipients and other low income people acquire skills and gain entry or advance in the labor force — face new opportunities and challenges in delivering education, training, and other services to the welfare population.

For more than 25 years, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, has studied the implementation and effects of programs that have attempted to increase self-sufficiency and improve life circumstances of people on welfare. In this chapter, we review some major findings and consider their implications for community colleges. We focus in particular on recent findings from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS), a federally-initiated study that answers two key questions asked by those who run welfare-to-work programs: what works best, and for whom? We also draw upon the early findings from Opening Doors to Earning Credentials, a foundation-sponsored initiative that is looking at ways to eliminate barriers and expand opportunities for welfare recipients and low-wage workers in postsecondary education.

The Policy Context: Welfare-to-Work under PRWORA[1]

The welfare-to-work provisions of PRWORA are embedded within a complex framework that affects every aspect of how cash assistance and welfare-to-work programs are funded and operated. Arguably, the most important feature of the law is the time limit it places on cash assistance. Prior to 1996, poor families were guaranteed an AFDC check if they completed an application and met state and federal eligibility requirements. Now, under PRWORA, there is no such entitlement. Poor families may receive federally funded cash assistance for up to five years. States may exempt up to 20 percent of the caseload from the time limit or, if they wish, use state funds to extend cash assistance beyond five years. States also have the option of imposing a time limit before five years, and many have done so. While time limits do not address welfare-to-work programs directly, they presumably place pressure on welfare recipients to look for work, and on welfare agencies to help them find employment quickly.

The law requires states to enroll 50 percent of all TANF recipients in work activities by 2000, and defines which activities are allowable. Unsubsidized employment — that is, any job that does not require the welfare department or other government agency to underwrite the wages — is clearly permitted. So are subsidized employment, on-the-job training, and unpaid work experience (commonly known as “workfare.”) Job search and job readiness assistance are permitted for a maximum of six weeks (or 12 weeks, under certain employment conditions). The law restricts classroom-based education and training in two ways: first, only teenagers who have dropped out of high school may attend education classes; and second, no more than 30 percent of the TANF caseload may be credited with participation in vocational training or other education.

To be counted as a welfare-to-work program participant, TANF recipients must be engaged in one or more activities for an average of 30 hours per week, including at least 20 hours in actual work or job search. In practical terms, this means that people engaged in education or training must combine these activities with paid or unpaid work or job search. The law also contains a “work trigger” provision, which states that all TANF recipients should be working after two years on cash assistance. States are supposed to sanction families that do not participate in required activities by removing the head of household from the grant. A more severe penalty, such as terminating the entire family’s grant, is permitted at state option.

PRWORA’s strong employment emphasis may be communicated not only via mandates and sanctions, but through financial incentives as well. Though not required by federal law, many states have adopted new rules to increase the amount of earned income TANF recipients may keep before losing their cash grant (a policy known as an earnings disregard). This policy, combined with the federal Earned Income Credit, makes it worthwhile for welfare recipients to take even a low-wage job, in that they will have more money each month if they work than if they rely on TANF alone.

The Research Context: Evidence from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies[2]

The “work first” emphasis of PRWORA raises an important question for welfare policymakers, administrators, and service providers: what is the best way to move people into employment? In the 1980s, many states opted to run mandatory job search programs, in which welfare recipients were taught how to look for work and provided with job leads (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1987). Rigorous research on these programs found that they sped up the entry of welfare recipients into the labor market, but did not lead to jobs that were long-lasting or high-paying. Furthermore, the programs generally did not benefit the most disadvantaged welfare recipients (Gueron and Pauly, 1991; Friedlander and Burtless, 1995). Many policymakers and program operators wondered whether an upfront investment in basic education and skill development would lead to better results than the labor force attachment (LFA), or job search, approach. Proponents of this alternative approach argued that human capital development (HCD) programs would help people — especially those who lacked a high school diploma or faced other barriers to labor market entry — get better and more stable jobs and reduce returns to welfare rolls.

NEWWS was launched in 1989 to settle this debate and answer other questions about the implementation, effects, and costs of welfare-to-work programs. Conceived and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with support from the U.S. Department of Education, the evaluation was conducted in seven locations across the United States: Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Riverside, California; Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Portland, Oregon. In each of these locations, or "sites," employment- or education-focused programs were operated over a several-year period. Researchers conducted random assignment experiments to determine the effect of these programs on employment, earnings, welfare receipt, and other outcomes. (For a complete discussion of the NEWWS design and final results, see Hamilton et al., 2001).[3]

The experiments were conducted as follows. Individuals who were mandated to participate in welfare-to-work programs — predominantly single mothers with children ages 3 and above (or, in some sites, ages 1 and above) (Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, 1993) — were randomly assigned to program or control groups. Program group members were required to participate in welfare-to-work activities or risk a financial sanction, usually resulting in the removal of the adult from the cash grant. Control group members were neither required nor allowed to participate in welfare-to-work programs, and could not be sanctioned; they could, however, enroll in other services available in the community if they wished. The strength of this design is that it ensures that the characteristics of program and control group members at the time of entering the study — including their education levels, work histories, family circumstances, motivation, and so forth — are statistically the same. Consequently, any subsequent differences in the two groups' outcomes can be confidently attributed to the welfare-to-work programs.

As part of a largely unprecedented effort to determine which of the two different welfare-to-work strategies was more effective, three of the sites in the NEWWS evaluation — Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside — agreed to operate *two* distinct welfare-to-work programs simultaneously: an LFA program and an HCD program. Each communicated a different message to welfare recipients about the best route to employment, and differed from the other in the way services were emphasized and sequenced. Random assignment was used to assign welfare recipients to the LFA or HCD programs or to a control group.[4] This three-group design provides the strongest possible test of the LFA and HCD approaches by allowing a direct comparison of the LFA and HCD groups to the control group, or the LFA and HCD groups to each other.

Table 1 provides an overview of the programs and research designs for the seven sites. Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside were the only sites that ran LFA and HCD programs side-by-side. Columbus, Detroit, and Oklahoma City ran education-focused programs; Portland adopted a mixed approach.[5] Although the seven sites are not representative in a statistical sense of the entire U.S., they reflect a range of conditions in which welfare-to-work programs operate. All included big or medium-sized cities; in addition, the Riverside, Oklahoma City, and Portland sites encompassed smaller towns and rural areas. All experienced population growth over the study period, though in Detroit, the growth was negligible. As was true nationally during the 1990s, the sites also experienced employment growth and a falling unemployment rate between 1991 and 1999. Finally, all of the sites also experienced large declines in their welfare caseloads during the study period. (See Table 1.)

Sample Characteristics. Across the 7 sites, sample intake took place from mid-1991 through the end of 1994, and resulted in over 40,000 welfare recipients randomly assigned to program and control groups. Their demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 2. The "typical" sample member was female, about 30 years old, and either never married or separated, divorced, or widowed. In contrast to some stereotypes, the majority of sample members in five of the seven sites had at least 6 months of work experience with the same employer. Most, however, had not worked in the 12 months prior to random assignment. With regard to past welfare receipt, the majority in all sites but Oklahoma City had already received welfare for at least two years.[6] Between 48 and 56 percent of sample members had a high school diploma or GED when they entered the program, and some enrollees in all sites had some college or post-secondary schooling. On average, however, sample members had completed only 11 years of schooling prior to random assignment. There was wide variation in the percentage of sample members who had enrolled in any education or training program in the 12 months before entering the study, ranging from a high of almost 40 percent in Grand Rapids (where community colleges, adult schools, and vocational training providers aggressively recruited welfare recipients) to just under 10 percent in Columbus. Most often, sample members who had enrolled in an activity chose a vocational education or skills training program. (See Table 2.)

Findings on Program Implementation and Participation. The LFA programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside emphasized rapid employment and required job search as the first activity. Clients were instructed on how to look for work, complete a job application, and conduct an interview. In supervised "phone rooms," clients were asked to call prospective employers, inquire about openings, and arrange interviews. Programs also hired job developers to find job leads and assist participants with placement. Clients were generally instructed to take any job offer — including minimum wage jobs — on the theory that they could best advance up the career ladder by building skills at the workplace. If clients did not succeed in finding employment through job search, they were assigned to education, vocational training, or work experience activities to improve their employability. LFA programs emphasized short-term assignments so that clients could return quickly to job search.

In contrast to the LFA approach, the HCD programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside emphasized increasing skills through formal education and training before entering the labor market. (The programs in Columbus, Detroit, and Oklahoma City shared this emphasis.) Clients received an upfront assessment to determine their work history, educational skills, and employment interests, followed by an assignment to an appropriate activity. Because of the generally low educational attainment of most welfare recipients, basic education (that is, Adult Basic Education, GED, or English as a Second Language) was a common first step. College and vocational training programs, however, were encouraged for those who qualified. Job search was assigned after education or training was completed. By increasing clients' basic skills, HCD programs hoped to place clients in jobs that offered good pay, benefits, and stability.

Portland was unique in that its program blended LFA and HCD elements. Like the LFA programs, Portland staff emphasized that employment was the goal of program participation. Clients who were considered "job ready" were assigned to job search for their first activity, but clients who were more disadvantaged — including those with low basic skills and little work history — were enrolled in education or training first, followed by job search. Portland employed full-time job developers to work with participants once they began actively looking for a job. In contrast to the "pure" LFA programs in the evaluation, Portland staff advised clients to be selective in their job search, accepting only positions that paid above minimum wage and provided benefits.

All of the evaluation sites used a "brokered" model of service delivery. Welfare department staff usually provided assessment and case management services, and — in most sites — managed the job search and work experience components. Community colleges, adult schools, and vocational training centers provided basic education and occupational skills training courses (Hamilton and Brock, 1994). Portland was unusual in that the welfare department contracted with the community colleges to provide all of the key services (though case management responsibilities were shared with welfare staff). In no other site did community colleges play such a central role.

As shown in Figure 1, all of the NEWWS sites produced significant increases in employment-related activities (including job search, education or training) among program group members. (Recall that control group members could voluntarily participate in services other than those provided by the welfare-to-work programs.) The bars in Figure 1 reflect participation *impacts*, or the difference between the participation levels of program and control group members. Most of the programs achieved a participation impact of 21 percentage points or more in the two years following individuals' entry into the study. The impacts ranged from 9 percentage points in Detroit to 40 percent points in the Riverside HCD group. Among people who participated, involvement in employment-related activities usually lasted for at least several months (Freedman et al., 2000). (See Figure 1.)

As displayed in Figure 2, the programs generally succeeded in increasing participation in the specific activities they tried to promote. For example, the LFA programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside — along with Portland — achieved significant impacts in job search activities. Likewise, the HCD programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids and Riverside — together with the education-focused programs in Columbus — achieved significant impacts in education or training. In Oklahoma City and Detroit, the differences between program and control group participation rates in education and training were much smaller (and, in Detroit, not statistically significant). The small participation impacts in Oklahoma City and Detroit were attributed to low enforcement of participation requirements for the program group (ibid.). (See Figure 2.)

Longer-term data on participation are available for the LFA and HCD programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids and Riverside, and for Portland. Even at five years after random assignment, the programs in these sites maintained statistically significant differences between program and control group members in employment activity participation levels, ranging from 9 percentage points in Portland to 27 percentage points in the Riverside HCD program. All of the programs had a substantial effect on job search participation. In addition, significant education or training impacts were found in the Atlanta LFA and HCD programs, Grand Rapids HCD program, Riverside HCD program, and Portland.

Individuals who entered the Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside HCD programs without a high school diploma or GED were more likely than control group members to obtain such a degree at some point during the follow-up period, a result consistent with program goals and not found in the LFA programs. In Portland, such "nongraduates" were more likely to obtain a trade license or certificate, or to obtain a GED and then a second education or training credential. For those who entered the study *with* a high school diploma or GED, only the Atlanta programs — both LFA and HCD — led to significant positive effects on receiving any type of education or training credential.

Program Effects on Employment, Earnings, Welfare, and Income. Most control group members found employment on their own at some point during the follow-up period. Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 3, program group members in the majority of sites "beat" the control group employment rates. For example, in the Riverside LFA program, 74.5 percent of the program group was employed over five years, compared to 66.1 percent of the control group, for a difference (or impact) of 8.4 percentage points. Across the sites, significant employment impacts ranged from 1.9 to 8.4 percentage points. Most of the programs also increased enrollees' earnings over control group earnings during the follow-up period, as shown in Figure 4. Of the programs that produced significant earnings gains, the average increases ranged from $1,361 in the Riverside HCD program to $5,150 in Portland. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

As with employment, most control group members succeeded in getting off welfare on their own during the follow-up period, but in the sites for which we have data, program group members got off welfare sooner. (Oklahoma City welfare records were not available for the full follow-up period.) The impacts ranged from an average reduction of 1.6 months on welfare in Detroit to an average reduction of 5.6 months in Portland. In dollar terms, program group members received between $710 and $2,949 less in welfare over five years than their control group counterparts, as shown in Figure 5. The largest welfare savings occurred in the Riverside programs, due in part to California's relatively large welfare grant (resulting in bigger savings when people go off welfare than in states where grants are smaller). (See Figure 5.)

Across all sites, the programs had little effect on income — that is, the combination of earnings, tax payments and credits, and public assistance benefits. Over five years, welfare recipients in most of the program groups received more in earnings and the Earned Income Credit than those in the control groups, but also paid higher payroll taxes and received less in welfare and Food Stamps. (Again, five-year data for Oklahoma City were not available.)

Comparing the LFA and HCD programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside, we found that HCD programs did not produce greater earnings gains or improvements in participants' overall financial well-being relative to LFA programs. Moreover, the LFA approach got welfare recipients into jobs more quickly than did the HCD approach, a clear advantage when welfare benefits are time-limited. Finally, the LFA approach was much less costly to run than the HCD approach. These findings held true for program enrollees who lacked a high school diploma or GED as of study entry as well as for those who possessed these educational credentials. The education-focused programs in Columbus, Detroit, and Oklahoma City also fit this general pattern. Given the large number of programs examined, and the variety of served populations and labor markets, these results provide support for choosing employment-focused programs over education-focused programs that mandate education or training for everyone.

Notably, one program — the one in Portland — by far out-performed the others in terms of employment and earnings gains and saving government money. As indicated above, Portland was distinguished from the other sites operating pure LFA or HCD programs in that it initially assigned some enrollees to very short-term education or training and others (the majority) to job search. Portland staff also counseled participants to wait for a good job, as opposed to taking the first job offered. This result, along with other past research, suggests that a "mixed" approach — one that blends both employment search and education or training — might be the most effective (see also Gueron and Pauly, 1991; Friedlander and Burtless, 1995).

The NEWWS results should not be interpreted as an indictment of the benefits of education and training in general. Additional analyses performed as part of this evaluation have suggested that obtaining a GED and, especially, obtaining a GED and then receiving some type of vocational training can result in employment and earnings gains for those who achieve these milestones. Using non-experimental techniques, researchers estimated that those who received a GED earned \$797 more, on average, than those who did not receive a GED over a three-year period. More impressively, those who earned a GED *and* received post-secondary services earned \$1,542 more, on average, than those who did not (Bos et al., 2001, forthcoming). Unfortunately, few NEWWS sample members made it this far. While the Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside HCD programs increased GED certificate attainment by 7 to 11 percentage points for those who entered the study without a high school diploma or GED, all in all, only 10 to 23 percent of all HCD sample members who lacked these credentials at study entry had obtained one by the end of the five-year follow-up period. The reasons for these low percentages are many, including: people drop out of education and training classes, either because they leave welfare (and, thus, welfare-to-work programs) or other personal circumstances change; adults supporting families cannot afford an upfront deferment of employment and earnings to attend school; and only a small minority of welfare recipients report that, if given a choice, they prefer to go to school to study basic reading and math over going to school to learn a job skill or going to a program to get help looking for a job (Hamilton and Brock, 1994). This suggests the need to identify other types of programs or initiatives that can achieve the originally hoped-for HCD goals of providing welfare recipients with better and more stable jobs and increasing their income.

Programmatic Implications for Community Colleges

In many ways, the analyses of PRWORA and the NEWWS data point to the same conclusion: that welfare-to-work programs should have a strong employment emphasis. As evidenced in Portland, however, an employment-focused program can include education and training for people who need these services — and can help clients obtain good paying, stable jobs. Moreover, an employment-focused program can continue serving clients after they begin working, to help them acquire skills and earn credentials that will move them up the career ladder. In this section, we consider the variety of steps community colleges can take to accomplish these goals.

The first consideration for community colleges or any other organization designing a welfare-to-work program is to coordinate with local welfare agencies. Some colleges and welfare agencies enter into formal relationships, with a contract or memorandum of understanding that spells out the services that each institution will provide, the number of clients to be served, and the funding. Other colleges operate programs independently of the welfare system, with no explicit agreement to accept referrals or resources from the welfare department. In either case, they need to be aware of the local welfare agency's policies concerning education, training, and work activities. Otherwise, welfare recipients who enroll in community college programs may be at risk of being pulled out by welfare department case managers and placed in other activities or, worse, sanctioned because their activities do not count toward the welfare agency's participation requirement.

Running an employment-focused program does not mean that community colleges need to limit their offerings to job search or other work activities. As Portland demonstrated, job search can be used for "job ready" clients, while short-term education and training can be used for clients in need of skills. Another approach is to combine education and training activities with work. Many welfare agencies currently allow welfare recipients to participate in 10 or more hours of education or training per week provided that they work at least 20 hours. Some community colleges have developed work-study options to help welfare recipients meet their work obligations while going to school. Ideally, work/study positions can be structured to reinforce clients' career goals through placements in the college's administrative offices, student services, library, other facilities, or even off-campus with local public or non-profit employers. At least two states, California and Kentucky, have created special work/study programs for TANF recipients that allow placements in off-campus for-profit employers, to provide participants with relevant career experience.

While welfare-to-work programs will likely be relatively short-term compared to a college's degree or certificate programs, it may be possible to condense programs into shorter time frames without sacrificing quality, by increasing their intensity or combining different elements. For example, basic skills remediation and job training can be integrated, rather than addressed separately (Grubb et al., 1999). Another option is to pair employment services with longer education and training programs that have been broken down into smaller modules that build on one another. In this way, recipients can earn credits or build skills in shorter, more manageable "chunks." Participants who leave early do not need to repeat entire semester-long courses, but can complete only the remaining modules at a later date (Golonka and Matus-Grossman, 2001). Still another option, often combined with "modularizing" programs, is to run programs in an open entry/open exit format, so that participants can move at their own pace and have the option of re-enrolling if employment or other circumstances cause them to leave the program.

The above strategies suggest that welfare-to-work programs may be only the first step in a longer-term process of career development. Given the pressures and incentives for welfare recipients to find work, it may not be realistic to expect them to earn degrees or certificates in the short-term. The challenge for community colleges is to leave open the door so that former welfare recipients return to gain such credentials in the future.

The Opening Doors Initiative.[7] In 2001, MDRC launched the Opening Doors to Earning Credentials project (Opening Doors for short) to explore the issues of community college access and retention for current and former welfare recipients and low-wage workers. The project is examining the full range of programs that community colleges can offer and how welfare recipients and low-wage workers might take better advantage of them. Encouragingly, early findings suggest that much can be done under existing state or federal welfare policies.

Balancing Work and School. In the past, community colleges and other welfare-to-work service providers could assume that most welfare recipients who enrolled in their programs were unemployed. Now, because of PRWORA's work requirements and the earned income disregards adopted by many states, many welfare recipients are working, at least part-time. This suggests that community college programs should be designed to allow work and academic or training activities to be combined easily.

There is huge variation across states and even localities in terms of what sorts of activities are allowed to count towards the federal work requirement. Some states and localities insist on 20 or 30 hours of work per week, either in paid employment or unpaid work experience. Other states have allowed welfare recipients to count some postsecondary participation towards the work requirement, while still requiring some limited work hours. A growing number of states allow welfare recipients to engage in postsecondary or vocational education activities for one, two, or even four years without requiring additional work hours (Greenberg, Strawn, and Plimpton, 2000). Illinois has gone so far as to "stop the clock" for welfare recipients enrolled in full-time postsecondary degree-granting programs, meaning that welfare recipients do not lose months under the time limit while they are in college.

Welfare recipients who are working and attending college often experience conflicts between employer and classroom demands because of dynamic or inflexible schedules, the need to put in overtime, or other issues. As noted earlier, colleges in some states provide on- or off-site work/study or internship positions to help participants fulfill their work requirement. Other colleges have hired job developers or placement staff to help welfare recipients find part-time private sector employment that will easily accommodate their school schedules. Ideally, such positions can provide entrée into organizations or occupational fields that correspond to participants' career interests.

Family Demands, Responsibilities. By definition, all welfare recipients are also parents, and will likely have competing family responsibilities in addition to any program or employer commitments. In a study of young mothers on welfare, Quint, Musick, and Ladner (1994) found that juggling family, school, and sometimes work, as well as pregnancy, were all barriers to finishing college degree or certificate programs. The more a community college program can take into account this delicate balancing act, the greater the likelihood that working parents will be able to participate. Programs may wish to consider including children or other family members in program activities — either with their parents, or in separate enrichment programs — to ease child care problems and encourage greater levels of participation. Programs can also schedule activities on a flexible basis, as Riverside Community College's New Visions program has done, by offering multiple sessions of a single activity so that parents with changing work schedules or child care arrangements can switch back and forth from an evening class to a daytime or weekend offering when necessary (Fein et al., 2000).

While some colleges offer onsite child care, many of these programs have insufficient capacity or are reserved for full-time degree seeking students, and thus not a viable option for welfare-to-work participants. Lack of access to child care in general during program hours may also be a barrier to program participation, especially if programs are held during evening or weekend hours when child care is less likely to be available. Programs may wish to build referral relationships with community-based child care providers in order to retain program participants, or work with the welfare agency to create new child care slots. For example, Washington's State Board of Community and Technical Colleges is administering a TANF-funded program to provide evening and some weekend child care to TANF and other low-income families on most college campuses.

Academic Barriers. The target population for welfare-to-work programs is relatively heterogeneous, with a variety of basic skill levels. As Table 2 showed, in all but one NEWWS site, at least 40 percent of welfare-to-work program enrollees did not have a high school diploma or GED. The flip side is that many NEWWS enrollees *had* completed high school or a GED program before entering the study, and a small number had received some college or training. Another study estimated that welfare recipients fell almost evenly across three skill levels: 31% of recipients had "minimal" skills (the equivalent of having dropped out of high school); 37% had "basic" skills (the equivalent of having earned a high school diploma with below average school performance); and 32% had "competent, advanced or superior" skills (the equivalent of some postsecondary education, a bachelor's degree, or beyond) (Carnevale and Desrochers, 1999).

For program designers, these data suggest the importance of upfront screening or assessment to determine whether welfare recipients are ready for postsecondary-level coursework or will require remediation, and of an individualized service delivery approach. Among individuals requiring remediation, for example, some may need only a short period of study to acquire a high school diploma or GED, while others may require longer-term or more intensive services to address extremely low basic skills, limited English proficiency, or learning disabilities. Many community colleges are equipped to provide a full range of educational services; if not, they should be prepared to refer clients to other services in the community.

Personal Barriers. Participants may exhibit a variety of personal participation barriers, including poor physical health, depression, mental illness, substance abuse, or domestic violence. Some participants may have legal barriers to employment, such as past criminal records, or unresolved immigration issues. In order to address such barriers, colleges may need to develop or provide referrals to counseling services that go beyond traditional academic counseling. This is another area where it makes sense for community college and welfare staff to coordinate, since welfare agencies often have contracts or linkages with programs that can help individuals with severe problems.

To help welfare recipients cope with more common concerns — such as the stress associated with re-entering school or balancing home, school, and work commitments — some colleges have encouraged the formation of peer support networks. Welfare recipients come together on a regular basis, sometimes with college staff present, to discuss problems, seek advice, and gain emotional support. Sacramento City College in California, for example, has trained current TANF students to provide referrals to college and community resources as well as emotional support to students in need, through the "Student Ambassador" program. The students involved in the program are paid for providing counseling and support as part of their work/study assignment.

Financial Cost. Welfare recipients who are interested in enrolling in Associate's degree programs or other community college courses may be deterred by the registration fees and other expenses related to school. Despite the availability of grants and loans, many welfare recipients may not be aware of how to apply for financial aid or feel intimidated by the process. At many colleges, financial aid staff have little time to meet with students individually, and written materials on how to apply for grants and loans tend not to be user-friendly. Quint, Musick, and Ladner (1994) identified lack of understanding of financial aid or other college rules as a reason some young mothers on welfare dropped out of college. Moreover, due to past defaults on student loans or grants in the past, some welfare recipients may not be eligible for some federally funded financial aid programs.

Colleges might consider designating a staff person to help students on welfare navigate the financial aid system, or develop written financial aid materials expressly for welfare recipients. In addition to basic information on scholarships and loans, welfare recipients need to know what the welfare office will provide — and how to obtain welfare office assistance. For approved education and employment activities, welfare agencies will typically provide financial help with child care expenses, transportation, books, and uniforms. Some agencies will also cover registration or course fees. Unless welfare recipients are aware of these options, however, they may not think to ask. Likewise, welfare agency staff do not always make known that support services are available, especially when individuals enroll in college activities on their own rather than through welfare agency referral.

Access to Program Information. Finally, simply not knowing about programs or their benefits can be a barrier to participation. Programs will need to build strong relationships with their local welfare agency in order to ensure that welfare recipients are informed of community college options by their caseworkers. Colleges will likely also want to build strong referral relationships with workforce development and other public agencies, as well as local community based organizations that are likely to serve the target population. Colleges might create marketing materials for their programs, such as posters, brochures or videos that can be distributed at welfare offices and in the community. Partner agencies may also include these materials in their planned mailings to clients, as welfare agencies in Maine and Kentucky have done.

Another way to strengthen existing referral relationships is for colleges to conduct training sessions for welfare or other agency staff about their welfare-to-work programs, so that caseworkers, receptionists, and others have more information to share with potential participants. College programs might even consider placing staff onsite at welfare agencies to conduct orientations and answer potential participants' questions about available programs and services. Likewise, colleges can work with welfare agencies to hold some activities at the college, such as job search, job club, or special events like job fairs, in order to familiarize welfare staff and recipients with the college campus and its resources.

Since not all welfare recipients are in frequent contact with their caseworkers, colleges will likely want to conduct outreach and marketing to potential participants in the community at-large. Ideally, such outreach efforts will involve the college's central admissions office as well as specialized welfare-to-work program offices. Colleges can also use current program participants as recruiters, even offering work/study slots as Riverside Community College's New Visions program has done (Fein et al., 2000).

Seeking Out New Funding Opportunities. It appears at first glance a daunting task to broaden community college programs to take into account welfare time limits and work requirements imposed by PRWORA and the many other barriers faced by participants. Fortunately, there are a number of financial resources available to support such efforts. Some individual states, such as Washington, are applying TANF dollars to support program or curriculum development to create shorter-term programs that take time limits into account, or to tailor programs to job opportunities in high growth industries. Others, such as California and Kentucky, are using state TANF funds to create college-based case manager positions to assist welfare recipients with college-specific and personal support needs. TANF funds can also be used to support additional benefits and services including tuition assistance, child care, transportation assistance, and state-level work/study programs.

Rather than rely on TANF funds alone, college welfare-to-work programs are in a unique position to merge these sources with additional federal, state, and local funding streams, leveraging additional resources. The U.S. Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work Grants program is not likely to be reauthorized, but there are a number of other federal funding sources for college-based welfare-to-work programs. College-based welfare-to-work programs may be able to tap into workforce development funding under the Workforce Investment Act. In states where TANF agencies are partners in workforce development "One Stop" centers, college welfare-to-work programs may be able to become eligible providers for training or employment services.

Some programs with an occupational training focus may be able to draw down funding from the Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Program. Colleges which provide vocational education are often eligible to receive Perkins grants through their state boards of vocational education, and can use the funding to cover a variety of expenses including equipment costs, curriculum design, career counseling, integrating academic and vocational education, staff, special services, and even remediation. One new source of federal funding, for example, is the H1-B Technical Skills Training Grant awarded by the Department of Labor to local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to support development of local training programs in high-skill technology areas that face labor shortages. Colleges can apply through their local WIB's for support; grants have been awarded up to $2.5 million. Some states have used other federal sources of funding to support training or other welfare-to-work efforts, including the Adult Education and Literacy funds from the Workforce Investment Act and Community Development Block Grants. By offering education and training components of a program on the credit-granting side, colleges can often secure federal financial aid for eligible participants as well.

There are also private resources available to support welfare-to-work program efforts. Private foundations or other philanthropies may be willing to support program development or operations costs. Colleges can also work with the employers of working students to secure tuition reimbursement. For participants who are unemployed or seeking career advancement opportunities, colleges can partner with local employers to hire program graduates, fund and collaborate on program design and operations, donate equipment, and lend staff to serve as instructors or mentors. While colleges are unlikely to find a single funding stream to support services and programming for welfare-to-work participants, there are clearly a host of new funding sources available which can be merged to create a diverse and stable funding base for their efforts.

Community Colleges and Welfare Recipients: A Good Fit

Colleges designing welfare-to-work programs are faced with two seemingly conflicting goals: helping welfare recipients move into employment quickly, and helping welfare recipients find and retain good jobs that have the potential for stability and living wages. As the Portland NEWWS site demonstrated, these goals are not necessarily incompatible, but can be achieved by developing individualized programs that combine job search with education and training, and maintain a clear focus on employment. As described in the previous section, there are many other ways community colleges can make their programs more flexible and attempt to build long-term relationships with clients so that they continue to work toward postsecondary educational goals after leaving welfare.

Compared to other institutions, community colleges offer several advantages as operators of welfare-to-work programs. They are accustomed to serving a wide range of students, from traditional college-aged students to older working students, and from various socio-economic, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They typically offer a wide menu of credit and non-credit academic, remedial, vocational, and continuing education courses, as well as some campus-based support services. They can help participants acquire marketable credentials, including vocational certificates and Associate's degrees, and make the transition to four-year colleges and universities. Finally, they frequently have relationships with local employers, which they can use to provide job placement opportunities for welfare-to-work participants. Given these features, community colleges have the potential to set TANF recipients on a path toward reduced welfare dependence, increased employment opportunity, and economic gains.

Endnotes

[1]Unless otherwise noted, the information in this section is adapted from Brock, Nelson and Reiter, 2002. For a detailed description of PRWORA, see Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, 2000.

[2]Unless otherwise noted, the information in this section is adapted from Hamilton et al., 2001.

[3]NEWWS reports can be downloaded from either of the following websites:
http://www.mdrc.org/WelfareReform/NEWWS.htm and http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/NEWWS/index.htm.

[4]In Atlanta and Grand Rapids, welfare recipients had an equal chance of being randomly assigned to the LFA, HCD, or control groups, regardless of educational status. In Riverside, an educational test was administered prior to random assignment. Welfare recipients who were determined to be in need of basic education services could be randomly assigned to the LFA, HCD, or control groups; welfare recipients who were *not* in need could be randomly assigned only to the LFA or control groups.

[5]In Columbus, an experiment similar in design to the LFA-HCD test was conducted to compare two alternative approaches to case management: a traditional approach, in which separate staff performed income maintenance and welfare-to-work case management roles; and an integrated approach, in which income maintenance and welfare-to-work case management were consolidated. For more information on this test, see Brock and Harknett, 1998, and Scrivener and Walter, 2001.

[6]The differences between sample members in Oklahoma City and those of other sites on public assistance and labor force status are attributable to a decision to include only welfare applicants in the sample. In the other sites, samples included both applicants and ongoing recipients.

[7]Unless otherwise noted, much of this section draws on information presented in Golonka and Matus-Grossman, 2001.

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Table 1

Programs and Research Designs for the Seven Evaluation Sites

Characteristic	Atlanta	Grand Rapids	Riverside	Columbus	Detroit	Oklahoma City	Portland
Program type(s)	LFA and HCD	LFA and HCD	LFA and HCD	Education-focused	Education-focused	Education-focused	Employment/ Education blend
Random assignment design	3-group (LFA, HCD, control)	3-group (LFA, HCD, control)	3-group (LFA, HCD, control)	3-group (Integrated case management, Traditional case management, control)	2-group (Program, control)	2-group (Program, control)	2-group (Program, control)
Dates of sample intake	01/92 – 06/93	09/91 – 01/94	06/91 – 06/93	09/92 – 07/94	05/92 – 06/94	09/91 – 05/93	02/93 – 12/94
Sample Size (total):	4,433	4,554	8,322	7,242	4,459	8,677	4,028
Program:	1,441 (LFA) 1,495 (HCD)	1,557 (LFA) 1,542 (HCD)	3,384 (LFA) 1,596 (HCD)	2,513 (Integrated) 2,570 (Traditional)	2,226	4,309	3,529
Control:	1,497	1,455	3,342	2,159	2,233	4,368	499

SOURCE: Hamilton et al., 2001.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Program Enrollees

Measure	Atlanta	Grand Rapids	Riverside	Columbus	Detroit	Oklahoma City	Portland
Demographic characteristics							
Gender/sex (%)							
Male	3.2	4.2	10.6	6.5	3.3	6.9	6.7
Female	96.8	95.8	89.4	93.5	96.7	93.1	93.3
Average age (years)	32.8	28.2	32.0	31.8	30.0	28.1	30.4
Ethnicity (%)							
White, Non-Hispanic	3.5	50.1	49.0	46.5	11.0	59.4	69.5
Hispanic	0.9	8.2	30.2	0.4	0.8	4.6	4.2
Black, Non-Hispanic	95.2	39.3	16.7	52.0	87.3	28.9	20.1
Other	0.4	2.4	4.1	1.2	0.9	7.1	6.2
Family status							
Marital status (%)							
Never married	60.5	57.9	32.5	50.2	68.0	34.3	47.3
Married, living with spouse	1.4	3.3	8.1	8.2	2.7	3.8	1.7
Separated, divorced, or widowed	38.2	38.8	59.4	41.7	29.3	62.0	51.1
Age of youngest child (%)							
Less than 3	0.3	46.3	6.2	1.8	39.3	41.4	40.2
3-5	41.2	21.6	49.8	45.1	25.0	23.8	27.3
6 or older	58.5	32.1	44.0	53.1	35.7	34.9	32.6
Labor force status							
Worked full-time for 6 months or more for one employer (%)	71.4	63.8	71.0	42.5	48.1	68.8	76.9
Any earnings in past 12 months (%)	23.6	46.0	40.7	28.2	21.1	69.0	39.3

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Measure	Atlanta	Grand Rapids	Riverside	Columbus	Detroit	Oklahoma City	Portland
Currently employed (%)	6.9	11.4	11.2	4.0	6.8	8.6	9.6
Public assistance status							
Total prior AFDC receipt[a] (%)							
None	0.3	0.1	1.0	10.0	2.8	44.4	1.2
Less than 1 year	18.9	22.1	33.8	8.3	13.7	18.8	20.9
1 year or more but less than 2 years	10.1	18.6	11.3	9.0	9.1	12.5	16.6
2 years or more but less than 5 years	24.6	30.0	26.4	27.9	24.0	15.3	32.1
5 years or more but less than 10 years	22.4	16.4	15.6	22.7	22.5	6.5	21.1
10 years or more	23.7	12.8	11.8	22.1	27.9	2.5	8.2
Educational status							
Highest degree/diploma earned (%)							
GED[b]	5.4	8.2	9.2	7.0	10.7	11.3	21.5
High school diploma	46.7	45.9	41.8	44.6	37.0	38.2	34.5
Technical/AA/2-year college degree	6.6	4.1	4.3	4.6	8.0	4.3	9.7
4 year (or more) college degree	1.3	0.9	0.9	1.6	1.1	1.6	1.9
None of the above	40.0	40.9	43.8	42.3	43.2	44.6	32.3
Highest grade completed in school (average)	11.2	11.4	11.0	11.2	11.2	11.1	11.3
Recent education and training activities							
Enrolled in education or training during the past 12 months (%)	13.4	39.2	19.6	9.5	20.0	23.7	21.1
Sample size	4,433	4,554	8,322	7,242	4,459	8,677	4,028

SOURCE: Hamilton et al., 2001.

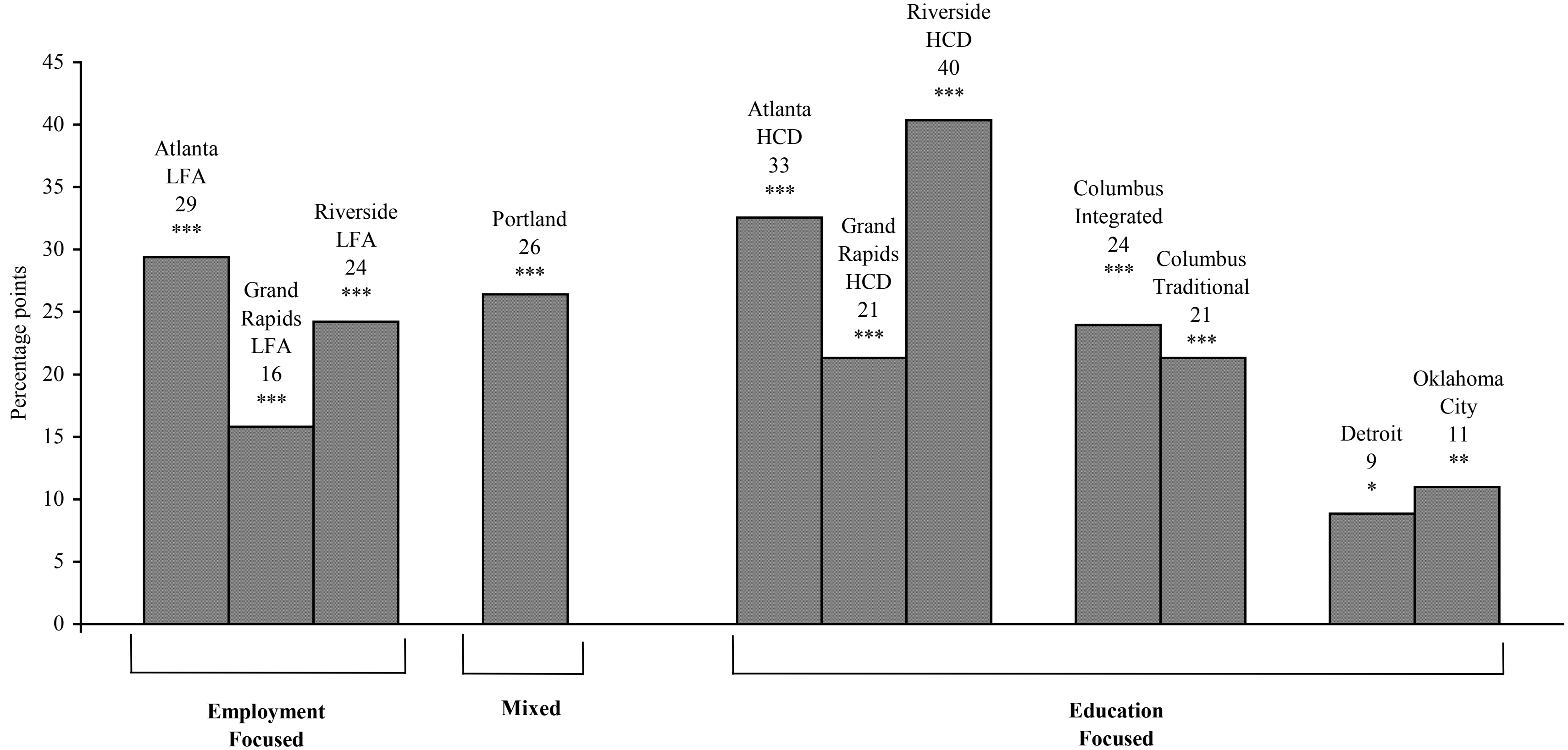
NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100.0 percent because of rounding.

[a]This refers to the total number of months accumulated from one or more spells on an individual's own or spouse's AFDC case. It does not include AFDC receipt under a parent's name.

[b]The GED credential is given to those who pass the GED test and is intended to signify knowledge of basic high school subjects.

Figure 1

Impacts on Two-Year Participation in Any Employment-Related Activity

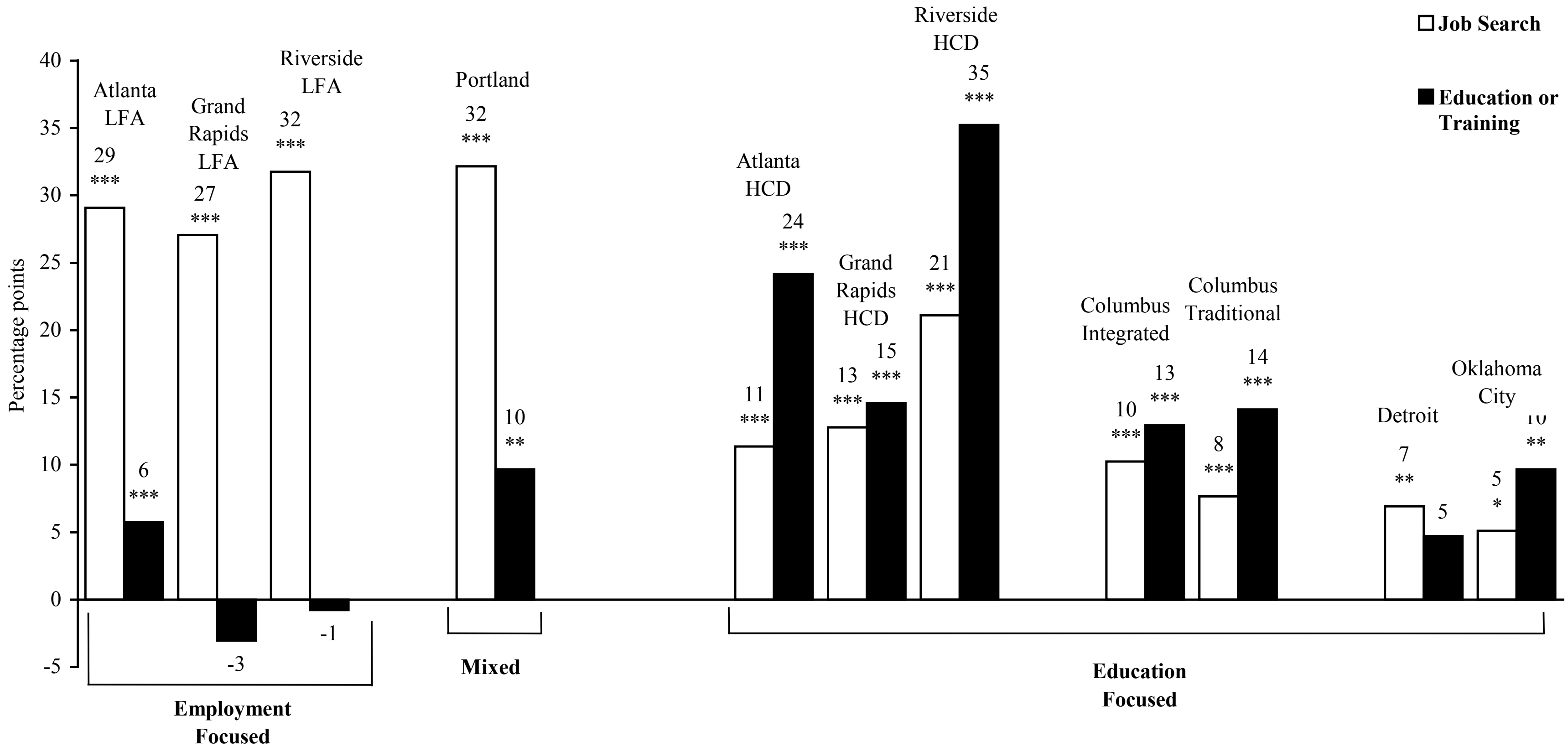


SOURCE: Freedman et al., 2000.

NOTE: Bars represent impacts, or differences between average participation rates for program and control group members over two years. To determine whether the differences were significant, a two-tailed t-test was performed. Statistical significance levels are indicated as : * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; and *** = 1 percent.

Figure 2

Impacts on Two-Year Participation in Job Search and Education or Training

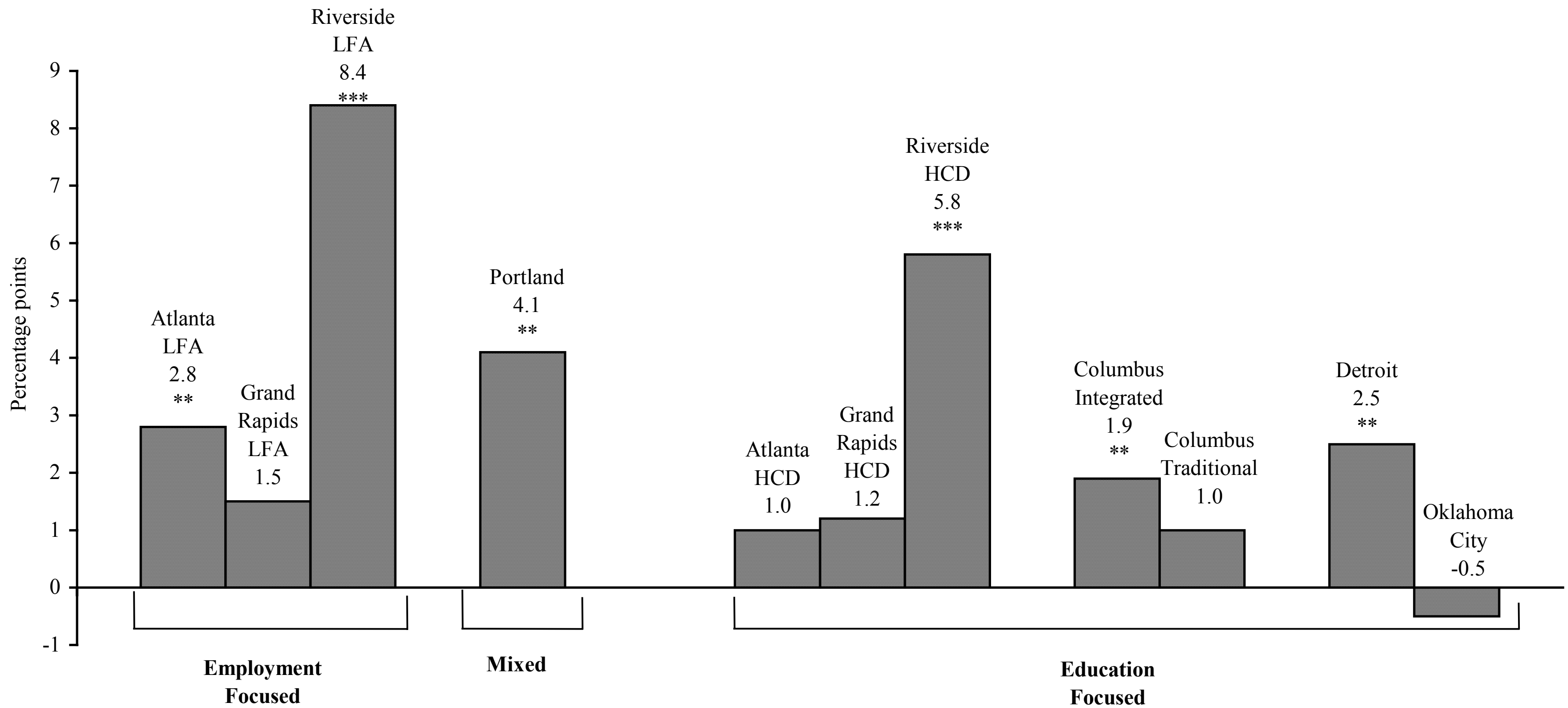


SOURCE: Freedman et al., 2000.

NOTE: Bars represent impacts, or differences between average participation rates for program and control group members over two years. To determine whether the differences were significant, a two-tailed t-test was performed. Statistical significance levels are indicated as : * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; and *** = 1 percent.

Figure 3

Impacts on Employment in Years 1 Through 5

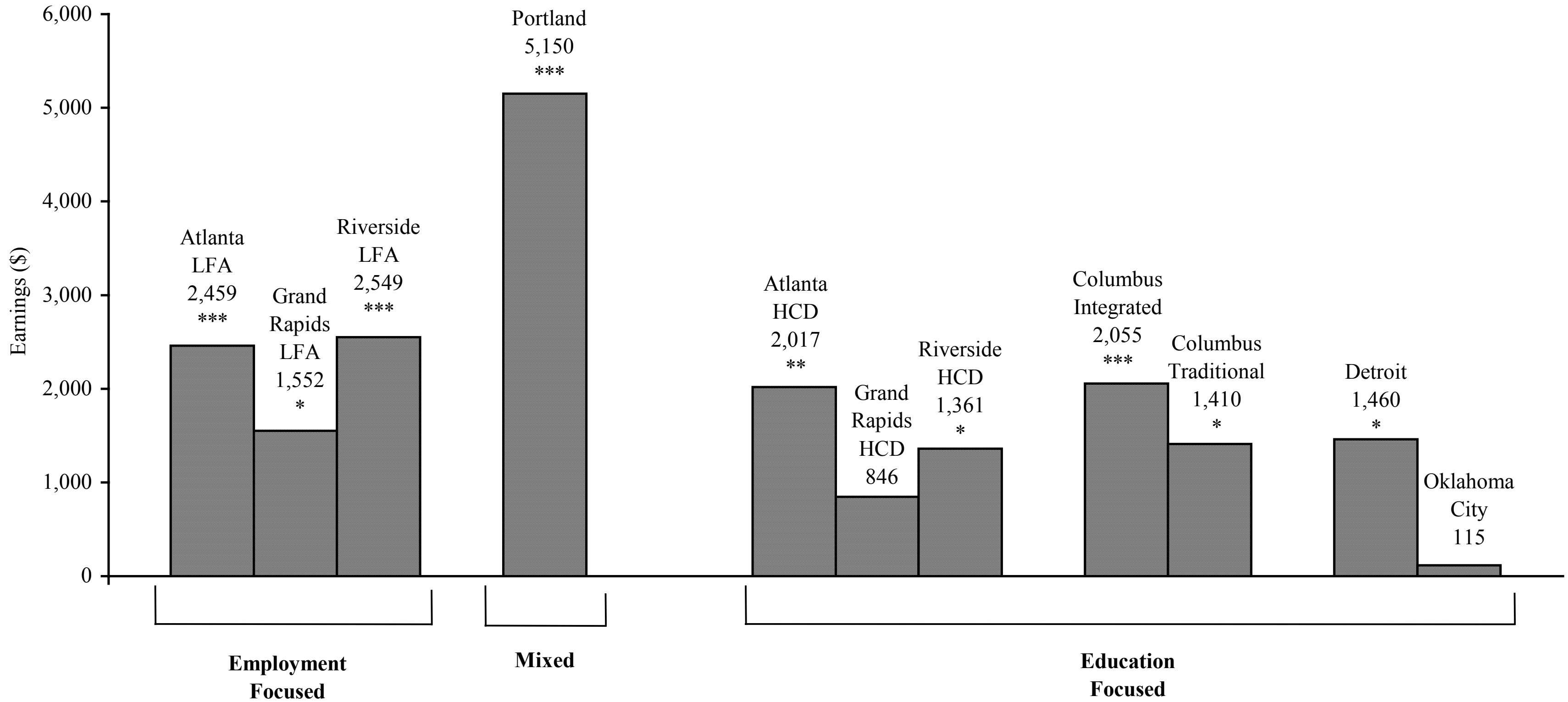


SOURCE: Hamilton et al., 2001.

NOTE: Bars represent impacts, or differences between average employment rates for program and control group members over five years. To determine whether the differences were significant, a two-tailed t-test was performed. Statistical significance levels are indicated as : * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; and *** = 1 percent.

Figure 4

Impacts on Earnings in Years 1 Through 5

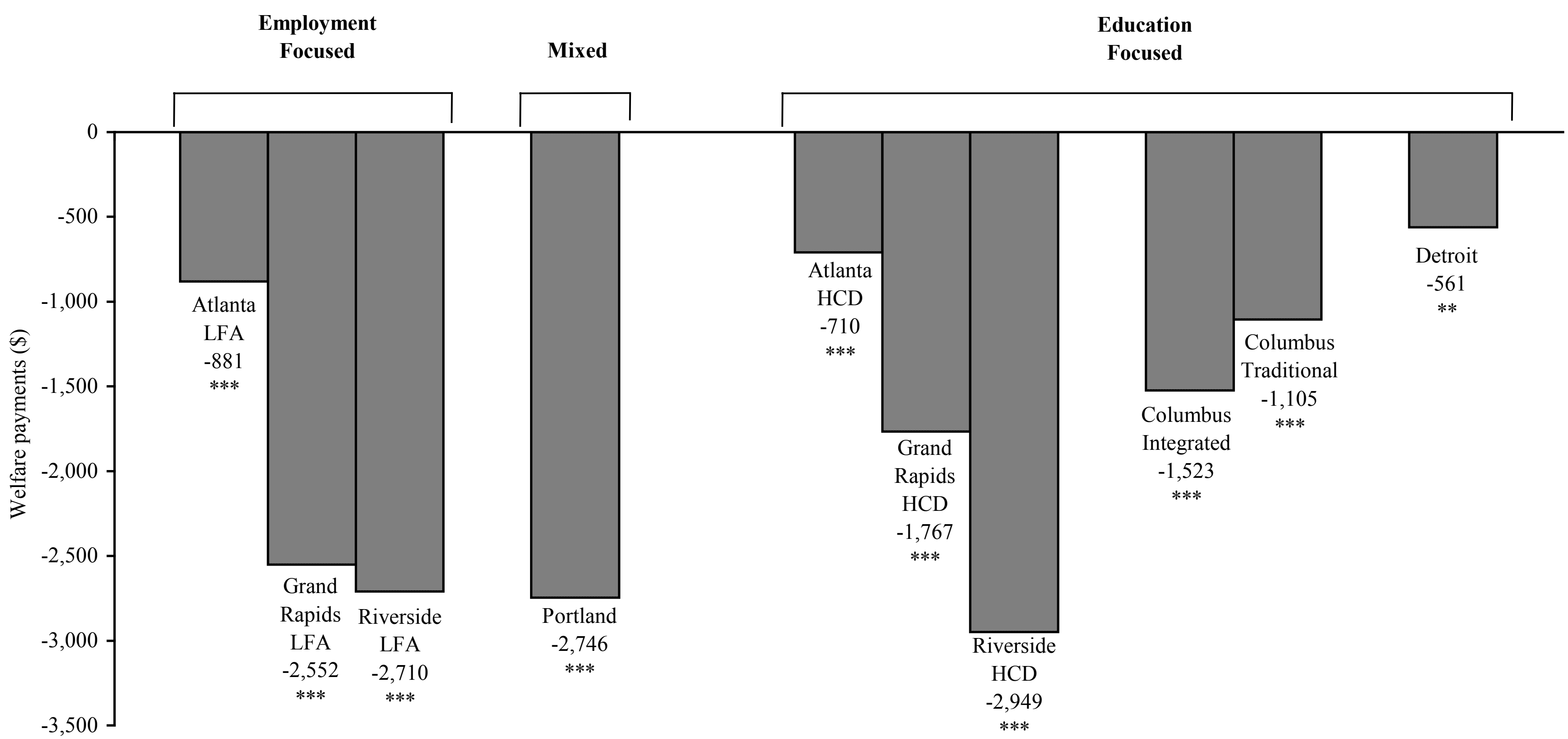


SOURCE: Hamilton et al., 2001.

NOTE: Bars represent impacts, or differences between average earnings for program and control group members over five years. To determine whether the differences were significant, a two-tailed t-test was performed. Statistical significance levels are indicated as : * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; and *** = 1 percent.

Figure 5

Impacts on Welfare Payments in Years 1 Through 5



SOURCE: Hamilton et al., 2001.

NOTES: Bars represent impacts, or differences between average welfare payments for program and control group members over five years. To determine whether the differences were significant, a two-tailed t-test was performed. Statistical significance levels are indicated as : * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; and *** = 1 percent.

Welfare data for Oklahoma City were not available for all five years and are not shown.

About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

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