Program Flexibility, Career Pathways, and Improving Employment Outcomes for TANF Participants

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Time to get past old debates and face new realities

- Education matters in employment and earnings
  - Demand is for workers with more skills and education
  - Increasingly hard for those with limited education & skills
- Education and training programs reforms have adapted program design to changes in the economy
- TANF recipients often left out of these changes
  - TANF law limits when participation in vocational education, basic ed, job skills training *can count* as meeting WPR
  - While states can allow whatever activities they choose, pressure from out-of-date WPR leads states to limit access

States often have more flexibility to allow access to training than their own TANF policies reflect

- Many states are meeting their target work rate
  - There may be space to allow access to training even if it does not count toward the WPR

- Participation in education and training programs can count toward work rate in many instances
  - State policies may be more restrictive than federal ones

- Range of ways states can design programs to allow TANF recipients to participate in training

Many states are meeting their target work rate

- For 2011, all Region VI states met WPR, most by a very large margin

- 2012 and after may be tighter for some states
  - ARRA caseload reduction credit provisions expired, caseloads remain increased in some states

- State self-assessment: what are restrictions on participation in education and why?
  - "Work first" focus? WPR concerns? The way it has been?
  - Are state law changes needed?

States may not be taking advantage of participation in education and training that can count toward WPR

- Stand-alone voc ed can count for 12 months
  - time beyond that can count as (non-core) job skills training
- Basic education or directly related for employment can be stand-alone activity for younger individuals
- 30% cap on training participation often not reached
  - Less than 20% nationally, less than 15% in 10 states
  - Cap does not apply to non-core training

Stacking core and non-core activities together

- After 12 months of stand-alone voc ed, create stacking activities that can count toward work rate
  - o Use good match like work study or internships in field
  - o Ex: Kentucky Ready-to-Work use of work study
- Drawback – additional work activities can impede completion and success in school
  - o Research indicating that working 15 hours or more can interfere with school
  - o Another study, more than 20 hours work delays school completion

Just allowing participation in education and training

Taking or avoiding the WPR hit to allow participation

- Allow participation even if will not count toward WPR
  - Ex: Nebraska expanded access to basic education as stand-alone activity, different state core and non-core rules

- Letting go of core requirement for some families
  - Ex: California Family Stabilization Services
  - Ex: Certain activities in DC tiered approach

- Serving students in solely state-funded (SSF)
  - Ex: West Virginia and Nebraska post-secondary, other states have done this as well

States can use other strategies to meet work rate

- Serve other groups of families in solely state-funded programs, e.g. parent with disability preventing work
- Boost work rate achieved through unsubsidized employment (or other countable activities)
  - Expand earnings disregard, post-TANF or worker supp
  - This also increases the number of education/training slots that fall within the 30% cap
- Lower target rate with excess MOE (CRC)
- Penalty relief including corrective compliance options down the road