
Promising Practice Fact Sheet – Workforce Development CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVE (CPI) - Arkansas

Program

Description: Uses specialized college staff (counselors and tutors who follow students as they move through the program) and comprehensive support services, to help low-skill adults find high-wage work in high-demand fields. College staff receive special training on serving low-income students and colleges are subject to per capita and institutional incentives. Arkansas has adopted a Career Readiness Certificate, a statewide, portable, assessment-based credential that measures key workplace skills.

Target Population: Low-income (up to 250% FPL), low-skill clients, including TANF and former TANF recipients

Goal: To help clients get degrees and/or credentials to get and retain jobs in selected high-wage, high-demand fields.

Cost: Annual - \$12 million in TANF dollars; CPI pays up to \$1,500 per client per year for tuition and support services, for up to 18 months.

Evidence: A comprehensive, third-party program evaluation is now in the planning stage.

Caseload Data: 7,834 enrolled in 2008, mostly non-TANF but most receiving food or medical assistance.

Assessment: Screened and assessed by an academic counselor/advisor.

Services Overview:

- Option for students to enter at different points and achieve same career goal
- Counselors and tutors follow students as they move through the program
- Special training for college staff on serving low-income students
- An outcome measurement system
- A system of per capita and institutional incentives for colleges
- Flexible course scheduling
- Innovative instructional strategies aimed at improving student retention and completion.
- Comprehensive student support services – child care, transportation, financial aid, college survival skills, and life skill seminars, academic advising, and job placement
- The key components of the CPI model include: clear pathways of continuing education and employment; innovative instructional strategies aimed at improving student retention and completion; comprehensive student support services; and strategic partnerships.

Eligibility: Participant must be low-income (less than 250% of FPL).

Findings:

- According to latest annual report, 90% of CPI students either continued into next semester or completed program and 2,774 certificates or degree were awarded in 2008 (about 35% of enrollment and short of 50% goal); the 11 colleges that were the most recent to join CPI (and the only ones that reported employment outcomes in 2008) surpassed their employment goal of 55%, placing clients at a rate of 62%.
- CPI activities have not yet been fully aligned with TANF work activity definitions and insufficient child care funds have been invested.

- Budget cutbacks are impacting provision of key support services, which may impact retention.

Implications for policymakers and program developers to consider:

- Related policies that favor CPI effectiveness:
 - the Career Readiness Certificate, a statewide, portable, assessment-based credential that measures key workplace skills;
 - a flow-chart of the steps for transitional students from school to work;
 - a student file for program completers; and
 - a database for tracking career counseling and job placement services provided.
- Program may have expanded at a rate that exceeded budgetary capacity.

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