



## WorkFirst Redesign Conversations – Education and Training

Using the WorkFirst Redesign Project Charter and Core Assumptions, the SBCTC WorkFirst staff developed a series of questions to elicit meaningful conversations and suggestions on each of the core assumptions. These questions focused discussions during seven regional campus meetings from June 2010 through August 2010 representing all of the DSHS regions and representative of over 100 educational service sites in Washington.

Participants included WorkFirst Directors, administrative staff, front line staff, faculty, students (both current and prior) and ABE staff. By request, this was also presented at the Council of Basic Skills 2010 statewide conference. A statewide student summit for input from WorkFirst parents was offered via ITV, and attended by approximately 40 students and staff.

### **SBCTC WorkFirst Redesign Survey Results**

**Core Assumption #1: Employment is our main objective; successful workforce attachment and opportunities to move out of poverty within the budget.**

The colleges' WorkFirst mission is to develop marketable knowledge, skills and abilities in parents so that they will be able to achieve self-sufficiency.

College staff and students reported that marrying classroom training with

- internships, externships, work study and other paid work experiences were their most valuable workforce attainment activities.
- IBEST was excellent because of the way it sped up the parent's arrival at self-reliance.
- computer literacy skills, critical thinking and people skills are indispensable in the current job market.
- microenterprise presents income possibilities even in a recession.

Students were passionate in describing, among other points, that they are acquiring skills they can use in every area of their lives, how education gives them confidence and self-esteem, a can-do attitude and the critical skill of prediction.

At one point in our survey, college staff said that they saw growth in the parents' practicality, their recognition that choices are available and that things can change.

---

Both groups emphasized how beneficial year-long IRPs would be.

**Core Assumption #2: A family-centered case planning and engagement approach is necessary to achieve good outcomes and reduce recidivism and generational poverty within families.**

There was universal agreement that there should be assessments at the beginning and throughout the program. Evaluations should be individualized and should be based on the parent's definition of success. A process like the comprehensive evaluation would reduce refer-backs and TANF recidivism.

Prior assessment for learning disabilities would allow the parents to make the best and wisest use of their training time, allowing colleges to implement interventions to level the playing field that could support the parent's educational success and/or condense the training time commitment, especially for low-literate students. These interventions can be used in the workplace as well.

Students and college staff agreed that a "more carrots, less sticks" approach is the best approach. Recognize parent success by reducing the amount of case manager oversight.

Students said they would have benefited from a personalized approach which would generate their own goals and objectives along a pathway.

Another recommendation was to "track student milestones rather than seat time" and focusing on "activities that count rather than counting activities" as one student put it.

**Core Assumption #3: Policies should promote childhood development and well-being, and improve the development of children, their health and educational success to the extent possible within our budget.**

Students and college staff agreed that students and their families should be viewed holistically.

This will reduce both service duplication and conflicting ends. Co-location of staff on college campuses and the start-up of programs similar to Families That Work that integrate parent work and education goals.

If the needs of families are addressed, it will result in a stronger workforce attachment which is key to leaving TANF.

**WorkFirst is a transitional, not long-term, program to assist families on the pathway to self-sufficiency.**

The goal of education is transformation. Both students and college staff recommended that transition plans should be developed near the end of TANF. Transition plans are essential.

College staff recommended assisting small business' utilization of tax incentives to employ WorkFirst clients in jobs and paid internships. They also were clear about the importance of a well-defined "hand-off" to the success of a transition.

---

Students advocated for the creation of mentoring groups and other peer resources where they would be able to learn what other people in their situation did to meet the goals of the program—what worked and what didn't.

Both groups felt that the program and the clients would benefit from marketing success stories to the general public.

**We will fully leverage non-TANF resources to achieve the goals of WorkFirst.**

Both students and college staff were in support of co-located case managers who support clients in education.

Having childcare on campuses allows more time for parents to focus on learning marketable skills will get them off TANF. It supports family values.

Online classes (as appropriate) make the most efficient use of limited funds.

For additional information contact:

D. Marie Bruin

Policy Associate

360-704-4360

[mbruin@sbctc.edu](mailto:mbruin@sbctc.edu)