
WOMEN'S COMMISSION

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COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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March 22, 2001

Chair Tony Campos
 Board of Supervisors
 701 Ocean Street, Room 500
 Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Chair Campos:

The Women's Commission wants to bring to your attention, what we feel, are serious obstacles to the success of persons working to get off public assistance through the Welfare-to-Work Program. Through our participation with the Subcommittee on Welfare Reform, we have been presented with a Position Statement outlining the deficiencies in the welfare reform effort due to limitations imposed by the State.

Academic counselors from four local Community Colleges: Cabrillo, Gavilan, Hartnell and Monterey Peninsula Community Colleges have prepared a position statement opposing the educational time limits imposed by the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. They contend that such time limits compromise the effectiveness of the Welfare-to-Work Program by impeding the education usually required to secure jobs with wages high enough for financial independence away from public assistance.

The academic time limits are insufficient and do not allow for prerequisite courses, learning disabilities, English language acquisition or life situations such as sick children.

The typical family receiving welfare is a single mother with two young children. For such a family to be financially self-sufficient in Santa Cruz County, the parent needs full-time employment that pays a minimum of \$2 1.75 per hour. The average entry-level pay rate for jobs that Welfare-to-Work participants can complete in the required 18-24 month period ranges from \$7.00 to \$14.38 per hour. These wages fall significantly short of what is needed to support a family in Santa Cruz County.

The Women's Commission has reviewed the counselor's position statement and we strongly support its claim. We encourage the Board to review it as well and do whatever you can within



County of Santa Cruz

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AGENDA: 4/24/01

April 16, 2001


BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: POSITION STATEMENT REGARDING WELFARE-TO-WORK

Dear Members of the Board:

Attached is a letter from Nancy Driscoll, Chair of the Women's Commission, transmitting a Position Statement prepared by counselors of Cabrillo, Gavilan, Hartnell and Monterey Peninsula Community Colleges with regard to the educational time limits imposed by the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. While no formal Board action is proposed for Board consideration today, the Commission has requested that the Board provide time on our agenda to hear a brief presentation on this matter.

Sincerely,



TONY CAMPOS, Chairman
Board of Supervisors

TC:ted
Attachment

cc: Women's Commission
Human Resources Agency Administrator

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your power to influence the State to reevaluate the effectiveness of the existing academic time limits.

This Position Statement is particularly timely, in that TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) is scheduled for reauthorization in 2002. At that time Congress will review TANF as well as other legislation affecting low-income families and children, including the reauthorization of the Food Stamp and child care programs, and the future of Welfare-to-Work legislation. Your voice would go along way in influencing legislators to revise the academic time limits and address any other flaws in the current system that prevent families from achieving economic self-sufficiency.

Thank you for your ongoing support of issues positively impacting women in Santa Cruz County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Nancy Driscoll".

Nancy Driscoll
Women's Commission Chair

COUNSELOR POSITION STATEMENT

Introduction

The counselors of Cabrillo, Gavilan, Hartnell and Monterey Peninsula Community Colleges oppose the educational time limits imposed by the Welfare Reform Act (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, PRWORA) of 1996. Such time limits compromise the effectiveness of the Welfare To Work Program by impeding the education usually required to secure jobs with wages high enough for financial independence from public assistance.

“Counties must provide...education and training the participant needs to find self-supporting work,...to obtain unsubsidized employment.” CalWORKs Statute #1 1322.7.

The Welfare to Work Program implies that participants will have the ability to provide adequately for themselves and their families upon program completion. Due to the legislated time limit, however, this is often not the case. As a result, community college counselors, as Welfare to Work collaborators, find ourselves in a double bind when we advise student participants. Additionally, putting a great deal of effort into pursuing a plan that often fails to meet objectives has a profoundly demoralizing and discouraging effect on participants. Such fruitless efforts suggest that legitimate means to financial independence are not worth pursuing and/or confirm to those with low-self-esteem that they have been correct in their perception of themselves as helpless. The problem is not with welfare recipients, but with the inadequate length of time allowed for people to transition to unsubsidized employment with sufficient wages.

Santa Cruz County/Cabrillo College

When states and counties permit Welfare to Work benefits to cover education at all, the length of time students are granted is **often** inadequate for the completion of educational and, therefore, financial **self-sufficiency** objectives. Some statistics from Santa Cruz County and Cabrillo Community College help to demonstrate the fallacy inherent in the current Welfare to Work system.

The configuration of a typical family receiving welfare is a single mother with one child in elementary school and a second younger child. For such a family to be financially self-sufficient in Santa Cruz County, the parent needs full-time employment that pays a minimum of \$21.75 per hour. In Santa Clara County the figure is \$25.55 per hour and in Monterey County it is \$17.84. Welfare recipients have a maximum of 24 months before their benefit coverage for training and education expires, and then they are compelled to work, even if at low paying jobs that do not allow for financial self-sufficiency. By the year 2002 the state minimum wage will be increased to \$6.75 per hour.

Although Cabrillo College, the only community college in Santa Cruz County, offers a variety of programs that do indeed lead to jobs with entry pay that meets or exceeds the previously mentioned minimum, the majority of these programs have prerequisite courses and require for completion **more than 24 months of full-time coursework**. Examples include but are not limited to degree programs in Computer Information Science, Engineering Technology, Radiologic Technology, Criminal Justice, Nursing, Fire Technology, and Dental Hygiene.

Cabrillo College additionally offers numerous degree programs that can be completed within 24 months, but the majority of these programs lead to work that pays significantly lower than the required **self-sufficiency** standard. County-based rates of pay for jobs that correspond to some of the most popular programs, taken from the Santa Cruz County Occupational Outlook Handbook 1997- 1999, follow with approximates of pay per hour:

Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management:

Cooks and Bakers:

Entry Pay: \$7.00

3 years experience: \$11 .00

Medical Assisting:

Medical Assistants:

Entry Pay: \$8.25

3 years experience: \$11 .00

Business Office Skills

And Technology:

Receptionists:

Entry Pay: \$8.25

3 years experience: \$10.75

Administrative Support:

Entry Pay: \$10.00

3 years experience: \$15.54

Early Childhood Education:

Preschool Teacher:

Entry Pay: \$7.17

3 years exp.: \$9.84

Instructional Aide (*usually part-time hours*):

Unionized Entry Pay: \$8.76

Union. 3 years experience: \$11.11

Accounting; and Finance:

Bookkeeping and Accounting Clerks:

Entry Pay: 8.63

3 years experience: \$12.50

Auditors:

Entry Pay: \$14.38

The statistics for many counties in California underscore the same problem. On the national level, a study by the Urban Institute found that, “only 23% of welfare leavers receive health insurance from their employers. More than one third sometimes run out of money for food and rent... Out of... adults who left welfare between 1995 and 1997, 29 percent returned to the welfare rolls by 1997.”

Welfare reform models allowing for extended education do exist.

“At least eight states...support welfare recipients who attend school even longer-to pursue four-year degrees or to spend extra time to complete two-year degrees.” Carnevale & Reich (2000). *A Piece of the Puzzle.*

18 to 24 Month Limit

As stated earlier, a typical participant family is comprised of two young children and a single parent. The current national 18 to 24 month transitional time limit does not reflect the realities of that situation. Required college courses are **often** sequential in nature. If a student has to miss one week of classes to care for a sick, contagious or injured child, the chances of him/her being able to fully catch up on their academic work while continuing with family responsibilities are slim. It is nearly impossible for low-income parents to find available back up childcare for sick children. Failing one required class in a semester jeopardizes a two-year academic plan.

Most academic programs require a specified level of math and English competency for completion. If a participant has been out of school for many years before returning, as most have, they may need to take up to four sequential math and four sequential English courses to fulfill

requirements. Such remedial courses are often necessary before even **beginning** required major courses. Finally, computer skills are essential in almost every field. Given that many programs have computer-related prerequisites, participants often have to take computer classes but are not granted extra time to meet this need.

In addition, over 10% of Cabrillo College's Welfare To Work participants speak English as a second language. Students who are monolingual in a language other than English usually require at least three years of study to be able to pass required courses taught in English. While a few counties allow recipients to reach a high enough level of proficiency in English before beginning timed study in their major, most counties do not. Except for very rare case-by-case instances, most ESL recipients find their allotted time is used up before they even begin major coursework!

Most learning disabilities aren't discovered in college until at least one or two terms have passed. Those students are **often** halfway through their allotted 18 to 24 months before they learn why they've been struggling academically and can take advantage of compensatory study strategies. The most common compensatory strategy prescribes part-time instead of full-time course loads. Part-time study requires enrollment of duration longer than 24 months. The Employment and Social Services Policy Studies Division of the National Governors Association reports the following:

"Studies conducted in Ohio, Kansas, and Washington...indicate that between 25 percent and 35 percent of participants in a former federal welfare-to-work program had learning disabilities...More than 85 percent of the participants identified in the Washington study...had not been previously identified as learning disabled by the public school system."

Brown and Ganzglass (1998). Serving Welfare Recipients with Learning Disabilities in a Work First Environment.

These are all **very common** reasons why a two-year time limit of benefit coverage for education is unrealistic in relation to a goal of financial self-sufficiency. Extensions to the time limit are prohibitively hard-fought and too rare.

Recommendations

The state should ensure that Welfare to Work students can stay in college until they have completed a degree or certificate of proficiency that leads to employment with earnings high enough for self-sufficiency without subsidies of any kind. At least eight other states have found a way to do this.

- After participants' initial 24 months of coverage, education should continue to be defined as an acceptable form of work participation/activity OR
- In the measurement of time limits, "time clocks" should be stopped during periods when students are making satisfactory academic progress

so that participants can continue to receive benefits until they have achieved a level of education that supports employment providing sufficient earnings.

Teaching faculty are protected by academic freedom; counseling faculty should be too. College counselors should have the authority to use their professional judgement in designing educational plans that will not be modified by county workers.

Decrease legislative and regulatory restrictions that hinder colleges' ability to be dynamic, creative, and competitive on behalf of all students.

Ethical Concerns

The following are excerpts from the Codes of Ethics of two professional associations, The American Counseling Association (ACA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), either of which community college counselors are likely to be members:

“... Counselors encourage client growth and development in ways that foster the clients' interest and welfare...” ACA Code of Ethics, Section A: 1b (1996).

“...Counselors and their clients work jointly in devising integrated, individual...plans that offer reasonable promise of success...” ACA Code of Ethics, Section A: 1c (1996).

“...Counselors do not...engage in discrimination based on...age,...disability,...gender, race,...marital status, or socioeconomic status.*” ACA Code of Ethics, Section 2 (1996).

“Social Workers strive to ensure...meaningful participation in decision making for all people.*” NASW Code of Ethics (1999).

“Social Workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment...and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary...” NASW Code of Ethics 1.06 (1999).

“Social Workers should ensure that their representations to clients...of ...results to be achieved are accurate.” NASW Code of Ethics 4.06 (1999).

“Social Workers should not participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud, or deception.” NASW Code of Ethics 4.04 (1999).

The intent behind **these** ethics are common to most counseling organizations. The educational time limits imposed by Welfare to Work legislation challenge counselors' ethics. Due to legislated time limits, counselors advise Welfare to Work students differently. Participants have limited self-determination in choosing their goals and little to no opportunity for decision making in designing their academic plans. Indeed, participants are directed toward those programs that can be completed within two years by some, but that lead to jobs paying lower than self-sufficiency wages. These participants usually fall into at least two categories identified in counseling codes of ethics as those most often facing discrimination and oppression. Students' best interests are often not met by the Welfare to Work program and, indeed, **often** conflict with the interests of the program.

Counselors face a conflict of interest as they cooperate with the guidelines of employer institutions and the **CalWORKs** program while trying to counsel students with a focus on students' best interests and with integrity. Further conflict arises as counselors advise students to pursue plans that counselors know might likely fail to meet the stated objective of financial self-sufficiency. Consequently, counselors feel we are being deceitful.

These ethical dilemmas would be effectively addressed by extending Welfare to Work benefit coverage for educational objectives requiring study of greater than two years duration, as do most associate and bachelor degree programs.

Conclusion

“Three years after congress and the president transformed the welfare system, our nation would do well to remember the promise of welfare reform. It was a promise of opportunity and self-sufficiency. For the average woman leaving welfare and still struggling to support her children...the promise of welfare reform has yet to be realized.” Carnevale & Reich (2000). A Piece of the Puzzle.

“...students who completed an associate degree had a 41% increase in annual income, compared to students completing 12 units or more...” J Friedlander (1993), Peets Feasibility Study.

An educated community protects children from poverty and enhances the quality of life for all community members. An increase in the time allotted for Welfare to Work students to stay in school is a worthwhile investment for us all.

Given that the goal of Welfare to Work is to foster financial self-sufficiency instead of dependence on public money, the parameters for the transition to financial independence must be more realistic. Many recipients need longer than two years of education to prepare for work that pays a living wage.

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