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Executive Summary

Exploratory Study of the Role of Vocational Education in Even Start Projects

The goals of welfare reform continue to emphasize the need to move families away from reliance on government assistance and toward self-sufficiency through employment. In light of current public policy, the need for programs which offer services like vocational education and job readiness training will likely increase. While Even Start projects were not explicitly designed to address these issues, some components of the program’s services, like adult education, may help participants attain educational credentials or receive vocational training that might increase their employability. This paper explores the characteristics of and outcomes for participants in Even start, focusing specifically on vocational education and employment training. We also discuss the state contexts in which a subset of these projects operate.

Three research questions guide this investigation:

- Does the level of emphasis on vocational education vary across Even Start projects? Do projects that emphasize vocational education differ from those that do not in other service domains?
- Is the level of vocational education offered associated with increasing participants’ ‘job readiness’ through attainment of higher levels of education or increasing employment?
- What is the state context in which Even Start projects operate? How do changing state welfare guidelines affect Even Start participants?

To address these questions, we analyzed the variation of vocational education hours offered in conjunction with other project characteristics. Individual-level outcomes for Even Start participants were examined as a function of participation in vocational education, after controlling for other factors. We also examined current welfare requirements in a small number of states. It is important to note that our preliminary analyses are based upon data collected during the 1995-96 program year, and consequently, the data may not yet reflect full-fledged implementation of state level changes in welfare policy.

The sample consists of 462 projects which completed site and project-level Even Start Information System (ESIS) forms, and 21,771 adults from these projects. We included only those families for whom baseline demographic and economic information was reported, and for whom there was also participation data on Even Start core services.

The results indicate that participants in the most vocational-education rich Even Start projects are less educated and more likely to be unemployed at the start of the program year, but appear to make greater gains in their educational attainment and employment status by the end of the year. Our exploratory analyses found that the amount of vocational education offered by Even Start projects varied tremendously across the country, ranging from no hours to more than 40 hours a week. Interestingly, the findings suggest that the level of services offered is associated with the prior educational attainment of projects’ participants.
INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we explore questions about the role of vocational education in Even Start projects, focusing specifically on whether participation and other outcomes vary for those Even Start participants according to the prevalence of a vocational education emphasis within the contexts of adult education. Over the past several years, as the national political climate surrounding welfare reform has changed, a number of states have begun to institute substantial changes in state level welfare policy. As more states implement policy changes, policy makers have speculated about the relationships between participation in educational programs (like Even Start) and transitions to employment and off of public assistance. Although most states began to implement changes only fairly recently (effective in 1995), we are exploring whether there are observable and systematic differences between participants from projects that differ along a continuum of offering education to adults in a vocational context. Because welfare reform has become more common only in the past two or three years, and we draw from 1995-96 program year data, it is important to note that the findings reported here can only be described as exploratory and preliminary in nature, because local projects had only begun to experience the consequences of their own states’ efforts to change welfare.

The role of vocational education and training or employment training is an important issue that is addressed by many social and educational programs, including many Even Start projects. While the federal Even Start program, as a whole, is not focused specifically on employment training, but rather on literacy education, it does provide vocational education and skills ultimately valuable in employment to participating adults. Nor is the Even Start program specifically designed to address welfare reform. However, the intersection of vocational education and welfare reform does have some relevance for Even Start in terms of service provision and program design. Over time, as local projects continue to serve those most in need in their own communities, including those who must participate in state-mandated educational or employment training programs, the proportion of adults affected by changes in welfare policy may continue to increase, and the role of sound vocational education may well become more prominent in local projects’ design and delivery of services. Below, we provide some contextual background about the Even Start program.

EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Even Start Family Literacy Program was originally authorized in 1988 as Part B of Chapter 1 of Title I (P.L. 100-297) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The Even Start legislation was amended in July 1991, when Congress passed the National Literacy Act (P.L. 102-73). In 1994, the Even Start program was reauthorized by the Improving America’s Schools Act (P.L. 103-382), as Part B of Title I of the ESEA. This description of Even Start refers to the reauthorized law. Projects were not required to implement changes made by that law, however, until program year 1995-96. According to the 1994 legislation, the Even Start program is intended to:

“...help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the Nation’s low-income families by integrating early childhood
education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program...The program shall (1) be implemented through cooperative projects that build on existing community resources to create a new range of services; (2) promote achievement of the National Education Goals; and (3) assist children and adults from low-income families to achieve to challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards.” (P.L. 103-382, Sec. 1201).

To be eligible for Even Start under the reauthorized law, a family must have (a) an adult who is eligible for adult education programs under the Adult Education Act, or is within the state’s compulsory school attendance age, and (b) have a child less than eight years of age. Even Start projects are required to provide participating families with an integrated program of early childhood education, adult literacy and basic education, and parenting education. The program’s design is based on the notion that these components build on each other and that families need to receive all three services, not just one or two, in order to effect lasting change and improve children’s school success. As a “family-focused” rather than parent- or child-focused program, Even Start has three interrelated goals:

- to help parents improve their literacy or basic educational skills;
- to help parents become full partners in the education of their children; and
- to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners.

To achieve these goals, Even Start began as a demonstration program administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that provided school districts with four-year discretionary grants for family literacy projects in 1989. In 1992, the program, while remaining a competitive discretionary grant program, became primarily administered by the states, although two small set-asides remain for direct federal grants for Migrant Education projects and grants to Indian tribes and tribal organizations. In addition, the reauthorized law authorizes one grant in a prison that houses women and children, and grants for statewide family literacy initiatives and for service to outlying areas. According to the Even Start statute, when the program is funded for $50 million or more per year, it must be administered at the state level. Each state’s share of Even Start funds is based on its proportion of funds under the Title I Part A LEA Program. States hold grant competitions and make subgrant awards. The statute specifies that each Even Start subgrantee must receive a minimum of $75,000 per year, although each state may have one grant under $75,000 operating at any time. Further, families must be provided with home-based services as well as some services with parents and children together.

**Even Start Program Design**

The Even Start legislation contains language setting forth the major elements that must be the basis of each Even Start local project. The legislation allows grantees flexibility in devising projects to meet local needs but all projects are required to offer three core services:
• **Early childhood education:** developmentally appropriate educational services for children from birth through seven years of age, designed to enhance development and prepare children for success in school.

• **Adult education and adult literacy:** high-quality instructional programs for adults to promote adult literacy (including adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), English as a second language (ESL), or preparation to attain a General Education Development (GED) certificate)\(^1\);

• **Parenting education:** high-quality instructional programs to empower parents to support the educational growth of their children; and

Each family is required to participate in all three core services.

The Even Start program has the potential to benefit families in several domains. As illustrated in Exhibit 1, a conceptual model of how Even Start works, the desired outcomes for parents include positive effects in three areas linked to the Even Start objectives or goals: literacy behaviors (e.g., shared literacy events with children, increased reading and writing activities in the home), parenting behavior and skills (e.g., positive parent-child relationships, positive expectations for child), and educational skills (e.g., improved reading and English language ability, higher educational attainment). In addition, goals for parents participating in Even Start might include growth in personal skills (e.g., increased self-efficacy) and community involvement (e.g., increased involvement in schools), as well as family outcomes such as family stability and family self-sufficiency.

Ideally, Even Start will have a positive impact on children’s language development, school readiness, and school achievement. School readiness includes age-appropriate cognitive, language, and social skills. Once children enter school, outcomes might include satisfactory school performance and improved school attendance, as well as a lower incidence of special education, and retention in grade. For parents, participation in Even Start will ideally have a positive outcome on adults’ educational attainment, and on their involvement in their children’s schooling.

**SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT NATIONAL EVALUATION OF EVEN START DESIGN**

Our analyses in this paper are based on the data from the Even Start Information System (ESIS), the second national evaluation of the Even Start program, which covers program years 1993-1994 to 1996-1997. As part of the second national evaluation, each year for three program years (1994-95, 1995-96, and 1996-97), projects submitted data to the evaluation contractor on both project and participant level factors.

\(^1\)In April 1996, the Even Start statute was amended to require high-quality, intensive instructional programs in the areas of adult and parenting education. This new requirement became effective for projects in program year 1996-97.
Project level data included such information as size (number of participating families), number of staff, types of collaborating agencies, and amount and intensity of educational services offered to participants. Participant-level data includes such information as primary language, employment status, income level, type and amount of educational services received, and a measure of the relative neediness for each family, based upon indicators of potential disadvantage. Local projects submit data annually for the program year that ended June 30 (and began the previous July 1). Additionally, the second national evaluation includes a substudy of educational and developmental outcomes collected from a sample of Even Start projects. We draw as well from data collected as part of the Sample Study.

The ESIS was designed primarily to collect information about program operations on a very broad scale; essentially, it is a management information system. It was designed to capture more detailed information about such things as who participates in the program and for how long, who staffs the Even Start projects, and project size (or the number of participating families within each local project), as well as more limited information on the content of the services, and even more limited information on program outcomes. The ESIS collected and then analyzed data on an annual basis, by examining project and participant characteristics for each program year. In this paper, we are using data exclusively from the 1995-96 program year.

We mention these features of the second evaluation now because the design of the ESIS has an effect on the nature of secondary analyses, including the kinds of analyses we describe in this paper. Because the ESIS data represent the largest, and as yet most current, source of information about the Even Start program, it is an appropriate data source for such exploratory data analyses as we have conducted about the potential relationships between emerging welfare reform, project characteristics, and participant outcomes. Simultaneously, however, we may well be asking research questions of this data source that the data were not designed to address.

Current Activities in Welfare Reform

The goals of welfare reform continue to emphasize the need to move families away from reliance on government assistance and toward self-sufficiency through employment. Toward that end, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which was an open-ended entitlement to income support for needy families with children, was replaced by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Specifically, Section 402 of Public Law 104-193 requires that the “parent or caretaker receiving assistance under the programs is to engage in work (as defined by the state) once the state determines that the parent is ready to engage in work, or once the parent or caretaker has received assistance under the program for 24 months, whichever is earlier.” Thus, welfare as it has existed for more than 60 years is to end, and states are to play a large role in designing their own programs. (Public Law 104-193, 1996).

In terms of employment requirements, the federal guidelines for TANF require that parents participate in some employment effort after 24 months of TANF benefits. In general terms, participation is defined as 20 or more hours for parents in single parent families and 30 hours or more for each parent in two-parent families (Public Law 104-193). Because the funding
mechanism is through block grants to states, this welfare reform offers individual states a wide variety of choices of how to structure their aid to families. States can and have applied for waivers that deviate from these general requirements. In fact, 40 percent of the state plans call for employment in less than the two years outlined in federal guidelines (Kamerman and Kahn, 1997). For instance, in the California Gain program, “participants who have received aid for 22 of the last 24 months will be required to participate in at least 100 hours per month in pre-employment preparation or work experience activities” (Greenberg and Savner, 1996). In Connecticut, "individuals participating in job search and job readiness activities should be considered to be 'engaged in work’ for the purposes of calculating the participation rate for as long as they are satisfactorily participating in such activities” (Greenberg and Savner, 1996).

As public policy continues to encourage reduced dependence on public aid by limiting tenure and imposing work requirements, the need for programs that offer some form of vocational education and job readiness training will continue to increase. While Even Start projects were not explicitly designed to address this issue, some components of program services, particularly adult education, including literacy training in a vocational context, may help participants attain educational credentials or receive vocational training that may increase their employability.

**Purpose of the Analysis**

The information collected through the ESIS on projects and participants offers an opportunity to contribute to the portfolio of studies about the Even Start program. In particular, we are interested in exploring the following research questions:

- Does the level of emphasis on vocational education vary across Even Start projects? Do projects that emphasize vocational education differ from those that do not in other service domains?
- Is the level of vocational education offered associated with increasing participants’ ‘job readiness’ through obtainment of higher levels of education or increasing employment?
- What is the state context in which Even Start projects operate? How do changing state welfare guidelines affect Even Start participants?

**Analytic Sample**

For the purposes of this particular inquiry into vocational education, we restricted the analysis to projects (and families participating in these projects) that had completed site-level and project-level ESIS forms (84 percent of all projects). Additionally, we included only those families on whom baseline demographic and economic information was reported, and further, for whom there are participation data on Even Start core services. We focused on participation in adult education, including adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and
English-as-a-second Language (ESL) and parenting education (PE). For the purposes of our reporting in this paper, however, we refer to all adult education as such. The analytic sample consists of 21,771 adults from 462 projects.

To learn whether these exclusion criteria result in a biased analytic sample, we compared baseline characteristics for the entire ESIS to those of the smaller analytic sample. These comparisons revealed modest differences in levels of past and current receipt of welfare, with those included in the analytic sample more likely to have received or be receiving welfare assistance. As a result, our analyses may overestimate the relative strength of relationships among individuals’ characteristics and programmatic outcomes.

Data from the ESIS

Levels of Vocational Education

We measured the extent to which vocational education is offered by Even Start projects using responses to the following two questions on the ESIS:

- whether a project’s approach to adult education involves functional literacy, the context (life skills, vocational, or parenting) in which they provide instruction for the three levels of adult education (beginning, intermediate, and secondary/GED) and ESL; and

- the number of hours of instruction offered each month for each level of adult education and for ESL.

We have considered the number of hours for each level of adult education as equivalent to the number of hours of vocational education if functional literacy was provided in a vocational context. For example, if beginning adult education was taught in a vocational context, and the number of hours provided was 20, then the number of hours of beginning ABE offered with a vocational context was 20. If beginning ABE was not taught in a vocational context, then the number of hours was coded as 0, regardless of the number of beginning hours of ABE offered.

The ESIS does not allow us to differentiate between projects’ actual “vocational education” content or curriculum, which means that we may be overly generous in our designation of adult education hours as vocational in nature. Consequently, the deliberately broad definitions we have applied to Even Start may not hold for making comparisons with other providers of employment training or vocational education. Nor can we meaningfully compare individual project characteristics on the content of the vocational education offered.

We augmented these primary measures with the following secondary indicators. One is based on the extent to which vocational education was discussed during parenting education. This reflects responses to the question “Indicate how frequently building awareness of vocational and educational opportunities is used” during parenting education (coded on a 4-point scale ranging from ‘not taught’ to ‘taught to most families’).
Another secondary indicator of vocational education is the reported level of collaboration with trade or technical schools in providing adult education, which can serve as a measure of the degree to which programs are providing vocational education, although vocational education also could be provided through collaboration with other types of institutions (e.g., community colleges, public schools).

**Participant Characteristics**

The outcomes included in this analysis focus on steps towards economic independence, such as educational attainment, employment changes, employment stability and gains in literacy skills as measured by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) or Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Educational attainment is measured as having achieved a GED, high school diploma, or acceptance to some form of postsecondary education. Employment information includes having obtained a job (if unemployed at entry to the program) or maintaining employment if employed at entry to the program. We are limited, however, by the available data on employment, which was collected at intake for new families in 1995-96, and again at the end of the program year for those remaining active participants, and consequently, does not include information on participants who left during the program year or whose employment status changed more than once between intake and end of year.

Baseline characteristics of individual families include demographic and economic measures and past experience with education and social services. The demographic measures include:

- Marital status (not married versus married);
- Income level, measured in eight categories, ranging from less than $3,000 to more than $25,000;
- Employment status at start of program (employed versus unemployed);
- Number of years of schooling (on a scale of 1 "no schooling" to 16 "received a college degree"); and
- Ethnicity, using two dichotomous variables; Hispanic (1 = yes, 0 = no) and Black (1=yes, 0=no). If a participant was neither Black nor Hispanic, then her or his ethnicity was coded White and other. The “White and other” category served as the default comparison group, against which the effect of being Black or Hispanic could be measured, after controlling for other factors.

Participation and past experience measures include:

- Participation in adult education, measured as the number of hours of instruction received per month and the duration in terms of the number of months involved.
- Current participation in services outside of Even Start recorded as current receipt of ABE classes not affiliated with an Even Start project.
• Participants’ program experience prior to enrollment in Even Start captured as past receipt of welfare, past receipt of vocational training, and past participation in adult education.
• Indicators of the parents’ motivation for participation in Even Start were whether the goal of participation was to further their own education or to obtain employment.

Again, these participation and experience indicators are based upon data from the 1995-96 program year.

**Analytic Approach**

**Methods**

Because our chief questions are about variation at the project level, our initial set of analyses focused on describing the variation of vocational hours offered in concert with other project characteristics. First, we examined whether there was variation in the level of vocational hours offered across states, using a one-way analysis of variance with an unbalanced design. Second, we categorized the projects by level of vocational education hours offered and compared the distribution of other site-level characteristics across these categories to explore whether programs that offered more vocational education hours also differed in the array of other services provided.

We categorized the number of vocational hours offered into four groups: no vocational education offered; 1 to 10 hours; 10.1 to 20 hours; and more than 20 hours per week. The 465 projects are distributed fairly equally across these categories. This categorization scheme also captures a distinction made by policy makers, between what does and does not represent a minimum effort (e.g., above and below 20 hours a week). We also wanted to be able to describe projects that offer no vocational education or limited vocational education, as well as projects that offer at least the minimum 20 hours per week required by federal guidelines (American Public Welfare Association, 1996).

Next, we examined the currently promulgated welfare requirements in a small number of states in order to learn about the match between recent service provision and specific examples of welfare reform. We focused on states that met at least the following two criteria: (1) they have clearly articulated and published legislative language about the requirements for welfare recipients; and (2) they have multiple Even Start projects currently operating. We wanted to compare project-level characteristics within these states to the state (and federal) guidelines for receipt of TANF. We selected the following seven states: Texas, New York, California, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois and Georgia.

The third part of the analysis examines individual level outcomes for Even Start participants as a function of participation in vocational education--after controlling for demographic characteristics, for motivation, and for baseline participation.
We want to emphasize that these analyses are exploratory in nature, for the following reasons. One, significant changes in welfare policy at the federal and state levels have only occurred within the past year or so, and therefore potential ramifications at the individual project level will have occurred even more recently. Two, our database represents information collected during and about the 1995-96 program year, likely to be well before legislative changes in welfare reform had time to take effect. This means that any analyses can only describe what was current on the eve of changes in welfare policy. What these analyses can offer, however, is an exploration of the relationships between individual attributes and available outcomes, including employment, obtaining a GED or high school diploma, and, where available, pretest to posttest gains on the CASAS or TABE. Models that estimate the strength of relationships between individual attributes and economic outcomes include multiple predictors simultaneously (due to the larger number of adults for whom there are valid data), while models that estimate the predictive capacity of attributes relative to adult assessment outcomes include only one or two predictors each (due to the smaller number of adults for whom there are valid pretest and posttest scores).

In order to learn whether the participant outcomes differed across Even Start projects, we used a multilevel analytic technique called hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to look at interactions between variables at different levels of analysis—individual-level outcomes, on the one hand, and program characteristics on the other (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992.) This approach allows us to determine which site-level factors (e.g., size or setting of program) were influential in predicting variation in individual adult outcomes (e.g., educational level).

**RESULTS**

**Project Characteristics**

Exhibit 2 displays the distribution of project characteristics (e.g. project size, staff ratio, parenting education, average number of hours/year and extent of adult secondary education, ESL, collaboration with trade school) across the four categories of adult education hours offered in a vocational context (0 hours, 1-10, 11-20 and 20+ hours/week). Projects that offered more vocational education offered more services in other areas, and they were also more likely to collaborate with vocational institutions. First, the average number of Adult Secondary Education/GED Preparation was significantly higher for projects that offered the greatest amount of adult education in a vocational context. Further, the number of parenting education hours offered averaged about 27 hours per month for the projects that offered the most vocational education, while the number of parenting education hours offered in projects with no vocational education was only 17 hours per month. The number of hours of ESL per week was lower in the projects that offered no vocational education than the number offered in the most intense vocational education projects (22 versus 29); this is interesting because nearly half of the participants in the no-vocational education projects reported their ethnicity as Hispanic. Additionally, participants in projects offering 20 or more hours of vocational education were nearly twice as likely to have received some form of employment assistance (e.g., placement, referrals, or vocational counseling) through Even Start.
### Exhibit 2
Comparison of Project Characteristics Across Levels of Vocational Education Offered
1995-96 Program Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Level Characteristics</th>
<th>A) None</th>
<th>B) 1-10 hours</th>
<th>C) 11-20 hours</th>
<th>D) 20 + hours</th>
<th>Significant Difference *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Families Per Project (sd)</td>
<td>58 (115.3)</td>
<td>63 (61.4)</td>
<td>58 (41.3)</td>
<td>61 (45.1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Staff-Participant Ratio (sd)</td>
<td>4:1 (.1)</td>
<td>4.1 (.4)</td>
<td>4.1 (.3)</td>
<td>4.1 (.1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Receiving Employment Assistance through Even Start</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean no. hours English as Second Language offered/month (sd)</td>
<td>21.7 (25.3)</td>
<td>10.9 (11.9)</td>
<td>19.1 (21.4)</td>
<td>28.6 (32.0)</td>
<td>ACB, DCB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean no. hours parenting education offered/month (sd)</td>
<td>17.0 (26.7)</td>
<td>14.4 (12.7)</td>
<td>20.8 (16.8)</td>
<td>26.8 (24.0)</td>
<td>AD, BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean no. hours Adult Secondary Education/GED Prep/month (sd)</td>
<td>28.7 (27.4)</td>
<td>17.0 (11.3)</td>
<td>34.9 (19.4)</td>
<td>65.5 (27.7)</td>
<td>ABCD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean level of collaboration with trade schools (sd)</td>
<td>1.3 (.5)</td>
<td>1.5 (.6)</td>
<td>1.5 (.6)</td>
<td>1.6 (.7)</td>
<td>AD, AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean level of staff received vocational education in service training (sd)</td>
<td>1.4 (.6)</td>
<td>1.9 (.7)</td>
<td>1.9 (.6)</td>
<td>2.0 (.6)</td>
<td>AB, AC, AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistical significance was established using unbalanced ANOVA with Student’s Tukey Test to evaluate difference between categories.

Exhibit reads: Projects offering 20 + hours a week of ABE in a vocational context also offered 26.8 hours/month of parenting education, on average. The level of parenting education offered differs significantly (p < .05) between group A (no ABE hours offered in vocational context) and group D (20+ ABE hours offered in vocational context) and between group B (1-10 ABE hours offered) and group D (20+ ABE hours offered).

1Employment Assistance refers to referrals, placement services, or vocational counseling provided through Even Start.
There was no statistically significant difference in the staffing ratio or in the size of the projects across the levels of vocational education offered. The mean staff ratio was four to one for all four categories and the project size ranged from 58 to 63 families. These findings suggest that projects that offered more vocational education also offered more ancillary services to their participants, but that the level of services are not associated with decreases in project size or staff ratios.

**Participant Characteristics**

From the available data, it is not possible to determine whether the level of services was tailored to the population served or whether adults enrolled in the project because of the configuration of services offered. Nevertheless, it is interesting to examine the profile of participants served by projects offering varying levels of services. As shown in Exhibit 3, comparison of participant characteristics across the four levels of vocational education suggests that those participating in projects with high levels of vocational education were more disadvantaged economically and educationally. Nearly half of the participants enrolled in projects with intense vocational education services reported family incomes less than $6,000, and 64 percent were receiving some form of government assistance. By contrast, only 35 percent of the participants in projects with no vocational emphasis had incomes below $6,000, and the proportion receiving government aid was about 17 percent lower, with 53 percent of the families reporting receipt. Additionally, participants in projects that offered the most intensive vocational education were slightly less likely to be employed and to have a high school diploma or GED.

Exhibit 4 shows that participants of the intense vocational education projects were nearly twice as likely (11 contrasted to 6 percent) as those in projects without any vocational education to participate in employment training or vocational education outside of Even Start. While the level of participation in outside services is low overall, this difference may indicate a greater motivation in some of the participants enrolled in the projects offering high levels of vocational education. Nearly half (48 percent) of the participants in projects offering the most intensive vocational education reported their goal was to “further their education,” compared to 31 percent in the projects with no vocational education offered.

Twice as many participants in the projects with more intensive vocational education than those in projects with no vocational education obtained a high school or GED diploma, or had been accepted to a post-secondary program since enrollment in Even Start (14 percent versus 7 percent) during the 1995-96 program year (Exhibit 5). While the level of employment in all categories of vocational education offered is roughly equivalent, participants in the projects offering more intensive vocational education gained the most ground, with the proportion employed increasing from 18 percent to 32 percent. These gains should not be surprising, for two reasons. First, the number of adult education hours received during the program year was significantly higher in projects that offered more vocational education (136 hours) than in projects offering less vocational education. Second, as noted above, participants enrolled in projects that offered over 20 hours a week of vocational education were more likely to obtain vocational education or employment training, thus potentially helping them become more employment-ready.
### Exhibit 3
Comparison of Individual Baseline Characteristics Across Levels of Vocational Education Offered
1995-96 Program Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>Number of Hours/Month of Adult Education Offered in a Vocational Context</th>
<th>Significant Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (n=3,982)</td>
<td>1-40 (n=6,356)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than $6,000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$6,000-$14,999</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 plus</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous Receipt of Welfare</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Receipt of Welfare</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 0 - Grade 8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9 - Grade 12</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma/GED +</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently employed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exhibit reads: Thirty-five percent of those enrolled in programs offering no ABE in a vocational context had a family income of less than $6,000.
# Exhibit 4
Comparison of Individual Baseline Characteristics Across Levels of Vocational Education Offered
1995-96 Program Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>0 (n=3,982)</th>
<th>1-40 (n=6,356)</th>
<th>41-80 (n=5,044)</th>
<th>81+ (n=6,389)</th>
<th>Significant Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous Participation in Social/Education Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment training/ vocational education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult basic education</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Participation in non-Even Start Social/Education Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment training/ vocational education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Participating in Even Start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve chances of getting a job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exhibit reads: Ten percent of those enrolled in programs offering no ABE in the vocational context participated in employment training or vocational education.
### Exhibit 5
Comparison of Individual Outcomes Across Levels of Vocational Education Offered
1995-96 Program Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Characteristics</th>
<th>Number of Hours/Month of Adult Education Offered in a Vocational Context</th>
<th>Significant Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (n=3,982)</td>
<td>1-40 (n=6,356)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received HS/GED either prior to/since enrollment in Even Start,</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or had been accepted to college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained HS/GED since Even Start, or had been accepted to</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently Employed</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in full-time job</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in part-time /seasonal job or through a job training</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently Unemployed</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed/enrolled in a voc ed or educational program</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed and looking for work</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of hours of participation in Adult Education</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the 1995-96 program year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exhibit reads: Seven percent of those enrolled in programs that offered no ABE in a vocational context obtained a high school Diploma or GED, or had been accepted to college since enrolling in an Even Start project.
Taken together, these descriptive analyses indicate that participants are indeed distributed quite variably across different projects. Additionally, while participants in the most vocational-education rich Even Start projects are less educated and more likely to be unemployed at the start of the program year, they appear to make greater gains in their educational attainment and employment status by the end of the year. Again, we do not know whether the projects enroll different participants because they offer unique services or whether the services are tailored to the population being served. We do know from other items on the ESIS that the criteria used by each of the projects for recruiting families did not differ across the categories of vocational education offered.

**Relationship of Individual Characteristics and Selected Outcomes**

In the previous section, we described the distribution of individual baseline characteristics and outcomes across the four categories of vocational education offered, which revealed that there were differences in participant characteristics across the four categories, and that outcomes also varied across the categories. However, as noted, our exploratory analyses of participants’ baseline characteristics revealed no systematic associations with outcomes. In this section, then, we explore relationships between changes/gains in employment, educational attainment, and extent of participation in adult education. These analyses are also exploratory in nature, and seek to learn whether there are any patterns or trends among Even Start participants vis-a-vis adult education participation (particularly with a focus on vocational education). Because our analyses are exploratory, rather than theory-driven, we did not begin with particular hypotheses about where we might expect to find differences.

We fit a multivariate regression model using HLM to identify which individual level characteristics were related to the employment, education and adult education participation outcomes. Gains in the CASAS or TABE standardized tests were estimated using OLS regression models with a minimum number of predictors due to the limited number of participants who took both pre- and posttests during the 1995-1996 program year. (See Exhibit 6).

Ethnicity, past educational attainment, current participation in vocational education outside of Even Start programs, and whether the primary motivation for the participation was to get a job all were positively related to higher levels of employment. However, none of these predictors was associated with a substantively important gain in level of employment.

In the model predicting attainment of any additional education, we found that ethnicity and increased income level were associated with less educational advancement, while having participated in vocational education, other adult education, and listing to ‘further own education’ as motivation for participation were positively related. As was the case with the model predicting gains in employment, however, none of these relationships were substantively significant.

Being married predicted few hours of participation in adult education, while being employed, having a higher income level, receipt of adult education in the past and listing ‘to further own education’ as the motivation for participation were all positively associated with increases in
**Exhibit 6**

Comparison of Individual Characteristics by Selected Outcome Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Random Effect Across Sites</th>
<th>Significant Individual Level Predictors (p &lt; .05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Employment**                        |             |                             | 1. ethnicity  
2. past educational attainment  
3. current participation in vocational education outside Even Start  
4. motivation for Even Start participation is to find a job  
5. current adult education participation |
| Vocational hours offered by sites     | .0009*      | Yes                         | 1. ethnicity  
2. past educational attainment  
3. current participation in vocational education outside Even Start  
4. motivation for Even Start participation is to find a job  
5. current adult education participation |
| **Additional Educational Attainment** |             |                             | 1. ethnicity  
2. income level  
3. individual vocational ed participation  
4. other vocational ed  
5. motivation for Even Start participation is to further education |
| Vocational hours offered by sites     | .0003***    | Yes                         | 1. ethnicity  
2. income level  
3. individual vocational ed participation  
4. other vocational ed  
5. motivation for Even Start participation is to further education |
| **Adult Education Participation**     |             |                             | 1. martital status  
2. employment  
3. income level  
4. adult education receipt in past  
5. motivation for participating in Even Start is further education |
| Vocational hours offered by sites     | .431***     | Yes                         | 1. martital status  
2. employment  
3. income level  
4. adult education receipt in past  
5. motivation for participating in Even Start is further education |

* = p < .05 ,   ** = p < .01,  *** = p < .001
adult education participation. Again, however, none of these measures were predictive of substantively significant changes.

**Relationship of Project-Level Characteristics and Participant Outcomes**

Given that outcomes do vary across levels of vocational education offered and that the participant characteristics available for these analyses are relatively weak predictors of the outcomes, we explored which project-level characteristics might be associated with gains in these outcomes. In other words, if, after controlling for these individual-level characteristics, the outcomes still vary by project, what project-level characteristics might help explain the remaining variation?

To examine this question, we built upon the individual models predicting greater employment attainment, obtainment of additional education and the increases in adult education hours. We added project-level characteristics to predict differences in the outcomes once we had controlled for individual-level characteristics. For each of the three models, we entered project size, number of vocational hours offered, the degree to which the project collaborated with a trade or technical school or institute, the proportion of staff who had received in-service training on vocational education and the ratio of staff to families as predictors of the mean levels of individual level outcomes. We fit these models using HLM software.

The results indicate that the number of vocational hours offered by Even Start projects was positively related to the proportion of participants who had attained additional education, the level of employment, receipt of any additional education outside of Even Start and adult education hours received. These findings suggest that the level of services was related to the continued educational progress of participants, even after individual level characteristics are taken into consideration.

Our exploratory analyses thus far suggest that there is tremendous variation in the amount of vocational education offered by the projects, and that the level of vocational education offered by projects is associated with individual gains in educational progress and employment. Given that the projects considered in this report serve individuals who are most likely to be affected by changes in government assistance programs, it is also useful to consider how projects operating in different state contexts array their services.

**HOW DO CURRENT EVEN START SERVICES MEASURE UP WITH CHANGING STATE WELFARE GUIDELINES?**

Recent legislation has made it clear that the focus of TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) programs is to encourage greater self-sufficiency among welfare recipients. In addition, federal monies are now distributed through block grants to the states, thereby allowing states to decide how to best distribute government assistance dollars. Since states are now playing a larger role in the design of their public assistance programs, it is interesting to explore the variation between the states in the level of vocational education offered by Even Start projects.
We found that the amount of vocational education offered (by Even Start projects) varied tremendously across the 50 states, from no hours to more than 40 hours a week, with an average of 12 hours a week. Exhibit 7 displays the categorization of all states (as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) into levels of vocational education used for earlier analyses. As this table illustrates, nearly 35 percent of the states offered 10 or fewer hours of vocational education a week, while 31 percent offered between 10 and 20 hours. Only 35 percent offered more than 20 hours a week, the level of commitment required by most states when education is counted as equivalent to work participation. While the level of vocational education offered might appear low given current public policy, it should be kept in mind that much of this new legislation has only been enacted since sometime in 1996. The latest program year we have for comparison is 1995-1996, and therefore it is not surprising that services offered by local projects do not yet reflect changes dictated by subsequent policy and legislative shifts.

We selected seven states (Texas, New York, California, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois and Georgia) to compare state (and federal) level policy with the amount of vocational education offered. These states were selected because they served a relatively large number of Even Start participants (across these seven states, 45 percent of all Even Start participants) and because they offered varying levels of vocational education. The number of vocational hours offered by Even Start projects, ranged, on average, from 6 hours a week in California to 25 or more hours per week in Florida and Georgia (Exhibit 8). We had hoped to be able to draw direct comparisons between the number of hours offered and state TANF policies. However, review of the state TANF plans revealed so many exemptions and different scenarios under which vocational or other types of educational efforts count as ‘work activities’, that direct comparisons are not feasible.

A review of the policies mandated by these states makes it clear that these states’ plans place a priority on helping families become more self-sufficient by encouraging parents to find employment as soon as possible. That all of the states emphasize the need to find employment as an immediate goal is not surprising, since Federal policy clearly requires that states reduce their caseload by increasing employment. In his 1996 State of the State Address, for example, Florida Governor Chiles asked the state legislature to “turn welfare applications into job applications.” (Florida Governor’s Office, 1996.) This legislation requires participation in work activities as a condition of getting public assistance. Georgia’s plan entitled “Work First! Work First!” (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1996) clearly emphasizes the state’s priority of moving individuals from government assistance to employment. To motivate individuals receiving cash benefits in their states, policy makers in California and New York have increased the amount of income that can be earned and level of assets acquired before benefits are decreased.

It is interesting to note, however, that for these two states and the others described in this paper, vocational education, and other job readiness activities are sometimes considered ‘work activities’ in some circumstances and that certain groups of individuals are given exemptions. For instance, in all seven states, single parents with children aged less than one year are not required to participate in work activities. This policy represents a change from past practices, which provided exemptions for single mothers of pre-school children. Because more than half of all of the Even Start projects targeted mothers with children aged 0-2 years of age, we can expect that a large number of participants will be affected by this particular change in policy.
### Exhibit 7
Level of Vocational Education offered in Even Start Projects Across All States
1995-96 Program Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Vocational Education Offered</th>
<th>n (%)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Vocational Education Offered</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 10 hours per week</td>
<td>17 (32.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1 - 20 hours</td>
<td>16 (30.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 20 hours per week</td>
<td>18 (34.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean hours offered per week</td>
<td>14.4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Hours</td>
<td>12.7 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes 50 states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico

Exhibit reads: Seventeen states, representing approximately 33 percent of the states, offered between 1 and 10 hours per week of vocational education.

### Exhibit 8
Featured States’ Even Start Projects, Participants, and Mean Amount of Vocational Hours per Month
1995-96 Program Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Even Start projects</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage of All Even Start Participants</th>
<th>Mean Number of Vocational Education Hours Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,945</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,112</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1,925</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2,343</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exhibit reads: Texas has 38 Even Start projects, which enroll nearly 11 percent of all Even Start participants, and the mean number of adult education hours offered per month in a vocational context is 11.
Since vocational training and other basic education are sometimes, but not always, considered to be “work activity”, it is difficult to enumerate the number of hours of effort required. All seven states encourage TANF recipients under 18 years to complete high school or obtain a GED. In Georgia, priority is given to helping adults who are 20-25 years of age and have at least a 10th grade education to get their high school diploma or GED (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1996). As a result, these individuals are exempted from work for an unspecified period of time, while others receiving aid in Georgia are expected to work as soon as they are considered ‘job ready,’ which can be as soon as they begin receiving any government assistance. In Pennsylvania, participation in vocational or general education is limited to 12 months, but exceptions are made for individuals aged 18-22 years who have not yet obtained a GED or high school diploma (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, 1996). Individuals who meet this criteria are allowed to pursue their education for 24 months. Nearly one-third of the Even Start participants in Georgia qualify for an educational exemption, while 20 percent of the participants in Pennsylvania qualify. These figures indicate that despite the trend in welfare reform to encourage immediate employment, there exists a relatively large population currently targeted by Even Start projects who will continue to be eligible for and need educational services. This has clear ramifications for service design and delivery, as Even Start participants may face competing demands imposed by state regulations, on one hand, and Even Start offerings, on the other.

Texas state policy provides another example of how states are simultaneously struggling with the definition of those most in need and trying to tailor the delivery of assistance to match those needs. In Texas, time limits on cash and transitional benefits depend on the level of caretaker education and recent work history (Texas Department of Human Services, 1996). For instance, a caretaker with a high school diploma and at least 18 months of recent work history is eligible to receive up to 12 months of cash benefits and then 12 months of transitional benefits (such as child care subsidies). Conversely, a caretaker who has completed less than 3 years of high school and less than 6 months of recent work history is eligible to receive cash benefits for up to 36 months. Nearly 70 percent of the participants enrolled in Even Start projects in Texas fall into the latter educational category (i.e., they are eligible to receive cash benefits for up to 36 months). With this extension of benefits to three years, Even Start projects in Texas can expect to continue to serve a large portion of their current target population.

In summary, our review suggests that state policy makers are taking positive steps to reduce dependency on public assistance. All of the states count some form of vocational education or job readiness training as work activities. Some of the states adjust the level of benefits and time allowed in educational activities to reflect the educational achievement of public assistance recipients. This may change in the future, however. The House Ways and Means Human Resources Subcommittee is currently (summer 1997) reviewing a proposal that would severely limit the ability of states to classify individuals enrolled in educational activities as ‘participating’ to meet their federal participation rates (Center for Law and Social Policy, 1997).
CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored the characteristics of and outcomes for participants in Even Start projects, focusing on vocational education, and employment training. In addition, we have discussed welfare reform contexts within several states which host a number of Even Start projects.

Our exploratory analyses indicates that the level of services focused on vocational education varies tremendously across projects and states. More importantly, however, our study suggests that the level of services offered is associated with Even Start participants’ prior educational attainment. Although participants in projects offering the most vocational education were more economically and educationally disadvantaged, they were also, on average, more likely to attain a GED or high school diploma, obtain employment, and report greater participation in adult education during their program participation. While these types of gains are important because they may be associated with increases in participants’ employability, they should be interpreted with caution. Perhaps we observed greater gains in this group because these participants started with lower levels of education and employment, and therefore had more room for potential growth. Equally plausible, however, is the possibility that the available measures did not adequately capture the range of participants’ characteristics and motivation that might help explain the observed gains. Even with caution, though, these preliminary results suggest that this group did make progress towards greater employability. Increasing employability is crucial at any time, and it is even more critical now that welfare reform has placed a time limit on receipt of cash benefits for most recipients of government assistance.

Our review of state contexts in which some projects operate also suggests that Even Start service providers will continue to play a critical role in the futures of their program participants. While federal guidelines stress the need to decrease dependency on government assistance through greater employment, most states are allowing select groups to further their education in order to increase employability. Our preliminary research suggests that individuals eligible for these exemptions represent a considerable portion of the population targeted by Even Start for services. Therefore, we can expect that there will continue to be a large population in need of literacy and vocational services designed to increase their long range employability.

In order to conduct a study that can effectively evaluate relationships between changing welfare reform requirements and participation in Even Start, we would need to collect some additional data than those elements included in the Even Start Information System. Aside from more comprehensive and current state-level information on specific policies and implementation schedules, we would need much explicit information on how local projects define vocational education and employment training. Additionally, more specific information about the content of adult basic and secondary education instruction, English-as-a-Second Language instruction, and detailed records of adults’ participation in services would also help researchers understand the relationships between participation in vocational education or employment training, on one hand, and related outcomes, on the other. Finally, because employment training and vocational education represent means toward the achievement of long-term goals of economic self-sufficiency, it would be useful to have data that adequately capture long-term changes in
employment status and educational attainment -- changes that may well occur after participation in Even Start has ended.
REFERENCES


