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**College as a Job  
Advancement Strategy:  
An Interim Report on the  
New Visions Self-  
Sufficiency and Lifelong  
Learning Project The  
New Visions Evaluation**

**Executive Summary**

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# Executive Summary

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This report is the second in a series on the New Visions Self-Sufficiency and Lifelong Learning Project, an innovative program designed to help welfare recipients go to college and advance to better jobs.<sup>1</sup> First implemented in August 1998, the project is a partnership between Riverside Community College (RCC) and the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) in Riverside County, California.

New Visions tests the thesis that success in college and at work require similar skills, and that these skills can be imparted in a single program. The design consists of a 24-week phase of preparatory studies at RCC, followed by a short sequence of regular college courses providing training for a specific job. New Visions participants must be working in an unsubsidized job for at least 20 hours a week in addition to attending 12 hours of classes.

An assumption underlying New Visions is that students who work are in a good position to apply new skills and advance in their jobs. Evidence for or against this proposition is pertinent to the current national debate about how much education and training will be feasible if work requirements are increased for welfare recipients. The New Visions demonstration also addresses the question of whether specially-designed programs for low-income parents can promote college achievement and thereby movement to higher-wage jobs.

Abt Associates Inc. is conducting a five-year evaluation of New Visions under a grant to RCC from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The evaluation is assessing the program's implementation and estimating its impacts on participants' educational attainment, earnings, and welfare reliance. The demonstration incorporates an experimental design, which randomly assigned 1,076 volunteers to treatment and control groups. Results provide the first rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of a college promotion program for welfare recipients.

The first New Visions evaluation report (Fein *et al.* 2000) looked at early implementation lessons and short-term impacts for a small sample of early demonstration participants. The present report covers the full implementation period, provides detailed analyses of participants' experiences, and assesses impacts for a larger sample over a two-year follow-up period. The final report will provide impact analyses for the full demonstration sample and a longer follow-up period.

## Background

Special college programs for welfare recipients received a boost from the 1988 Family Support Act, whose Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program made education and training (E&T) the cornerstone of the nation's welfare policies. Many states encouraged post-secondary education under JOBS, and colleges—particularly community colleges—developed a variety of innovative program designs. Little is known about whether these programs were effective, as the handful of studies of them were largely descriptive in nature.

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<sup>1</sup> In early 2003, there were several changes to New Visions' design, and the program was renamed the Workforce Preparation Skills Program. Our final report will describe these changes.

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) shifted the emphasis in national policy from education and training to employment services and rapid transitions from welfare to work. An earlier experiment finding large positive employment impacts for Riverside County's employment-focused program was influential in promoting this philosophy, which came to be known as "work first." PRWORA's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which replaced AFDC/JOBS, contained strong work activity participation requirements and restricted the circumstances under which states could count education and training as work activities.

PRWORA initially led states to restrict opportunities for welfare recipients to attend college. A counter-reaction developed in the late 1990s in response to strong evidence that, although work first moved many recipients from welfare to work, it did little to increase their net incomes. A number of states developed policies and programs to encourage college, sometimes working within, and sometimes around, the TANF work participation rules.

Interest in mixed employment-education approaches was particularly keen, given evidence that educational programs may be more effective when developed in a strong employment context. Evaluation researchers are beginning to describe emerging approaches to promoting college under TANF. Until now, however, none of these evaluations has included a rigorous impact study.

## **The New Visions Program**

Riverside County was among the earliest jurisdictions to recognize and systematically address the problems of job retention and advancement. Its current TANF program embodies a three-phase design. In Phase 1, DPSS's employment service counselors help clients find jobs. Clients advance to Phase 2 after finding unsubsidized jobs for at least 20 hours a week, where special case managers concentrate on job retention and job advancement. Phase 2 case managers encourage clients to enroll in one of a variety of E&T programs in the community; alternatively, clients may choose to work full time to meet the overall participation requirement (32 hours for single parent cases and 35 hours for two parent cases). In Phase 3, the program offers extended services to support job retention and advancement after clients leave the welfare rolls.

New Visions is a specially-designed Phase 2 program for recipients with a high school diploma or equivalent preparation. Operated by RCC, the program has its own classroom, offices, and computer laboratory on the college's main Riverside City campus. The program is funded partly through TANF grant dollars provided directly to California community colleges and partly through the college's general funds.

New Visions' goals are to prepare welfare recipients for college, foster lifelong learning, and promote job advancement. Following a one-week orientation session, New Visions participants enter a 24-week core program of academic instruction and career guidance. The program includes college preparatory classes in math, English, reading, office-related computer software, and guidance. Academic instruction relies heavily on applied learning and hands-on assignments drawn from work situations (e.g., math problems arising in varying occupations, resume and cover letter preparation) and other areas of daily living (e.g., interest on loans, income taxes). The guidance class concentrates

on critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and study skills needed for success at college, work, and home.

The core program design addresses the special needs of low-income working parents. It offers a flexible schedule and individualized instruction delivered in a group setting. Classes are taught in three-hour time blocks each day, four days a week, with each block repeated three times daily to suit varying work, child care, and transportation needs. Small class sizes (typically no more than 15) allow instructors to work with students on an individual basis. Lessons and assignments are structured so that students can move through the curriculum at their own pace. Courses are divided into three six-week segments, each providing one unit of credit, to reward progress and make it easier for dropouts to re-enroll in the program. All credits appear on students' RCC transcripts, although only the three guidance course units are degree-applicable.

After the 24-week core program, New Visions seeks to move participants into an occupational mini-program at RCC. These programs consist of identified sequences of courses in the regular RCC curriculum normally requiring four-to-seven months of part-time study. The mini-programs are designed to train students for entry-level jobs in their chosen occupations. Credits for completed courses also are applicable towards state-recognized certificate programs and associates and bachelors degrees.

The strategy breaks up longer college programs into a series of segments corresponding to successive steps on participants' career ladders. The New Visions design assumes that an incremental approach to higher education will be more achievable for working parents than the sustained, full-time schedule in the traditional college model. The mini-programs also fit within DPSS' Phase 2 training philosophy, which emphasizes short-term programs training for specific jobs. Although well-suited for New Visions graduates, RCC mini-programs are open to all of the college's students, and most of the students in these classes are not welfare recipients.

## **Implementing New Visions**

As with many ambitious new interventions, it was not certain at the outset that New Visions could be successfully implemented. Would a sufficient number of working parents be willing to devote 24 weeks to preparing for college and then go for further studies? Was it possible to create a program that simultaneously prepared students for college and fostered short-term job advancement? Would New Visions build a sturdy bridge between the core program and regular college courses? The evaluation's implementation study uses information from on-site interviews and observations to answer these and related questions.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment proved to be far more challenging than RCC or DPSS initially had envisioned. Eligibility restrictions greatly limited the pool of potential volunteers (to no more than 15 percent of the caseload), and recruiters faced growing competition from other Phase 2 training programs in a period of declining welfare caseloads. Eligible clients often were not an easy sell. Past academic difficulties left them skeptical about college, financial needs impelled them towards full-time work, and other Phase 2 programs promised faster pathways to better jobs.

The earliest outreach efforts mainly involved calls and mailings by RCC to Phase 2 clients who indicated an interest in New Visions or RCC on a form implemented by DPSS. The resulting flow of volunteers—about 30 per six-week cycle, of which half were assigned to the treatment group—was below half the level needed to fill seats and meet demonstration enrollment requirements.

Over the next few years, senior staff at the two agencies collaborated closely on an extensive recruitment effort. Notwithstanding DPSS’s philosophy of not intervening in the training program marketplace, agency administrators and Phase 2 case managers took an active role in this effort. The campaign developed a wide array of techniques, including home visits, presentations at the welfare office, on-campus picnics, ads in local media and public spaces, use of New Visions students as recruiters, marketing to welfare clients before they found jobs, offering work study positions, and hiring an expert consultant to advise. The latter recommended revising the message about New Visions’ benefits and helped implement steps leading to a more uniform message across the two agencies. The revised message told welfare recipients that New Visions was a program for people like them that provided skills that all employers would reward. Previously staff had placed more emphasis on the program as a chance to improve basic educational skills (DPSS) and acquire skills needed to succeed in college (RCC).

The two agencies’ experiences with work study illustrate how programs like New Visions require that both partners be able to understand and accommodate to each other’s policy environments. RCC staff saw offering work study jobs to Phase 1 (pre-employment) clients as a good recruitment tool that would help participants to coordinate their work and school and gain experience with the college environment. DPSS policy normally did not allow work study because it viewed these subsidized, short-term jobs as diverting clients from sustained movement towards financial independence. The agency nonetheless agreed to test the use of work study positions in recruitment. When a surge of volunteers proved too great for the college to place quickly in work study positions, the welfare agency returned to its policy of requiring unsubsidized work.<sup>2</sup> College staff subsequently came to understand better the reasons behind DPSS’ stress on unsubsidized employment and have accepted the need to work within this framework.

Through its extensive recruitment efforts, the demonstration was able to maintain overall intake (treatment and control) at nearly 40 volunteers per cycle and eventually meet the target of 1,000 volunteers. Although not that much higher than early intake, administrators had feared substantial declines as they worked through the initial backlog of eligible clients and as competition increased from other Phase 2 providers. An early 2002 survey of eligible Phase 2 clients found that 27 percent had volunteered for New Visions. This result seems a good one, given competition from other programs, apprehensions about college, and the pull of full-time employment in a robust economy. It suggests that ultimately it was the small pool of eligible clients, rather than failure to make the case for the program, that limited demonstration inflow.

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<sup>2</sup> DPSS administrators believed that some Phase 1 case managers were using the work study option as an easy way to secure job placements for their less employable clients. After ending work study generally, the agency allowed a few participants to hold work study jobs as New Visions recruiters.

## The Core Program

Compared with recruitment, relatively few serious problems arose in implementing the New Visions core program, and it quickly reached its steady state. RCC administrators designed a solid core curriculum and hired an instructional staff committed to working with low-income working parents.

Teaching approaches varied across courses and over time, but generally emphasized a mix of group discussion and self-paced work periodically punctuated with short lectures. New Visions largely eschewed the traditional lecture-based model. Faculty used a combination of textbooks, worksheet assignments, and computer software as teaching resources.

Each course moved through its subject matter sequentially in six-week blocks timed to correspond to the inflow of students in new cohorts, who were enrolled about every six weeks. More frequent entry opportunities reduced the wait to begin classes but required that faculty engage new students in ongoing courses who had not had mastered previous material. Instructors responded by devoting time to review, by working with individuals and small groups of students, and by designing curricula to allow substantial self-paced work.

Faculty found that New Visions students' low academic skills made teaching these courses more challenging than teaching comparable courses offered in more traditional formats to the general RCC student body. Program developers had expected 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade competencies, but academic skills of incoming New Visions students actually averaged between the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>-grade levels on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The gap that New Visions needed to close to bring participants to the college level was therefore substantial.

In the program's first year, counseling staff were stretched thin by multiple responsibilities for counseling, recruitment, instruction, and administration. When the college added more counselors (around the end of New Visions' second year), the program was able to take a more proactive approach to counseling current students, re-engaging drop-outs, and building stronger bridges to post-core training at RCC.

Strong connections to employers are an important requirement for programs seeking to foster short-term job advancement. New Visions initially hired a job developer and developed ties to several employers—including a local bank—but ultimately decided it made more sense to rely on welfare agency staff for job development. As a consequence, employers were not as directly involved as they might have been in the core program, which focused more on preparation for work and school than on securing direct job placements.

The two organizations held somewhat different views of what an ideal core curriculum would look like. DPSS staff felt that the program would be more appealing if it introduced occupational training earlier—during the six-month core program. RCC staff shared this view to some extent, but believed also that virtually all New Visions students needed intensive academic preparation to succeed in the college's regular occupational programs. They noted that the program already provided some flexibility to start occupational training earlier by allowing students to test out of core courses.

## **Post-Core College Training**

An integral component of the original New Visions model was a period of regular college coursework following core program completion. This part of the program was not as fully designed as the core program at the outset, and its subsequent development took a back seat to recruitment efforts on the part of RCC administrators and staff. During the first two years, this component consisted mainly of *ad hoc* efforts by counselors to interest students in what then was a relatively limited number of occupational mini-programs.

Two developments eventually strengthened this part of the program. First, the college hired more counselors, who had more time to take a proactive role in career planning and post-core coursework. New Visions also added a special workshop—the Capstone course—designed to solidify career goals and training plans during the last weeks of the core program. Second, a surge of interest in shorter training programs in the general college community led to the creation of many more occupational mini-programs.

Administrators and faculty created these mini-programs in response to the requirements for specific jobs in demand in the community, sometimes working directly with employers to create programs. Most of these occupational mini-programs simply identified short sequences of existing courses needed for a particular job, although some broke up existing courses into smaller (e.g., one-credit) chunks, and still others incorporated new courses and programs customized to the specifications of local employers. Illustrative programs include training for: medical transcription, cardiac monitor technician, pre-school teacher's aide, PC publishing, and administrative assistant.

Whereas the original New Visions design portrayed post-core training as an integral part of the program, the implemented program mostly ends with graduation from the core program. New Visions counselors periodically contact participants continuing at RCC to assess their progress, and counselors also contact non-continuers to encourage them to return to school. Continuing students also remain eligible for other special services the college provides to CalWORKS students, including counseling and help with tuition and school materials.

Further efforts to extend the program beyond the initial preparatory phase could be beneficial. Steps might include adding short extension segments to core courses after graduation (e.g., a one-unit guidance follow-on) and offering special workshops, seminars and social events to alumni. Initiating short introductory segments of occupational training courses within the core program, as well as more visits to and introductory lectures by faculty outside New Visions, also might create a stronger bridge between the core program and post-core training.

## **Overarching Lessons**

Perhaps the most important lesson from this demonstration is that it is feasible, if challenging, to develop and operate college engagement programs for low-income working parents. Successful implementation required extensive collaboration between the welfare agency and community college, particularly with regard to recruitment. New Visions was fortunate to have strong support from both the director of DPSS and president of RCC, who jointly conceived the program. Senior and mid-level administrative staff at both agencies also worked together closely from the beginning. The partnership was tested on several occasions as staff negotiated differences in organizational philosophies and perceived responsibilities.

Working relationships between front-line staff took somewhat longer to emerge, partly because it took some time before both agencies had hired their full staff complements. Senior staff bolstered inter-agency working relationships by organizing staff meetings, by encouraging visits and briefings, and by out-stationing a DPSS case manager at New Visions. The eventual outcome was exceptionally strong day-to-day coordination and mutual reinforcement in arranging needed services, responding to problems at work, and encouraging clients to continue in school.

A final lesson is that developing new college-attachment programs requires a flexible outlook and management capacity to make any needed adjustments over time. The New Visions core program was operational at start-up and needed relatively modest refinements. In contrast, strategies for recruitment and the post-core program phase of occupational mini-programs initially were not fully developed. Administrators at both DPSS and RCC devoted substantial energy to program recruitment, generating a series of innovative responses that ultimately met the recruitment targets, but it has taken longer to create a strong bridge to post-core occupational training.

## **Experiences of New Visions Participants**

Here we describe the experiences of volunteers assigned to the treatment group and allowed to participate in New Visions. Analyses are based on an early 2002 survey of 684 New Visions-eligible clients, on administrative data on educational and economic outcomes for 353 clients assigned to the treatment group by the end of 2000, and on in-depth interviews with 29 current students and graduates conducted during October 2000 and November 2001 site visits.

### **Volunteering for the Program**

The typical New Visions participant we met in our in-depth interviews with current students and graduates was a single mother who had dreamed of going to college but felt she had insufficient ability or financial means to do so. She was attracted to the program by its promise of a highly supportive environment offering an opportunity to go to school with people in similar circumstances. Some volunteers saw the program as a chance to go to college as a route to a better-paying job. Many had a strong sense that the program initially would focus on academic preparation and guidance, but others were not as clear on what the program would involve.

Among non-volunteers in the 2002 survey sample, three-quarters said that they had heard of New Visions, and half of these said that they were interested in the program. Main reasons this half cited for not applying included wanting to learn more about the program and not having time to apply.

Among the other half—who had heard about New Visions but said that they were not interested in the program—key reasons were preferring another program, not needing more education, and wanting to have more time to spend with their children. Respondents working full-time were substantially less likely to volunteer than those working part-time.

New Visions students given work study jobs as program recruiters also stressed that many welfare recipients felt they did not have time for school or preferred shorter programs directed towards specific jobs. Both recruiters and other students told us that use of student recruiters sent a strong message that the program was feasible and beneficial. Student recruiters felt that they had received

valuable experience from these jobs, resulting in improved public speaking skills and increased self-confidence.

## **The 24-Week Core Program**

Two-thirds of all recipients who volunteered and were randomly assigned to the treatment group actually enrolled in classes—a respectable rate for welfare-to-work programs. The result reflects volunteers’ enthusiasm for the program, efforts by counselors to stay in touch during the up to six weeks between volunteering and orientation, and outreach to volunteers who did not show up for orientation.

Volunteers who did show were more likely to be working fewer hours and have previous college experience than those who did not show. Analyses of baseline data for the full sample also reveal lower academic abilities and more apprehension about college readiness among those who showed up than among those who did not. This finding reinforces impressions from staff interviews that many people saw New Visions as a program for students who needed remedial education.

Just over half (55 percent) of volunteers who came to the program completed the 24-week core program. Although we could not find statistics for comparable programs, this result seems fairly good given the challenges of balancing work, parenting, and school. Interviews with students and staff suggest that New Visions fostered retention by creating a highly supportive environment and an engaging curriculum; also that counselors were able to help many students resolve problems that otherwise would have led to dropping out.

For participants who did drop out, no single factor emerged as most important. In-depth interviews with program staff and students, including several drop-outs, identified a wide range of causes. The consensus was that early dropouts tended to be reacting to a perceived mismatch with the program (often a preference for quicker entry into occupational training), whereas later dropouts tended to be triggered by external events such as a job change or family illness.

In interviews with a small sample of current students and graduates, nearly all respondents had very positive reactions to New Visions’ courses, staff, and general environment. About half felt that the courses were taught at the right level, and they found most of the instructors to be enthusiastic, warm, and effective.<sup>3</sup> Students especially liked instructors who combined high expectations with an engaging manner. A repeated observation was that the math and computer classes had helped to break down longstanding fears of these subjects (developing basic facility with computers was especially satisfying), and students also appreciated the Internet experience they gained through the reading class. Many credited English with giving them the skills to communicate more effectively with their employers, their customers, and their children’s teachers. Students cited the guidance course as equipping them to deal with problems and plan their lives, as well as helping them to improve their social skills and self-esteem.

Average tested math and language skills at graduation were at about the eighth-grade level, reflecting average gains since enrollment of two years for math and one year for language.<sup>4</sup> Forty-two (42)

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed in the next section, several graduates who went on to other RCC courses felt that the core New Visions courses needed to be more advanced to prepare students for regular college classes.

<sup>4</sup> New Visions administered the Test of Adult Basic Education at orientation and graduation.

percent of graduates tested at or above the 9<sup>th</sup>-grade level in math (compared with only 9 percent at intake), and 57 percent tested at or above this level in language (compared with 37 percent at intake). Notwithstanding their substantial progress, most students remained at least two grades below that of a well-prepared high school graduate.<sup>5</sup> It does not immediately follow that New Visions graduates were at an academic disadvantage relative to incoming high school graduates at RCC, however, as many of the latter also had poor academic skills.

When asked about skills useful at work, about half of the students we spoke to were able to identify specific ways they had used things they had learned at New Visions in their jobs and at home. Examples included improved ability to tally receipts and calculate percentages in retail sales jobs, and better oral and written communications with supervisors and customers. At home, several students reported that their own school work had helped to foster a better learning climate for their children, both from the role model they provided as students and from their improved ability to help with their children's homework.

Finally, student feedback indicates that New Visions succeeded in creating a strong learning community. Students liked especially the opportunity to go to school with other people in similar situations, the friendliness of the faculty and staff, and being on a college campus and having access to its resources.

### **Experiences after the Core Program**

Within a year of completing the core program, a fairly high fraction—59 percent—of New Visions students enrolled in at least one regular RCC course. The most popular areas of study were: computers, early childhood education, business (including office administration), social services (counseling and social sciences), and health care. Rigorous impact analyses reported in the next section suggest that a substantial fraction of these participants would not have enrolled at RCC absent New Visions.

Substantially fewer no-shows (11 percent) and dropouts (20 percent) enrolled in regular RCC courses. No-shows were somewhat more likely than dropouts to engage in another DPSS Phase 2 training activity (34 versus 25 percent), indicating that preferences for different types of programs may partly explain the no-shows.

The small sample of continuing graduates we interviewed said they found regular RCC courses much more difficult than the New Visions classes. Two students mentioned that more advanced preparation during the core program would have been helpful.

As in the core program, graduates continued to experience multiple sources of stress from external life crises that made schoolwork difficult. The list of issues they mentioned included: divorce and other changes in relationships; unplanned pregnancies; drug and alcohol problems; health issues for self, children, and extended family; family conflicts; mental health problems; housing problems; concerns about children's behavior and school performance; job loss; and increasing debt.

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Education guidelines classify TABE scores of grades 9-10 as "low adult secondary education" and scores of grades 11-12 as "high adult secondary education" (U.S. Department of Education 2001).

Notwithstanding substantial continuing counseling and service needs, most program participants—especially those who left before finishing the core program or who graduated but did not continue at RCC—reported that their relationships with New Visions counselors, faculty, and fellow students largely ended after they left the core program. Several acknowledged vigorous outreach by New Visions counselors to offer encouragement and services and to try to re-engage them in school. A number of students also mentioned that they continued to work with their GAIN Phase 2 case managers on their education and training plans.

Neither administrative data nor in-depth interviews revealed dramatic improvements in participants' employment situations in the period immediately following graduation. Thus, although students felt that they had acquired skills useful at work from the core New Visions classes, in the short run these benefits were not of a kind or magnitude commensurate with job advancement. The next section summarizes more rigorous evidence on the program's short-term economic impacts that is consistent with these findings.

## **Two-Year Impacts for Educational and Economic Outcomes**

The New Visions demonstration provides the first rigorous impact estimates for a program promoting job advancement through college among low-income adults. The experimental design randomly assigned a total of 1,076 volunteers in roughly equal numbers to treatment and control groups. The only systematic difference between the two groups was that the former could participate in New Visions, whereas the latter could participate only in other DPSS Phase 2 education and training activities.

Estimated impacts—calculated as the treatment-control difference in average outcomes after random assignment—capture the degree to which New Visions improved educational and economic outcomes for volunteers, compared with the outcomes they would have experienced had they participated only in other Phase 2 activities. In general, these alternative activities provided short-term training for specific jobs.

As of the cut-off point for this report, sufficient time had passed to observe 658 volunteers in the overall sample for roughly two years after random assignment.<sup>6</sup> Analyses of this sample draw on administrative data from DPSS, RCC, the state community college information system, and the state Unemployment Insurance wage reporting system.

### **Educational Impacts**

Substantially more treatment (83 percent) than control (51 percent) group members ever participated in at least one education or training activity during the first two years after random assignment (see first panel of Exhibit ES.1). The treatment-control difference—32 percentage points—is statistically significant. This impact arises mainly because most treatment group members participated in New Visions.

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<sup>6</sup> Actual follow-up varies from 1½ to 2½ years, depending on the data source.

Although lower than the treatment group, the control group's 51 percent E&T participation rate is impressive considering that, unlike prior demonstrations, these welfare recipients also were working at least 20 hours a week. The finding underscores the point that the New Visions experiment is comparing the effectiveness of a particular college-attachment model to a variety of alternative training options in the community. The latter mostly involve shorter-term job training offered by non-college providers, although they also include regular occupational courses at RCC without New Visions.

**Exhibit ES.1**  
**Summary of New Visions' Impacts on Educational and Economic Outcomes**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>(1) Treatment Group</b>	<b>(2) Control Group</b>	<b>(3) Impact (1)-(2)</b>	<b>(4) Pct. Impact ((3)/(2))*100</b>
Participated in GAIN Education and Training Activities (over 2 years):				
New Visions (%)	74.8	0.0	74.8***	NA
Vocational training (%)	38.3	49.2	-10.9***	-22.2
Basic education (%)	4.5	5.8	-1.3	-22.4
Any education/training (%)	82.9	51.1	31.9***	62.4
Avg. total quarters of E&T	3.0	1.7	1.3***	76.5
Enrolled at RCC (over 2½ years)				
Taking any course (%)	72.4	26.7	45.7***	171.2
Taking non-New Visions courses (%)	40.2	25.7	14.5***	56.4
Avg. quarters took non-NV courses	1.7	1.1	0.6***	54.5
Avg. degree-applicable credits earned	7.5	2.0	5.6***	280.0
Employment and Earnings (over 1½ years)				
Avg. quarters worked	4.9	4.9	-0.1	-2.0
Avg. total earnings (\$)	11,499	12,092	-594	-4.9
TANF Receipt and Payments (over 2 years)				
Avg. quarters of receipt	6.1	5.7	.4***	7.0
Avg. total payment amount (\$)	7,077	6,252	825***	13.2
Sample Size	336	322		

Notes:

Follow-up periods vary across outcomes due to differences in data available at the time of this analysis.

Results of subtracting treatment and control columns (1 and 2) may differ slightly from impact column (3) due to rounding.

\*\*\* Impact is statistically significant at the 99-percent confidence level; \*\*at the 90-percent confidence level; \* at the 90-percent confidence level.

New Visions participants were significantly more likely to enroll in regular (non-New Visions) occupational courses at RCC (41 percent) than their control group counterparts (27 percent) during the 2½ years after random assignment (second panel of Exhibit ES.1). The 15-point difference

represents a 56-percent proportionate increase in community college attendance.<sup>7</sup> This finding means that New Visions was moderately successful in one of its key objectives—to foster longer-term community college education through occupational mini-programs.

There also was a substantial impact on degree-applicable credits earned at RCC. Over the first two years following random assignment, the average treatment group member earned eight credits, compared with only two for the average control group member. The average treatment group member had ten credits overall (including several pre-New Visions credits). By comparison, the threshold for state approval of certificate programs is 18 credits.<sup>8</sup>

## **Economic Impacts**

Impact findings for employment and earnings do not bear out hopes that New Visions would promote job advancement while fostering college engagement in the short run. The program had no statistically significant effects on either the average number of quarters worked or total earnings during the first 1½ years after random assignment (see bottom panel of Exhibit ES.1).<sup>9</sup>

It is possible that these average measures (which are based on quarterly earnings from jobs covered by Unemployment Insurance) conceal more subtle effects. For example, if some participants secured raises and promotions, while others curtailed their work hours to leave more time for school, impacts might cancel in the aggregate. We have not yet collected the data needed to investigate this hypothesis.

New Visions was associated with increased welfare receipt and higher average welfare payments, possibly because treatment group members restricted other activities—such as full-time employment or marriage—that might interfere with school. A hint that this may be so is that negative impacts on earnings emerge around the beginning of the second follow-up year (not shown in exhibit). Although the earnings impacts are not statistically significant, their timing nonetheless corresponds to the period of largest increases in welfare use.

## **Conclusions**

The New Visions demonstration provides an unparalleled opportunity to examine the issues that arise in promoting college for welfare recipients in a work first environment. Findings suggest that a vigorous, varied and well-coordinated recruitment campaign can achieve good penetration of the eligible population. They suggest further that a highly supportive environment, customized courses,

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<sup>7</sup> Results for RCC enrollment can be interpreted as impacts on community college enrollment generally, as analysis of statewide records showed virtually no treatment or control group members enrolled in other colleges.

<sup>8</sup> Although this comparison helps to put the ten credits in perspective, it is not meant to imply that the average treatment group member had completed 10/18ths of a certificate program. Some or all of the credits earned may not be applicable to the same certificate program, and programs can be longer than 18 credits.

<sup>9</sup> The observable follow-up horizon is shorter for these than for other outcomes due to lags in the availability of wage records from the state Unemployment Insurance system.

dedicated instructors and intensive guidance can sustain a fairly high level of program participation and subsequent college enrollment. Programs should extend beyond the preparatory phase given evidence of continuing needs for intensive supports. Whereas the original New Visions design envisioned such an extension, the program as implemented provides extended counseling but otherwise ends with completion of the preparatory phase.

Impact findings indicate substantial early success with college engagement. The program increased the percentage ever taking regular RCC classes by 15 points and boosted degree-applicable credits earned by an average of six units. Among participants who showed (67 percent) and then graduated (55 percent) from the core program, impacts likely were much higher. As an illustration, assuming no significant impacts on no-shows and dropouts, the estimated impact on college engagement for New Visions graduates rises from 15 to 41 percentage points.<sup>10</sup> It seems unlikely that programs like New Visions could achieve graduation rates approaching 100 percent, but it is at least tantalizing to contemplate the potential effects of their doing so.

Although New Visions was fairly successful in meeting its short-term educational goals, it did not increase the average participant's earnings during the first two years after random assignment, and it led to somewhat longer welfare stays for program participants. These results are not necessarily signs of failure: the absence of earnings impacts suggests New Visions performed no worse than other programs in the community, while longer welfare stays may be inevitable, and even instrumental, for low-income single mothers who wish to continue in school.

Whether a more concerted effort to promote short-term job advancement within the core program would have made a difference is unclear—an alternative possibility is that low-income single mothers simply cannot simultaneously devote sufficient energy to work and school to achieve on both fronts in the short run. Models that encourage welfare recipients to combine part-time work and school must acknowledge the fact that part-time jobs generally offer fewer benefits and more limited prospects for advancement than full-time positions.

The key questions ahead for this evaluation are how many New Visions participants eventually complete RCC's occupational mini-programs and then move to solid, career-track jobs. Future evaluation reports will explore the dynamics of work and school and analyze program impacts over a longer time horizon.

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<sup>10</sup>  $41 = 15/.37$ , where .37 is the fraction of all treatment group members who graduated (.67\*.55). Because New Visions may have helped some dropouts to attend other RCC courses, the true impact for graduates probably is not this high.