

# How Local Workforce Development Boards Support the Needs of Parents

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Parents who want to improve their job prospects through education and training often run up against scheduling conflicts, child care challenges, and other major obstacles. But local workforce systems, which help people access training and jobs, can help parents overcome these barriers.

New opportunities to help parents may have opened up under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, which put greater emphasis on serving people with barriers to employment.

To better understand how parents are being served under WIOA and to identify potential barriers to providing effective services, we conducted a national survey of 457 local workforce development boards and received 155 responses.

## Here's what we found:

- **Prioritizing parents.** Forty-one percent of survey respondents identified parents as a target population in their local plans. Respondents also said they prioritized parents through partnerships, supportive services, American Job Center operations, and special initiatives.
- **Collecting data.** About half of respondents said they looked at data about parents and children on an ongoing basis. Analyzing data about parents is an important part of designing programs to meet their needs, so opportunities may exist to improve services for families through more data collection and analysis.

- **Partnering with public agencies and community organizations.**

Partnerships are critical for delivering services. The most common partners mentioned were Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies and organizations that provide child care referrals, financial assistance, and help with food and nutrition. Partnerships with health and mental health agencies and those designed to address the needs of school-age children were least common. Workforce development boards may want to leverage local United Ways and other nongovernmental partners to tap into additional resources and supports for parents and families.

- **Delivering services.** Job seekers can register for services and receive training and referrals through American Job Centers. We asked respondents whether they required centers to have family-friendly policies in place. Sixty-eight percent had requirements that reflected parents' needs, including online access to services (53 percent); daytime, evening, and weekend hours (20 percent); and child care needs assessments (38 percent). About 26 percent required their centers to help parents develop a child care plan. There is room for American Job Centers to do more to meet parents' needs.

About a third of workforce development boards operated special initiatives to serve parents, including programs for single parents and parents receiving TANF. Special initiatives offer the chance to explore and evaluate strategies for meeting families' needs. They can later be scaled up to reach more parents accessing the WIOA system.

We also asked respondents whether they provide supportive services such as transportation, child care, housing, and emergency financial assistance to help parents participate in WIOA activities. About 92 percent provided transportation services and 64 percent provided child care.

- Leveraging funding.** Respondents commonly used federal WIOA funding to pay for supportive services. Sixty-two percent of respondents who also used non-WIOA funding to pay for child care used TANF funds, 54 percent used Child Care Development Block Grant funds, and 42 percent used funds from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Employment and Training program.

Private foundations can provide a more flexible source of funding that is especially useful when piloting new strategies. We found that a little less than

half of respondents worked with private philanthropy to meet parents' needs. The ability to blend funding from multiple funding streams is critical in a system that does not have enough resources to serve everyone.

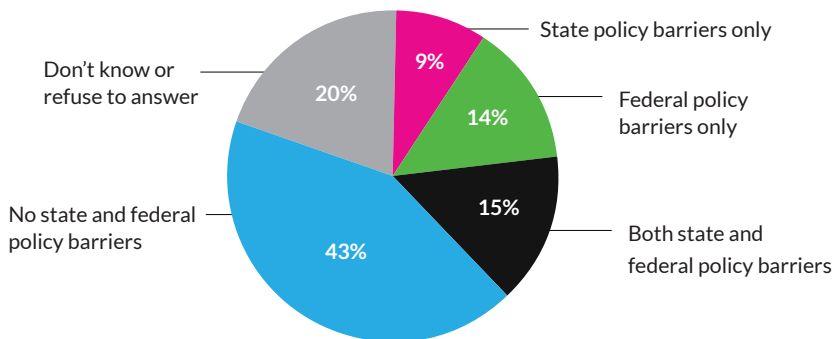
- Addressing policy barriers.** We asked respondents what federal or state policy barriers made it more difficult to serve parents. Many said that funding was the biggest limitation in terms of state policies, either because of scarce resources or because of limits on how funding can be used to pay for services. Others cited requirements placed on target populations, such as TANF work requirements and eligibility requirements for some programs.

These findings shed light on how local workforce development boards meet the needs of parents seeking to advance their careers through education and training.

For more information, see *Family-Centered Approaches to Workforce Program Services: Findings from a Survey of Workforce Development Boards* by Shayne Spaulding and Semhar Gebrekristos. This report and fact sheet were funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The research grew from two initiatives: Bridging the Gap, currently funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Family Centered Employment Initiative, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

FIGURE 1

### State and Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policies That Make It Challenging to Serve Parents or Families



Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 94 (61 missing responses). Five respondents answered “don't know or refuse to answer” to either the state or federal policy barrier question and also said there were no policy barriers of the other type. They are included in the “don't know or refuse to answer” category.