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Report to Wisconsin Counties on Implementation Surveys

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REPORT TO WISCONSIN COUNTIES ON THE SURVEY OF COUNTY OFFICIALS FOR THE WISCONSIN LEARNFARE EVALUATION

*prepared by the Employment and Training Institute
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
February, 1991*

In August, 1990 as part of its evaluation of the Wisconsin Learnfare experiment for the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Employment and Training Institute surveyed the directors of the seventy-two county departments of social services regarding the implementation of Learnfare in their area. All counties completed the survey. As promised, this report summarizes the survey responses. The survey instrument with response totals is attached.

Training for County Staff

The counties reported that nearly all had staff who attended training sessions on the implementation of the Learnfare policy and about half in turn trained other local county staff. The emphasis for training was upon income maintenance line staff (trained in 67 of the counties) and income maintenance staff supervisors (trained in 58 counties). Six counties reported that their social work staff received in-service training on the implementation of Learnfare.

Changes in Workload

Sixty counties reported increased workloads for income maintenance workers as a result of Learnfare, as compared to 17 counties reporting increased referrals to county social services to AFDC families with teenagers. (The counties received increased state funding for income maintenance workers to implement the Learnfare policy but not for social service staff.) A number of counties identified the income maintenance workers as partially or wholly responsible for providing services and counseling to AFDC families sanctioned for teens' poor attendance or failure to enroll in school. Eighteen counties said income maintenance workers were responsible at least in part for providing services and counseling to families of teens sanctioned as dropouts, and 21 counties saw income maintenance workers responsible for providing services and counseling to families of teens sanctioned for poor school attendance.

Informing Clients of the Learnfare Policy

When Learnfare was first instituted for teen parents and 13-14 year old teen dependents in Spring of 1988, the Department of Health and Social Services used regional staff to contact the families of teens recorded as dropouts to explain the Learnfare policy to them. Most of the counties (66) also explained the policy in person to clients during the clients' first six-month review after Learnfare was initiated, and 57 counties reported continuing to explain the Learnfare policy at subsequent six-month reviews. Three counties also met with teen dropouts to explain the policy.

Social Services to Sanctioned Families

Practices vary by county, with most counties reporting that they do not refer Learnfare teens to county social work staff unless the family requests help. When referrals are made to social work staff by income maintenance workers, referrals are likely to be for families sanctioned under Learnfare (26 counties reported making such referrals) or to assist families of teens who have dropped out of school (25 counties reported such referrals). At the time of the survey (before the state DHSS contracted for attendance verification and case management services under the June 4, 1990 federal waiver agreement), about half of the counties responded that county social workers or the school district and county social workers were responsible for providing services or counseling to sanctioned AFDC families in their county. Sixteen counties indicated that "no one" was responsible for providing such services. About a third of the counties reported that they thought the Learnfare policy had contributed to increased parental involvement in the AFDC teens' schooling. Thirteen counties thought Learnfare contributed to increased family tension but none thought it contributed to increased child abuse or neglect.

Cooperation with School Districts

Nearly forty percent of the county officials reported that cooperation had improved between school and county social service staff. Forty-two of the 72 counties reported meeting with local school districts to discuss the implementation of Learnfare. (Several others commented that they have communicated by letter or phone.) As reported by school officials these meetings appeared to focus primarily on methods of collecting student attendance data for the purposes of sanctioning teens not enrolled or attending school regularly. A smaller number of counties reported discussing "Children at Risk Programs" available for AFDC teens with poor attendance patterns or for returning dropouts and the availability of state funds for day care and transportation to day care.

Cooperation with VTAE Districts

Only nineteen counties reported meeting with their local VTAE (Vocational, Technical and Adult Education) district to discuss implementation of Learnfare. Most of these counties discussed GED programs available for high school dropouts and methods for reporting VTAE school attendance of AFDC teens. During these meetings a smaller number (9 counties) reported discussing possible programming for teen mothers.

COUNTY SURVEY FOR THE WISCONSIN LEARNFARE EVALUATION

1. Were any of your staff involved in in-service training regarding the Learnfare policy?

70 yes 1 no _____ don't know

If yes, please indicate which staff received training. (Check all that apply.)

58 income maintenance worker supervisors
67 income maintenance workers
6 county social workers
6 county administrators
5 other (Identify) _____

If yes, who provided the training? (Check all that apply.)

67 Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services
31 county staff
3 CESA (Cooperative Educational Service Agency)
2 other (Identify) _____

2. In addition to state materials distributed to AFDC clients, how did you inform families in your county on AFDC about the Learnfare policy when it was first implemented? (Check all that apply.)

1 sent a letter or brochure to each casehead
66 explained the policy in person during the first client six-month review after Learnfare implementation
57 explained the policy to the client at every six-month review
1 met with each casehead with teen dependents to explain the policy
3 met with each teenage dropout to explain the policy
0 met with each teenager (non-casehead) to explain the policy
9 other (Please describe) _____

3. How do you explain the Learnfare policy to families applying for AFDC? (Check all that apply.)

70 explain the policy orally during the application process.
57 provide a written statement or brochure to the family during the application process.
1 send a letter or brochure to the casehead if the family is determined eligible for aid.
2 other (Please explain) _____

4. Did your staff meet with local school districts to discuss the implementation of Learnfare?

42 yes 18 no 5 don't know

If yes, which of the following issues were discussed? (Check all that apply.)

26 methods of notifying AFDC clients about the Learnfare requirements
22 policies for waiving school attendance for older AFDC teens
31 clarification of school definitions of unexcused absences
39 methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens
28 "Children At-Risk Programs" for students with poor attendance or returning dropouts
7 use of school social workers to assist AFDC teens
15 use of county social workers to assist AFDC teens
28 availability of state funds for day care and transportation to day care
12 creation of special school programs for teen mothers
9 other (Please describe) _____

If yes, please list the school districts with whom you met.

5. Did your staff meet with your local VTAE (Vocational, Technical and Adult Education) district to discuss the implementation of Learnfare?

19 yes 46 no 4 don't know

If yes, what issues were discussed? (Check all that apply.)

- 9 special programming for teen parents
17 methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens.
7 policies for waiving high school attendance for older teens.
18 GED programs available for high school dropouts.
15 high school completion programs available for high school dropouts.
2 other (Please explain) _____

If yes, name of VTAE district _____

VTAE staff person contacted: _____

6. Do you assist teen parents under the Learnfare requirement to find day care for their children?

64 yes 6 no _____ don't know

7. Which of the following services does your staff provide, if any, to AFDC teens who have dropped out of school and are subject to sanction under Learnfare? (Please check any services you provide and the frequency it is provided to dropouts.)

SERVICE PROVIDED	SERVICE IS PROVIDED TO:			
	All Dropouts	Most (more than 1/2) Dropouts	Some (less than 1/2) Dropouts	A few (1 - 3) Dropouts
individual counseling	<u>19</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>
family counseling	<u>17</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>
arrange for an appropriate school placement	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>
arrange for enrollment in a VTAE school	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>
alcohol and drug counseling or referral	<u>12</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>
counseling for child abuse or neglect	<u>16</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>
assistance finding day care	<u>19</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
payments for day care or transportation to day care	<u>18</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>
other (please describe) _____				
		<u>2</u>		<u>1</u>

Comments:

Another six counties indicated that they provide all of these services to any youth who need them.

8. Under what circumstances do your income maintenance workers refer AFDC families to county social work staff as part of the Learnfare implementation? (Check any that apply.)

- 26 when families are sanctioned under the Learnfare policy
5 at AFDC clients' six-month review to determine if "good cause" exemptions to school attendance should be applied for their teens
44 when AFDC families request help in meeting the Learnfare school attendance requirements
10 to assist families of teens who are monitored monthly for school attendance
25 to assist families of teens who have dropped out of school
17 other (Please explain) _____

Comments:

9. What changes, if any, have you observed in staff work which you would attribute to the Learnfare policy? (Check any that apply)

17 increased referrals for county social services to AFDC families with teenagers
0 decreased referrals for county social services to AFDC families with teenagers
60 increased workload for income maintenance workers
0 decreased workloads for income maintenance workers
27 improved cooperation between school and county social service staff
1 less cooperation between school and county social service staff
15 increased contact with AFDC families by school social workers and counselors
0 decreased contact with AFDC families by school social workers and counselors
0 no changes observed
1 don't know

Comments:

10. In your county who is responsible for providing services or counseling to AFDC families with youth who are sanctioned under Learnfare for poor school attendance? (Check any that apply)

16 no one
28 the public school system
21 the family's income maintenance worker
33 a county social worker
5 community social service agencies
10 other (Please explain) _____

2 don't know

Comments:

11. In your county who is responsible for providing services or counseling to AFDC families with teens who have dropped out of school? (Check any that apply)

16 no one
26 the public school system
18 the family's income maintenance worker
35 a county social worker
5 community social service agencies
13 other (Please explain) _____

1 don't know

12. How do you determine which teens may qualify for exemption from school attendance under Learnfare because of their inability to graduate by age twenty? (Check any that apply)

46 income maintenance workers instruct older teens who are behind in school or dropouts to ask their high school whether they qualify for a waiver.
19 AFDC families are provided a list of possible exemptions and expected to inform their income maintenance worker if any apply.
4 information regarding waivers from high school attendance is left entirely to the teens and the public schools.
26 other (Please explain) _____

2 don't know

13. What changes have you or your staff observed, if any, within AFDC families that you would attribute to the Learnfare policy? (Check any that apply)

13 Increased family tension

2 decreased family tension

0 Increased child abuse or neglect

1 decreased child abuse or neglect

28 Increased parental involvement in the teen's schooling

0 decreased parental involvement in the teen's schooling

9 other (Please identify) _____

27 no observed change

5 don't know

Comments:

We welcome your comments regarding the strengths and limitations of the Learnfare policy:

Name of Person Completing Survey: _____

Title: _____

County: _____ Phone: () - _____

Please return this survey to: Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,
P. O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53203. Phone (414) 229-4934.