

DC Family Policy Seminar

February 15, 1996

Seminar Highlights

Transitioning from Welfare to Work in the District: A Family-Centered Perspective

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Moderator

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The topic of transition from welfare to work is hardly a new one. As the mood on Capitol Hill, in the democratic White House, and of the electorate shifts towards pushing us to ever more restrictive income redistribution policy, the task of welfare to work program administrators takes on a new sense of urgency.

Moving AFDC recipients off of welfare and into the workforce is not a simple solution to trimming welfare expenditures. Merely finding employment in the labor market is not the same as staying employed and becoming self-sufficient. The problems people face when transitioning into the work force from welfare dependency are many: child care, transportation, logistics of working, and poverty all add to the difficulty of making a smooth transition. These personal problems, however, become much more difficult when combined with changes in the macro economy and in the labor market.

A large part of the dramatic change in the labor market is due to global competition and a shift towards more technical skills. As a result, we have a large number of workers with obsolete skills and there is strong competition for scarce jobs. These challenges in labor market make the transition from welfare to work complex while at the same time resources are shifting, and the urgency has increased due to the political mood. Each of the panel members here today have labored long and hard on these issues and will shed light on current research, what we know, and how we can improve the chance of successful transitions into the workforce for our AFDC population.

Demetra Nightingale
Principal Research Associate
Urban Institute

Welfare programs are just a small piece of what we need to talk about. Policymakers must be realistic and modest about what overall welfare policy changes can be accomplished. More importantly, we need to have strategies that cut across welfare, labor market, economic development, and schools if we are serious about moving people into jobs over the long-term.

Main Points:

- Challenges in moving AFDC recipients to work are not new. Programs have been operating in the District and the rest of the country for over 30 years. What is new are the contextual factors that influence how the programs can operate:
 - 1) Policy: Enforcing obligation to work and having "work" as the rhetorical centerpiece of welfare reform.
 - 2) Behavioral changes: There is a growing consensus on the importance of behavioral changes. Republican initiatives focus on morality and moral behavior attributes that are supposed to take on public policy significance.
 - 3) Time limits: Programs have been through many political and legislative changes over the years. Welfare systems at the community level have not had to deal with time limits before. The fact that welfare may this year, next year, or sometime in the future, no longer be a lifelong entitlement poses new challenges to programs.
 - 4) Political: The call for reform is a politically "hot" issue. Almost every local or national elected official has a welfare reform platform.

- What are the employment and training activities:
 - 1) Direct Employment: Job clubs, self-directed job search, job development and job placement programs. Program staff need to: help participants identify job openings; work with employers to identify openings; develop relationships with certain firms and industries to funnel some of their participants; and can gain knowledge of the job market. The job development function is one that we really need to improve, not only in the welfare system, but in the job training system as well.
 - 2) Job Training: Classroom occupational instruction via community colleges or institutions, and on-the-job training with employers in the public or private sector.
 - 3) Education: Remedial, post secondary degree programs and GED.
 - 4) Subsidized Employment: In the past, programs such as CETA provided government subsidies for public sector jobs that paid workers at

or above the minimum wage. Today similar programs also include work experience, and participants may or may not get paid. Participants may just receive a stipend or may be involved in workfare where they have to work off a portion of their AFDC payment.

5) Vocational/Skills Training: We know that remedial education and skills training, when offered separately, are marginally successful at improving job readiness and skills. Combined together, there is some evidence that these programs are more effective.

6) Combination: The most effective programs include a mix of several of the above strategies.

- What do we know about the success of these programs?

1) Net individual impact: Estimates on the marginal effectiveness of these interventions compared to what would have happened without the interventions are promising. Programs with direct employment strategies can increase employment and earnings and in some cases reduce welfare costs. Intensive programs have a greater impact and larger payoff than less intensive programs. The most important point is that even interventions with the greatest measured impact on employment and earnings (which is very small, sometimes just five percent improvement in employment and maybe \$1,000 improvement in annual earnings), very rarely move people off of welfare for the long-term. Even the best strategies have a minor impact.

2) Program outcomes: We need to examine the volume of activities and the overall aggregate outcome to measure the bottom line of costs versus outcomes of these programs. We can do this by looking at: the number of workers placed into jobs; the amount and duration of employment; and the quality of jobs in terms of wages.

- What we see today is a surplus of low-skilled workers looking for work. Right now welfare to work policies have "tunnel vision"—if we get people to work they will leave welfare. We know that is no longer the case. Getting a job is no guarantee to keeping a job or becoming self-sufficient. We need to improve skills if people are to have long-term employability and economic mobility. This will require a fundamental shift in policy thinking and creative policy changes that address the need for training and providing livable wages.

- State, local and national policymakers need to decide what they are going to do beyond enforcing time limits and work requirements. What that means is a different perspective of what: a) welfare is; b) what income benefits are; and c) what obligations fit into that overall system.

- What can we do? Recommendations for policy:
 - 1) We know from studies and demonstrations that we can trim the welfare rolls a little bit by increasing requirements of welfare recipients to do "something". Whether it's to register for workshops, volunteer or actually work, it almost doesn't matter. Increasing enforcement of requirements does motivate some people to leave welfare.
 - 2) We can have more direct labor market activities to help people with placement in the job market.
 - 3) We need to train social service staff to become coaches to help welfare recipients in their transition from welfare to work.
 - 4) Compensate for deficiencies in the labor market and recognize that the skills gap exists. The skills gap does not only exist for those that don't have college degrees. There is a skill gap among people at all education levels. We are not necessarily teaching people the skills needed in the labor market, and we can not arbitrarily push people into the low-wage or dead-end labor market without proper training.
 - 5) Make a commitment to providing a living wage;
 - 6) Give more serious attention to subsidized jobs if we expect people to work;
 - 7) Make policies that simultaneously increase demand for labor overall and have a link between human resource services programs and economic development. This might include giving incentives to firms to increase their payrolls via tax credits.
 - 8) Make a commitment to lifelong learning: It is no longer enough in this society to just graduate from high school, get a GED, or go to college. The labor market is changing rapidly due to changes on the local, national and international arena and we need to change our philosophy and keep a commitment to education and skills training over a lifetime for everyone.

**Cynthia Marano
Executive Director
Wider Opportunities for Women**

Work alone will not create long-term self-sufficiency.

Program/Research:

- Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) has been working on the transition from welfare to work for women in the US for 30 years and specifically in the District for 20 years.
- Along with our network of women's educational training programs across the country, we've been looking at program strategies in a variety of different economies (rural/urban) across a number of states.
- WOW has been researching what strategies community-based practitioners can use to increase the outcomes of programs for women who are on welfare and their children. We've also been investigating the impact of public sector policies on community organizations. Our demonstration projects have dealt with: non-traditional employment; education; functional context literacy programs; and access to college for women on welfare, the impact of making an investment in college, and the barriers women face.
- We have two special projects:
 - 1) Strategies for Self-Sufficiency: This is a national project in cooperation with the MS. Foundation for Women, the National Economic Development and Law Center, and the Corporation for Enterprise Development. Together, we are looking at what we've learned about employment training, economic development, education, and enterprise development strategies. We will then package this knowledge for activists all over the country to take what we've learned and make it available for state implementation in the block grant process.
 - 2) Women's College Assistance Project: A support group for women on AFDC enrolled in college or trying to go to college. We're trying to look closely, in a longitudinal way, at 10 women (we'll add 10 more next year) to see what happens to them as they apply to enter college, attend, and leave college for jobs. We'll try to assess the costs and payoffs of attending college to them, their children, and the District.
- What have we learned so far? What have been the results of the work of practitioners across the country who work primarily with women?
 - 1) The goal of any successful effort has to be longer term economic independence for families. It's very clear that the notion of a simple attachment to "work" as the "answer" is counter to our experience. Low-wage jobs do not make clients self-sufficient and many return to welfare

since many are unable to support themselves. This "ideological" debate about work has no effect on family welfare in the long term.

2) It is very important to look at all members of the family when working on strategies for welfare reform. We need too look at the children and other significant family members and assess their needs, assets, and barriers to independence.

3) Two paths make sense from our research:

- Provide education and training for employment or enterprise development that can lead to self-sufficiency. In this, career counseling and skills training/functional context literacy are both critical.

- Provide transitional supports for those moving from welfare to work. Supports such as income disregards, transitional medical assistance, child care, and asset development strategies to support mothers on AFDC as they make the transition.

4) We need to understand the labor market. The AFDC population in the District is mixed. Some have high skills, some have low skills. Identify and invest in those that need the skills to become self-sufficient. Then target skills training for the job for these clients. Help others find good jobs through placement.

- To prepare AFDC recipients for self-sufficiency, policy must be set to bring these lessons into practical recommendations. The District of Columbia needs to adopt a Self-Sufficiency Standard. We need to look at how much it costs to support different kinds of families. The current poverty standard does not take into account the cost of child care given the different kinds of families that exist. WOW has developed a Self-Sufficiency Standard for the District that takes into account the different kinds of families (e.g. one parent or two, kids in day care versus children at school, etc.). The standard describes wage levels that are needed to meet basic family needs. (for a copy of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, please contact WOW at (202) 638-3143).

- What can we do for DC?

- 1) Develop a "public will" that the goal of welfare reform should be family economic independence;

- 2) Understand that movement into the job market is not an answer in and of itself;

- 3) Target the jobs where economic independence can be achieved. Focus education and training investments in these fields and provide career counseling for AFDC recipients to learn more about them;

- 4) Invest in quality skills development for jobs, enterprise development, literacy, and college;

- 5) Start with a family development plan that recognizes needs of the whole family;

- 6) Retrain staff working with welfare recipients so they can provide job training, job development, and coaching;

7) Understand the importance of transitional and supportive services;

8) Target strategies to take into account the different profiles of recipients and their families. Base decisions on the level of job readiness of each participant;

9) Don't give up! We must not restrict the occupational choices and opportunities for independence for the District's families in poverty. We must work together to see that the funds we receive are allocated to those who need it for services will have long-term benefit.

Robert Lerman
Director of the Human Resource Policy Center
Urban Institute

Up to this point we have had hardly any mention of "fathers" in the debate on welfare to work. There is a seeming lack of consciousness on the role of fathers in this issue. I believe this is a mistake since it largely ignores the role of fathers and might add to the marginalization of low income and minority men.

Main Points:

- I'm excited to hear today about the Self-Sufficiency Standard WOW developed, but I'd like to add a point about child support. For instance, consider a single, low-income individual working 30 hours a week for \$6/hour and earns approximately \$9,000 a year. If we add in the earned income tax credit and child support payments (a total of approximately \$3,000-\$4,000/year) this individual could move out of poverty.
- Child support, EITC, Food Stamps, Medicaid, child care subsidies are all important elements of any income sustenance programs. Child support in particular is an area we should look more at since it is not lost once the care giver goes to work.
- Where welfare to work programs may run into problems is in the changing structure of families. There is a rise of single parent families. Research shows that nearly all of the rise in child poverty can be attributed to the shift in where children live, i.e. in one-parent, never-married, families.
- Every year, about 1.2 million children are born outside of marriage nationwide. Yet a legal father is determined only for about 35% of these children. As a result, America adds over 700,000 children each year to the ranks of those with no legal father.
- In DC, about 7,200 births, or two of every three total births, were to unmarried parents. Since each year only about 2,400 paternity's are established, there are an additional 4, 500 children who have no legal father. As of 1994, paternity had not been established for at least 65,000 children in the District. This number represents a large share (about 40%) of the Districts children.
- The Congress and the President have begun to focus on the problem of family breakdown to a much greater extent and how it makes welfare reform much more difficult. It's hard enough to raise a family with two parents. Any kind of strategy involving welfare to work is up against many odds.
- A growing body of research shows that holding income constant, children growing up in one parent families, tend to do worse over time. Therefore, we

must be worried about these trends and how to involve both parents in raising children.

- Before we talk about how to involve both parents in raising their children, let's focus on how to prevent childrearing among unmarried young people:

1) We need a school-to-work strategy that begins in the High School so that young people are involved in gaining valuable work experience and at the same time interact with adults in a constructive setting. In this manner they can do something concrete and can see that they have a realistic chance to earn a middle-class income. Young men and women may thus become more likely to delay having children and ultimately may become responsible husbands, wives, fathers and mothers.

2) We need to stop discouraging marriage. A good starting point is for the Federal government to change tax and benefit programs so that marriage does not make people economically worse off, as they often do now. One important and growing benefit that creates disincentive to marry is the Earned Income Tax Credit. The EITC marriage penalties are so large that they can potentially cause low income parents who marry to lose as much as \$5,000 a year. As in the rest of the personal tax system, the EITC should use different tax schedules for married parents and heads of households to eliminate the marriage disincentive facing low-income parents.

3) On the local level, and in general, we need to change the mind-set of policy makers. Many of our policies seem to automatically dismiss the idea that fathers are going to be involved in raising their children. Consider the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC). Why is it not Parents, Infants, and Children?

4) Provisions in child support laws don't take into account partial custody. The welfare system itself builds in big disincentives to workout custody support payments within the system. For instance, under the system in DC, most families only get \$50 a month if the non-custodial parent pays through the regular child support system. This provides an incentive for fathers to "pay under the table" to increase the amount that goes to the family. These fathers that pay this way ultimately get a bad report from the authorities since it does not look like they are supporting their family.

- So what can we do? One potential approach for dealing with non-custodial parents is for social agencies to develop joint contracts with both parents. The contract needs to be established right at the hospital when the children are born and when fathers are most likely to feel proud of their fatherhood. Instead of working almost exclusively with the mother, a public representative would help both parents determine how best to take full advantage of the potential time, child care, and income contributions of each parent.

- Today, fathers often complain that while they pay child support, they frequently lose their visitation time at the whim of the custodial mothers. And, unlike mothers, who can obtain government legal assistance to establish paternity and awards and collect payments, fathers have no such recourse to legal help to ensure their visitation rights. If fathers were given access to legal support to ensure visitation rights, they would no longer see themselves quite as unfairly treated as they are today.
- There are promising programs that recognize the importance of engaging fathers. One program in particular, run by Charles Ballard in Cleveland, recognizes the importance of having fathers re-engaged when their child is young. At that point, the father enjoys holding the child and takes considerable pride in his fatherhood. Once Mr. Ballard's program helps young men recognize their paternal responsibility and their satisfaction in raising their child, the young male participants often move forward to take jobs and take an active role in fathering. He's having tremendous success in working with young men and getting them involved.
- One demonstration project, partially funded by the federal government, is moving somewhat in this direction and is helping both parents when the child is born as opposed to waiting until it's too late and payments have built up.
- This approach is still in its infancy. I was at a meeting last week with four state welfare commissioners and only one of them had acted to re-engage fathers in the process of supporting and raising their children. The commissioners of the other states, however, recognized the importance of doing something to involve fathers and will look into building programs on that model.
- Certainly, not all non-custodial fathers or mothers will choose to participate in childrearing. Many will never show up at the meetings nor cooperate in any way. However, a sustained effort at generating (and revising) contracts with parents has the potential to engage many fathers who would otherwise be marginalized by the new welfare reforms.
- It is well past time for welfare policy to take the potential contributions of non-custodial fathers and mothers seriously. Their financial contributions alone will not substitute for their active involvement in childrearing. But unless we emphasize the broader responsibilities of parenthood, we may lose their financial support as well.

Shari L. Curtis
Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
Marshall Heights Community Development Corporation

It's time to start looking at what peripheral systems need to be reformed in order for "welfare to work" to succeed. We need to start thinking of what happens when people go off welfare and what we need to do about the issue of poverty in general. If we take the welfare check away, the person will still be poor. Have we really changed anything?

Main Points:

- I've had the pleasure of working in this environment of moving people from welfare to work for many years. I first entered the District government before the Family Support Act (FSA) and was then in charge of implementing the FSA, so I've had the opportunity to grow the program over the years and try out new programs that we believed might work. We have had numerous successes.
- We determined over the years, that we can't expect to "play school" and get a good employee. All we get in that instance is a "good student". We therefore built many models with work as the context of training.
- One important policy issue that needs to be included in the development of any program moving people from welfare to work is to make sure that any training, educational development, or skill building integrates educational development with work. The environment where this training takes place needs to look and feel like a work. This aspect is especially critical. This is where we impact job retention in terms of outcomes.
- Also, systems need to be reformed. The current adult education system is completely outdated. The value of the GED certificate is becoming less and less, as employers are seeking individuals that possess more than what was known as entry level skills. One of the fundamental problems with welfare to work models that are successful is the systems' inability to implement what works on a wider scale. Often, most of the essential information on programs successes, remains in research offices and in evaluation documents and rarely move into practice
- In terms of policy, the system is not set up right to get the information out to the people that need it the most. I believe that many of the people on welfare have been victimized by the system—every door that they knock on doesn't deliver the quality of services that they need.
- More thinking needs to go into implementing the programs that will be forced on AFDC recipients as they are made to go from welfare to work. Program staff are not currently trained in how to effectively counsel their clients.

- In an economy where there are no jobs, the possibility of moving people from welfare to work becomes even more difficult. We must not discount the numbers of families on welfare where the parent is unable to work due to illness, substance abuse problems, or mental health issues. A system to support such individuals and their children until they can go to work is not in place. Should such individuals become unable to work, it is our responsibility to ensure that their children will be able to participate in the world and work and "break the cycle".

- There is a "disconnect" between the policy goal of putting people to work, and how to support such a system. For instance, has anybody thought about these practical questions?

- 1) If there are 2,000 people in work programs, who supervises the recipient while he/she is in job training? The employer? The Government?

- 2) If more support services are needed, who is going to provide them? Who will provide job coaching during the work hours?

- The government hasn't taken on the responsibility to provide real information to the population that will be directly affected by the loss of benefits. Persons will face reductions in benefits and will be placed into unpaid work situations without really understanding what welfare reform means. The media has targeted the policy makers and elected officials and focused on the debate among persons who have never experienced being on welfare.

- Welfare reform will not impact poverty, all it will do is make the poor even poorer as a result of this legislation. In the long run, many of our large cities will end up looking like some of the world's most depressed third world cities.

- Where will all of these people go? They'll turn to the community, and to community development organizations like the one I work for.

- Community organizations must be ready for employment training and counseling services that they will be expected to provide. All organizations will need training and supports to provide all these services.

- Is it realistic to think that all welfare workers will become job counselors with caseloads over 400? The Family Support Act asked welfare workers to become social workers. Now we are asking these same people to be job counselors? Is there money to help train and professionally develop staff so that they are able to serve their clientele appropriately?

- Who's going to fund this development? It is very expensive to provide the training across all the states.

- Rather than the current focus on legislating behavior, more emphasis needs to be placed on how to fix/enhance some of the systems that have been broken for so long. Services are not available for today's client. We need to study and research why people turn to welfare. Most of us that serve the welfare population believe that welfare is usually the last option on the list for most people. If we could just do something about changing the list of options for people, we may not have such a huge welfare problem, in the future, as there is today.

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Discussion and Community Announcements

The DC Family Policy Seminar graciously acknowledges the generous space and facilities offered by the Academy for Educational Development, and the help in obtaining the space provided by the Center for Youth Development.

COMMENTS:

Child support contribution and WOW's self-sufficiency act:

The average child support payment is about \$3,000 per family. Added to the formula of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, this would decrease the wages necessary for supporting one child by about \$1 an hour; and by about \$1.50-\$2.00 an hour for two children or more.

QUESTIONS:

Involving Fathers:

Q: What lessons have we learned from pilot projects that are trying to involve fathers more in their children's lives?

A: Some preliminary reports of programs that use mediation, peer support, and employment and training have found: 1) the system is unfair to fathers (with respect to legal aid etc.); 2) peer support is very helpful; and 3) mediation is very difficult to achieve. Also, like employment training programs, positive and measurable outcomes are small. The critical component is not whether this particular program worked or didn't work, but rather that these programs have opened up the dialogue to involve fathers more. For example, in previous discussions involving child care for children whose mothers enter the work force, no mention has been made of using the father as the care giver. Now we are starting to talk about fathers playing a more critical role—Bob Lerman.

A: Our program works with both attached and estranged dads. We have found that it *does* work to bring the fathers in. Fathers have a positive impact on the economic situation through child care and other supportive contributions. Policies need to be more forward thinking to involve the fathers early on rather than later. —Mark Robinson, New Community Family Place

How can we avail ourselves of information?

Q: How can we avail ourselves of information on what programs work and don't work? Some of the programs that we develop on our own don't always mesh with what others are doing.

A: First, there is a group of people interested in developing (especially for estranged fathers) an institution to serve as an intermediary between fathers and the child support system. Currently, there is no personal interaction between fathers, mothers and the child support system—it is all done via papers and

computers. By providing a buffer between the non-custodial father and institutions we may be able to smooth out the process. Second, we currently don't have a place where workers and families can go for help in the labor market on a day-to-day basis. A model we may look at are the old farm bureaus in rural areas, or settlement houses and union halls in the urban areas. At the same time we're revamping welfare, we need to look at revamping the human resource component. This would be a "worker support center" to provide individuals access to resumes, job listings, computers, referrals for child care and health care, and to generally help them make the transition from welfare to work.—Demetra Nightingale

A: I would argue that there are some places that fit this description, for instance, The Family Place or Marshall Heights Community Development Corporation. There are just not enough of them. The problem is that we don't finance these kinds of "holistic" services. We only finance skills training, micro-enterprises training program and the like. Also, our social service infrastructure is not trained to deal with many of these issues. We basically don't have all of the supports to help families work out the issues they are facing to do a good job of parenting and working. The question really is: How can we develop and support these programs well enough and long enough to learn from them?—Cindy Marano

How do we package things that work?

Q: Given that we know the following: a) half of all women on welfare don't have a high school diploma; b) that it's important for women to go beyond that to get employment in a job that will make ends meet; c) some job training programs are not tremendously successful; and, d) policy makers feel that the best training for jobs is to work since they no longer want to fund unsuccessful job training. Are there things that we can learn from taking the best out of the programs that do work and combine them into a package? Or is that not possible?

A: We are afraid to replicate. We find something that works, and spend resources on studying and disseminating the information on why it works. We don't always look at the bigger picture and implement the lessons learned. Also, another problem is the high school diploma and the way we deliver the message that it is the "end all" to get a good job. Is that the message we should be sending? There are many college graduates that aren't working or making a living wage either. Our traditional education and the way we have been teaching is about what we "think" we need. A high school diploma or a GED doesn't say what you can DO in the workplace. We need to structure the educational system so as to better prepare people for jobs in the workplace—Sheri Curtis.

A: We know that there are a lot of programs that work. We know that intensive training coupled with education seems to be the right direction for long-term self-sufficiency. We know that we need to provide long-term support even after

the job begins—to help with child care and other issues. But what does that mean for public policy in general? What kind of public policy should we have? We need *all* of these programs and need to have *more* of them. How do we then put all of that knowledge into a public policy statement that says: "we are going to help and support *everyone* that is currently on welfare, and everyone that is on the borderline". There are currently 5 million people in the US that are on welfare, and close to 2 million that are on the borderline. We need to revamp the current welfare system since it doesn't provide the support people need to work.—Demetra Nightingale.

A: First, we have to stop funding things that don't work. We spend an enormous amount of money nationally training for jobs that don't pay a living wage. Second, we currently have a hard time deciding in our communities where the jobs are and what the requirements of these jobs are. We need an infrastructure to get information to people so that they are better able to make decisions. This will be expensive. We have to invest in retraining and retooling our public sector systems so that caseworkers have relevant and up to date information to assist low income clients make a transition to good jobs.—Cindy Marano

A: First, evidence from the Job Training Partnership Acts (JTPA) has been positive. Second, I personally think that training should not only be tied into welfare. This sends a signal that to get training, we have to go on welfare. Training should be broadened to low-income individuals as well as welfare recipients. Third, with respect to high schools and work based training, we have seen a movement to a skills standard and curriculum that shows what you learn in school and what you learn in the worksite. Wisconsin has developed some good curricula and programs to address this issue.—Bob Lerman

A: At WOW we do not support the creation of special training for women on welfare, however, nationally and historically we have an abysmal record for creating programs for everyone of which welfare recipients rarely gain access to services. In the District, this has happened with the JTPA. We are supposed to have a requirement that welfare recipients get served as a percent of the population. Welfare recipients don't look like good placement prospects and thus don't get served.—Cindy Marano

QUESTION:

Entrepreneurial training for welfare recipients?

Q: What kinds of programs are available that encourage people to become entrepreneurs?

A: There are number of demonstration projects that are operating in some communities. There is some funding from federal demonstration projects working with the Departments of Labor and Commerce, but most of the funding is coming from foundations and the business sector. Results of some of the programs show that only a very small percentage of welfare recipients can make

it as entrepreneurs, since individual initiative is imperative for success. Thus, up-front screening is critical. So far, most programs have been positively received and have been supported politically.—Demetra Nightingale

A: The entrepreneurial question has its highs and lows. It is difficult to expect that someone who can't find a job will be able to successfully start a business. If we support this, I would agree that screening is key to get individuals who are stable and have stable families.—Shari Curtis

What about education reform?

Q: How much influence can we have on the education reform process? Our current system of schooling between the hours of 8 and 3 is based on the old farm system. If we are going to take a preventative approach to welfare reform, can we have any influence to keep kids in school from 3pm-6pm to teach them comprehensive skills or provide apprenticeships?

A: Welfare policy is not likely to influence education policy. I suggest getting the business sector involved to improve the schools. Top CEO's in communities know that their biggest resource is the people in the community and we should thus prepare children for work. For instance, in Kansas City, teachers are given sabbaticals to work with a company to see what the skills are that are needed to survive in business. They've also put CEO's and VP's in the class room to give them a taste of what it's like day to day. It's also important, however, not to create a dual educational system for the college bound versus the non-college bound. We need to ultimately create a better link between the school and work.—Demetra Nightingale