



Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG)

Compendium of Promising Practices

April 2015



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



Building Pathways to a Brighter Future



April 2015

Dear Colleagues:

The Office of Family Assistance is pleased to share examples of innovative practices from Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program grantees. HPOG provides education and training to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals for health occupations that pay well and are in high demand. HPOG programs offer job-driven training opportunities—matching people who are striving for better economic opportunities with careers in growing health care fields.

Stories within this compendium describe promising ways that HPOG programs have coordinated services and approaches with their local or state TANF partners. For example, in Pennsylvania, Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit's Project WATCH developed a strategic communication and collaboration plan to increase TANF participant enrollment. Their plan centered around cross-agency meetings of direct service providers and regular contact between HPOG and TANF staff. Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium in New York created a TANF liaison position to increase TANF enrollments through regular visits to TANF offices and to ensure TANF enrollees receive the individualized supports they need to successfully complete training.

We encourage readers to review these promising practices to learn about the opportunities and challenges that HPOG grantees have faced and how they have addressed them. We hope that these examples will stimulate discussion within organizations and communities around the country. The practices described provide ideas for consideration and organizational contacts that may be useful to others looking to innovate and to strengthen their work.

We are grateful for the detailed and dynamic practices that each of our 32 HPOG grantees has shared through this compendium. We are hopeful that their experiences will inspire others to identify and implement effective strategies to help low-income individuals and families build pathways to brighter futures.

Sincerely,

/s/

Nisha Patel
Director
Office of Family Assistance

Introduction

The [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program provides Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals with education and training for well-paying, in-demand health care occupations. The HPOG program is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, [Office of Family Assistance](#) (OFA).

OFA awarded initial grants in September 2010, and grantees are now well into their fifth and final year of the program. HPOG grantees include 32 entities in 23 states, including four state agencies, nine local Workforce Investment Boards, 12 institutions of higher education (one university, nine community colleges, and two community college districts), and two community-based organizations. There are five tribal grantees, including one tribal council and four tribal colleges.

The HPOG program is continually implementing and seeking to identify promising, innovative, and job-driven practices to support low-income individuals' progress along career pathways. In addition to providing education and training, grantees coordinate critical support services, such as case management, child care, and transportation. Grantees have built strong partnerships to recruit and retain program participants, such as with TANF agencies, Workforce Investment Boards, and offices of apprenticeship.

This *Compendium of Promising Practices* captures innovative practices that grantees identified as key to their success in serving TANF and other low-income individuals. The practices are indexed by grantee, state, community, type of organization, and job-driven practice component.

The HPOG program is a demonstration project designed to build and share knowledge. This compilation of promising practices is intended to support dissemination of insights and lessons learned to diverse stakeholders. A comprehensive evaluation of HPOG is also underway and will provide more information on program implementation, systems change, outcomes, and impact. The goal of the evaluation is to expand the evidence base for improving outcomes for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals.

ICF International, a technical assistance provider for the Office of Family Assistance, collected the *Promising Practices*. To access this document and other supporting documents, examples, and related information about the practices electronically, please visit the HPOG Website at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/hpog>.

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College Instructors as Job Developers

Healthcare Professions Training Initiative at Alamo Community College District

Alamo Community College District's (Alamo Colleges) Healthcare Professions Training Initiative (HPTI), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, has adopted a job placement strategy that uses college instructors to act in dual roles as life skills trainers and job developers.

In June 2013, HPTI undertook a reorganization and transition effort that focused on job placement. At that point, according to performance reporting data from almost three years into the HPOG program, HPTI had trained 236 students but only 53 had been placed in a job. With a limited staff, HPTI sought to maximize its existing staff to focus on job development, retention, and placement, as well as job skills and remediation. Classroom instructors, therefore, would assume dual roles of both life skills trainers and job developers. Instructors were the right individuals to undertake this task, since they were in the classroom for the entry life skills portion of the curriculum and later during the job skills preparation training. Instructors were already aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their students and knew what supports they needed--more than any other HPTI staff.

To help facilitate this job placement focus, Alamo Colleges brought in an employment expert in June 2014 and in March 2015. These training sessions reviewed case management and support services for students, and provided instructors tools to identify and use best practices for job placement success.

In their new dual roles, instructors first work with externship placements, mentoring student externs, and coordinating with job sites. As part of this effort, instructors developed relationships with job sites and established rapport to find opportunities for future externship sites as well as identify job vacancies.

Overseeing both fieldwork externships and classroom training, classroom instructors then used the information they were gathering from both experiences to better understand employer standards, interview techniques, and job demands. As a result, instructors began to adapt in-

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classroom work to better meet employer and student expectations, job needs, and build job readiness skills. These new additions to the training have improved students' skills and have been critical to improving job placement numbers. With this new knowledge base, instructors have also combined employer feedback and student performance data to ensure that student capacities are best matched with individual employer needs.

As part of HPTI's new job placement process, employers also now give 'ideal candidate' profiles to instructors who then match those needs with the students who are ready for employment. This approach has improved staff knowledge of student abilities and employer needs, as well as improved communication between the program and employer partners. As a result, job placements have increased, as has employer satisfaction. An additional benefit of increased contact with partner employers is that HPTI is aware of and can help fix on-the-job issues or problems students and/or their employers face.

Although these new processes and dual staff roles were built out of necessity, they have proven to be very effective at increasing job placements. HPTI staff now has more frequent communication with area medical providers, which has resulted in improvements to medical training and created better employment opportunities for graduates. According to performance reporting data as of March 2015, a total of 357 students have completed training and 213 have been placed in a job. The data further indicates that 130 of the 213 were placed into health care jobs. The new job placement process is working and increasing the number of people placed into sustaining careers.

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Creating and Managing Regional Consortium Partners

Northern New Jersey Health Professions Consortium at Bergen Community College

In 2010, several New Jersey colleges and an employer partner formed the [Northern New Jersey Health Professions Consortium](#) (NNJHPC), which became a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance. Each of the Consortium's ten member colleges is an independent organization with its own governing body, operating under the aegis of its home-county and State legislation. NNJHPC's employer partner is a large hospital system. The colleges sit in inner-city urban, suburban, and rural areas. Each serves an ethnically diverse student population facing challenges common among community college students across the nation.

NNJHPC's members are dynamic and diverse, and it was incumbent upon the Consortium to create a governance structure and operating model that would help it carry out its HPOG goals and objectives. Consortium members created and implemented several tools and strategies, which, together, have enabled the success of the Consortium as a whole. These include:

- **Use brand awareness and allow for flexibility.** Each member college uses its well-known local brand to promote the work of HPOG. In doing so, each college has the autonomy it needs to adjust programs to the local environment and integrate them into their individual college structure and culture.
- **Have a local presence.** HPOG operations occur locally, at each college. Each school has a local Site Coordinator who is overseen by the school, as well as the Consortium's leading college, Bergen Community College. Site Coordinators have become the local face of the Consortium's HPOG work--identifying and resolving local problems, setting up college-specific systems, and recruiting faculty and students.
- **Support coordination.** To maintain coordination and collaboration, all local Site Coordinators meet monthly. Meetings focus on operational details such as eligibility, program development, policy communications, and financial matters. The Consortium

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also formed a Leadership Council, which brings together leaders from each member organization to discuss policy-level Consortium issues.

- **Collect and manage data.** As an HPOG grantee, the Consortium collects data via the Performance Reporting System (PRS), which houses information relating to all clients and select information about program offerings. The Consortium uses this tool to report on student level activity, which resulted in its desire to develop its own tool--the Monthly Activity Report (MAR). All Consortium members use the MAR to monitor additional program successes. MAR reports include data on: (1) enrollment of new students (first time only); (2) completion of a health care curriculum (first time only); and (3) employment in a health care occupation (first time only). All Consortium members are able to see not only their numbers, but their colleagues'--both monthly and in an annual summary. Reports are distributed throughout the Consortium to Site Coordinators as well as Consortium leadership councils.

The Consortium has also created a number of other tools to improve efficiencies in data collection. For example, in lieu of manual data entry by staff, the Consortium developed a computer-based front-end system for PRS data that enables HPOG applicants to enter all data into a local computer, print out, and sign their responses. All of their data is then automatically uploaded into PRS overnight. Similarly, to help job developers manage their caseloads, the Consortium created a cloud-based client relations management tool. One of the most attractive features of the tool is its ability to match student skills to traits sought by employers and automatically notify qualifying students of available opportunities. The system will help Consortium members track interactions between job developers, students and employers, and maintain a list of contacts and profiles.

In all, the confluence of these Consortium-wide tools and strategies have provided Consortium members a common set of approaches that are improving individual members' program and participant outcomes, as well as communications among programs, students, employers, and funders. According to performance reporting data, implementation of this suite of tools has helped lead the way to a 13% increase in enrollments, a 7% increase in student completions, and a 26% improvement in first time employment for graduates into health care occupations. To date, the Consortium has guided 1,134 students to successfully joining the workforce--changing their lives and the lives of their families.

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Issksiniip Behavioral Health Aid

Issksiniip Project at Blackfeet Community College

[Blackfeet Community College](#)'s (Blackfeet) [Issksiniip Project](#), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) initiative funded by the Office of Family Assistance, offers students the opportunity to acquire advanced mental health certifications. This project is part of the Tribe's efforts to address the long standing lack of mental health services in their community--there is currently only one local mental health facility located in Browning, Montana's Indian Health Service organization. Designed in the summer of 2013, the Issksiniip Project's Behavioral Health Aid (BHA) training is a two-month summer training program that instructs students on counseling and mental health basics, first aid, child development, behavior management, and testing fundamentals. After completing the program, students receive a BHA Certification, a credential recognized throughout the Blackfeet Reservation as a viable health profession certification. Blackfeet Community College is also working to support job advancement for BHA certificate holders through memoranda of understanding (MOU) with employer partners. Currently in negotiation, these MOUs would guarantee that upon graduation from the BHA program individuals will receive a pay increase with their current employers.

The implementation of the BHA program was driven primarily by the lack of trained mental health service providers within the Blackfeet Reservation, as well as local levels of unemployment that approach 70%. Rather than just implementing a mental health training program based on assumptions of community needs, Blackfeet's first step was to connect directly with local large scale employers and tribal entities. Blackfeet met initially with local Head Start programs to conduct assessments of these organization's mental health employment needs to identify critical skills and knowledge needed by BHA graduates to advance in the workplace, and to gain insight on the types of courses and training needed in the BHA curriculum. Following the Head Start assessment, Issksiniip staff next worked with Browning School District leadership to make BHA services available to teacher assistants. Blackfeet is currently in negotiation with the school district on a MOU that would secure automatic pay increases for current employees who graduate from the BHA Program.

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In the summer of 2014, Blackfeet had its first cohort of students enroll in BHA training. As Head Start and the school districts were the first primary partners, the initial BHA training courses focused heavily on mental health issues and skills within the K-12 school environment.

In support of the program, the Blackfeet Issksiniip Project also established a Mental Health Advisory Board, which includes the University of Montana and Blackfeet faculty, as well as community leaders to guide program development, connect with community resources, and ensure the curriculum reflects actual employer needs. During the early stages of curriculum development, Blackfeet Issksiniip Project also elected to offer two types of BHA certificates--the two month, summer option, focused strictly on tribal entities, and a longer, one-year option offered during the academic year at Blackfeet Community College. Additionally Blackfeet Community College's Human Service division has articulated an agreement with the University of Montana to assist students' seamless transition to a four year program.

As the first cohort of short-term BHA students graduated in the summer of 2014, documenting evidence on the program's effectiveness is still in the early stages. However, what Blackfeet has documented in terms of enrollment and placement outcomes is highly encouraging. Testament to the high level of interest in this type of training, Blackfeet enrolled 53 individuals in the first cohort, more than double what the program anticipated. The program's impact on employment is difficult to gauge as many of the BHA students were already employed at enrollment or elected to participate in the one-year BHA program. Among a smaller group of non-employed BHA students enrolled in the two-month program, Blackfeet Community College's administrative data shows that it was able to quickly find employment for half of these individuals at wages 30% higher than anticipated. Blackfeet anticipates an increased number of job placements during 2015 among BHA graduates. Blackfeet will also work to track job advancement and pay increases among BHA certificate holders. On a qualitative note, employers routinely submit positive feedback on BHA graduates placed within their organizations.

While the BHA program has shown promising progress to-date, initially there were a number of challenges in marketing the program and identifying specific populations most in need of mental health services. There were also initial struggles in working with the state to recognize the validity of licensed practitioner services billing via the Medicaid program. Blackfeet found that a targeted outreach campaign, including numerous career fairs and workforce symposiums, was needed to effectively build community knowledge of the BHA program.

For others looking to replicate the BHA program, it is vital to implement a comprehensive community-based approach early during the program's development. Blackfeet Issksiniip staff

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also recommends that programs ensure their curricula are state, federal, and/or tribally recognized to ensure that billability to Medicaid, workplace duties, and job advancement are clear and agreed upon by all partners.

Moving forward, Blackfeet Community College's Mental Health Advisory Board will seek to replicate the Head Start and school district partnerships with the local Veteran's Affairs (VA) department. Blackfeet assessments revealed that VA offices have an immediate need for staff with specialized mental health skills. In response, Blackfeet is currently designing a BHA curriculum to include specialized courses geared toward Veterans' mental health issues. The first VA focused cohort will begin classes in the summer 2015. Blackfeet believes that engaging veterans through BHA will not only fulfill a critical local health need but improve their enrollment, completion, and employment outcomes during the final year of the HPOG grant. In addition, Blackfeet is planning to open BHA training to their Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) students. To date, they have struggled to find job placements for their EMT students¹ and they believe that BHA certification will increase these individuals' competitiveness in the job market.

¹ In 2014, BCC employed three EMT students, or 4% of their target goal for this occupation.

Promising Practices

Using a TANF Liaison to Streamline Communication

Health Professions Collaborative at Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc.

The [Health Professions Collaborative](#) (Collaborative) at Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc. is a project of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance. The Collaborative prepares Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals with the skills and credentials needed to enter employment and advance in the health care field. Participants entering the program receive comprehensive assessments, basic skills training, work readiness training, and case management. The program also provides supportive services, including child care, transportation, and uniforms.

In the first two years of its HPOG grant, the Collaborative's TANF enrollment numbers were approximately 9%. Looking to increase TANF enrollments and build a stronger relationship with its TANF agency counterpart, the Collaborative developed a TANF Liaison staff position, which began in 2012 and became a full-time position in January 2013.

The creation of the TANF Liaison position has helped streamline communication and joint activities between the Collaborative and the Erie Department of Social Services, TANF Division. This streamlining occurred because of the TANF Liaison's multi-pronged approach, which includes one-on-one contact with TANF staff, participation in community partner meetings, and the Liaison's development of informational sessions for TANF participants at TANF offices. First, the TANF Liaison visits the TANF agency every week to meet with TANF staff to discuss program requirements and collaboration opportunities between the two programs. These regular meetings help the Collaborative identify TANF participants who may be interested or eligible for the program. It also has allowed the program to refine a more targeted outreach strategy to TANF participants.

The TANF Liaison has also become an active participant in a community advisory council, where different human service system stakeholders, such as local employers, training schools,

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the New York State Department of Labor, the Erie County Department of Social Services, and other community agencies meet every three months to discuss the services they offer and the types of participants who may be qualified for their services or training. This has helped the program better coordinate services with partner organizations to prevent service overlap or duplication.

The TANF Liaison has also started to facilitate Collaborative informational sessions at TANF offices for TANF participants. These sessions increase the Collaborative's visibility and directly engage TANF participants. Each session is held at a time that would be most convenient for TANF participants, such as in the evenings, and the TANF agency helps promote the session through a variety of mediums, including Facebook postings. During each session, the TANF Liaison will share information about the Collaborative's program and how TANF participants can apply and receive training in high-demand health care occupations, such as Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN), Billing Clerks, Medical Secretaries, or Pharmacy Technicians. These sessions have been so successful that the Collaborative is looking to do similar outreach sessions with other community partner agencies and organizations.

In addition to the TANF Liaison's outreach and TANF enrollment duties, she also helps coordinate supports for TANF participants once they have entered the HPOG program. The Liaison, for example, facilitates HPOG program orientations for TANF recipients; tracks TANF participants through the HPOG program; helps coordinate support services for TANF participants; and coordinates with career counselors regarding TANF participant progress.

Since creating the TANF Liaison position, the Collaborative has experienced a steady increase in TANF participant engagement. By April 2014, according to its performance reporting data, the Collaborative had TANF enrollment numbers of approximately 16% (a 7% increase since the earlier grant years).

The Collaborative attributes these TANF enrollment increases to its focus on creating open lines of regular communication with the local TANF agency. The creation of the TANF Liaison position has helped strengthen the relationship between the two programs, as well as helped the program begin to use similar promising practices to strengthen its partnerships with other community stakeholders.

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Embedding Employer Engagement

Next Steps Project at Cankdeska Cikana Community College

[Cankdeska Cikana Community College's](#) (CCCC) [Next Steps](#) project, a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) initiative funded by the Office of Family Assistance seeks to create more opportunities for Native American people to train for and enter high paying careers in health care. From 2011-2012, over the first two years of their HPOG grant, the project placed 35 individuals in health care related jobs--steady progress towards their five-year goal of employing 139 individuals. While on track to reach their grant target projections, Next Steps' staff believed that a high level of need in North Dakota for trained health care providers would allow them to capitalize on this unmet demand and well exceed their job placement goals. Beginning in early 2013, Next Steps staff implemented a series of relationship building, data gathering, and staffing efforts to strengthen and support their employer engagement and job placement efforts.

Early in 2013, the Next Steps project planned and conducted a series of Healthcare Workforce Development Workshops aimed at over 500 health care employers in both rural and urban parts of North Dakota. The purposes of the workshops were to:

- Inform employers about the Next Steps project's efforts to produce quality health care workers to meet demands identified through labor market information (LMI) analyses.
- Validate and verify LMI data with primary data from health care employers--particularly from employers within specific job sectors and occupations.
- Advance apprenticeship as a proven model for producing a health care workforce.

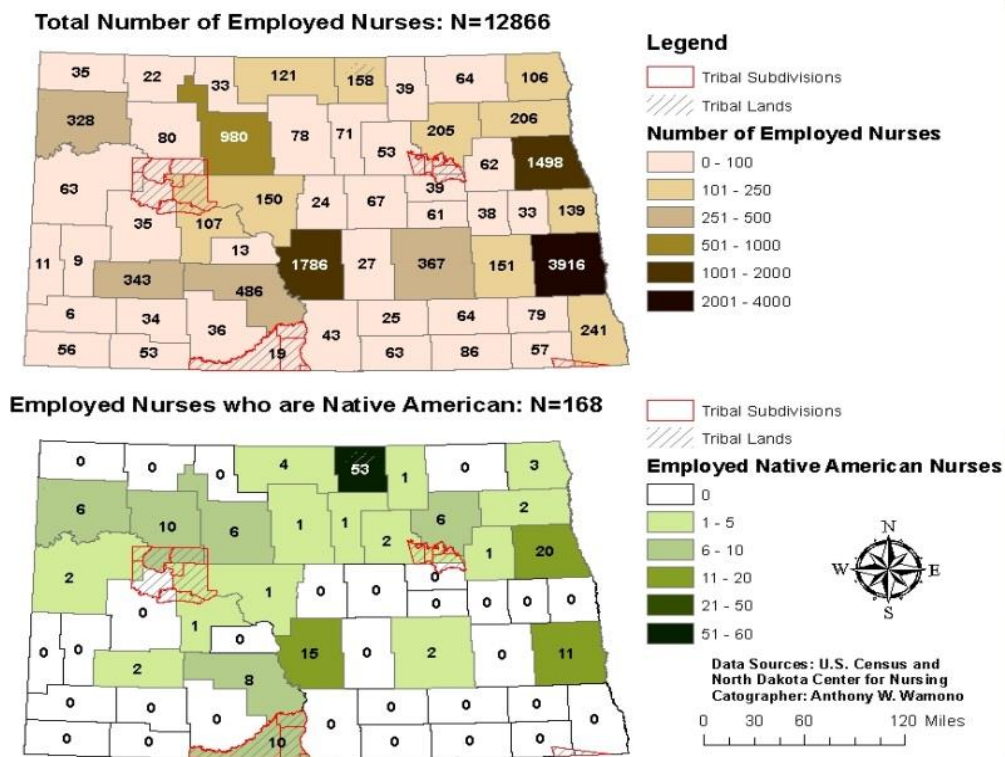
Approximately 150 employers attended the first workshop in 2013. Next Steps reported very positive feedback on the workshops, particularly around increasing organizations' understanding of Next Steps' goals, clarifying company hiring needs throughout the state, and elevating employer confidence as to the "hireability" of graduating Next Steps students.

While implementing these statewide employer workshops, Next Steps also conducted a series of LMI data gathering and mapping efforts as part of a North Dakota State University (NDSU)

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HPOG Research and Evaluation grant. Referred to as the North Dakota Nursing and Demographic Study, NDSU, in partnership with Next Steps, produced a series of geographic information systems (GIS) maps to document by county the total number of employed Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in the state, the percentage of employed RNs and LPNs per 100 people and the percentage of Native Americans among these occupations (see examples of these maps below). This information enabled Next Steps to focus additional outreach and job placement efforts to counties underserved by trained RNs and LPNs, particularly Native American nurses.

Armed with primary data on health care workforce demands obtained through the workshops and NDSU GIS data, the Next Step project was poised to directly engage health care employers to improve opportunities for Next Steps graduates.



North Dakota
Nursing and Demographic Study

Next Steps's Job Development Specialist used the project's existing employer relations, partnerships formed during the workshops, and the new LMI data to target major health care employers in North Dakota counties with significant health care hiring needs. Next Steps's staff also ensured that these employer hiring needs aligned with skills graduates would acquire

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through the project's training programs. These efforts resulted in partnerships with employers like [Eventide](#)¹ (a senior living organization) that included memoranda of understanding documenting employer commitments to hire Next Steps graduates and provide them with professional development opportunities. Next Steps is currently working on a similar partnership agreement with [Vibra Hospitals of the Central Dakotas](#).

These efforts to strengthen employer engagement and establish formal partnerships enabled Next Steps to successfully place graduates with health care organizations throughout the state. According to performance reporting data, from 2013 to 2014, the project placed 58 individuals in jobs, nearly doubling their employment outcomes from the previous two years. Given their projections in 2015,² Next Steps is positioned to achieve the goals they set out to accomplish in their renewed employer engagement effort--that is, to leap past their HPOG grant employment targets and place that many more Native Americans in high-demand and high-pay health care occupations.

¹ HPOG highlighted the Eventide partnership in Next Steps's 2014 promising practice.

² Next Steps projects to employ 70 individuals in 2015--placing their total five-year employment outcomes at 163.

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Employer Panels

Health Education Laddering Program at Central Community College

Central Community College's (Central) [Health Education Laddering Program](#) (Project HELP), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, provides Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other low-income individuals with education and training supports that lead to employment in high-demand health care occupations. In June 2013, Project HELP began implementing a series of employer panels to create stronger employer and student connections and increase health profession job placements. Project HELP arranges for employers to speak with graduating nursing assistant and medication aide classes to give students opportunities to interact directly with prospective employers. Participating employers provide information about their organization, their hiring practices, share interview tips, application information, and characteristics of a successful employee.

The idea to implement regular employer panels began after Project HELP staff noticed how effective periodic career fairs were in moving their Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Registered Nurse (RN) students into employment. The program wanted to replicate this success with their Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) students,¹ but because these are typically short-term training programs (2-3 weeks), the once a quarter career fair model would not meet immediate student employment needs. So, prior to implementing employer panels for CNAs, Project HELP did an initial assessment of employer capacity and collected feedback from instructors about the best course to take.

Specifically, Project HELP staff sought to build buy-in and knowledge of this opportunity by speaking to CNA instructors at each of Central's campuses to gauge their interest and hear their thoughts about connecting students with employers. Central's community liaison also connected with employers across more than 25 counties to explain the purpose of Project HELP, describe the benefits of hiring its graduates, and introduce the idea of employer panels.

¹ Project HELP targeted CNAs with this employment support because they represent a large portion of Project HELP students. In 2014, almost 30% of all enrolled students were CNAs (120 of the 418 actively enrolled).

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Following this initial assessment and outreach effort, Project HELP elected to hold employer panels multiple times each semester at each of Central's six campuses located throughout Nebraska. As many Project HELP students travel over 50 miles to attend classes, holding these panels throughout the state allows more students to interact face-to-face with local health care employers looking to hire CNAs.

Since implementing the employer panels, from June 2013 to December 2014, performance reporting data for Project HELP shows that CNA employment has increased from 79 to 245 participants employed. The panels have also received high marks from participants. Students report that the panels provide them with a better understanding of what employers are seeking and valuable tips on how to interview successfully. Specific student comments on the benefits of the panels include: "information from the Employer Panel helped me understand what working at different places like a nursing home would be like;" "it benefited me to learn what nursing skills, communication skills, and CNA skills are needed;" and, "the program was a great experience and it will help me be able to find a job I want."

Employers are also responding positively to the opportunity to connect with prospective employees. Rather than having to solicit employers to participate in the panels, Project HELP reports that employers are calling them to share job openings and inquire about the next employer panel opening. In addition to improving employment outcomes and the job readiness of students, the panels have also resulted in stronger relationships with employers in the community. In the words of one participating employer from Elwood Care Center, "it was so great to see that the "real world" information we were giving was helpful to the students, and knowing that ultimately they will be having a positive impact on other people's lives. What a great program!"

Employers and students have reaped significant benefits from this effort, but Project HELP has also encountered some challenges in implementing the Employer Panels. Nursing assistant students must dedicate 76 hours to classroom training. Given this rigorous schedule, it becomes challenging to find time for the panels if instructors do not plan for these meetings well in advance. In situations where there is insufficient classroom time, Project HELP has held the panels over the lunch hour. Attendance is optional for students with refreshments provided free of charge. Another challenge is managing expectations of students and employers who may envision the panel as a recruitment opportunity. The panels are intended to serve as educational opportunities only, though employers are not discouraged from telling students about upcoming job opportunities and describing the process of applying for these positions.

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To implement the panels, Project HELP advises organizations to first investigate state regulations regarding the number of hours students are required to be in the classroom. Next, they suggest checking with instructors to see if they will plan for additional hours to accommodate the panels. Project HELP has found that students are more likely to attend the panels within a classroom setting rather than over a lunch period when attendance is not mandatory.

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Increasing TANF Participation and Success

Work Attributes Toward Careers in Health Project at Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit

The mission of the [Work Attributes Toward Careers in Health](#) (WATCH Project), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, is to establish health care career pathways by providing a variety of academic and social support services to income-eligible individuals. These supports aim to help students enter and move up in health care professions to meet the immediate and long-term needs of regional health care employers. At the end of WATCH's first HPOG grant year, WATCH Project staff saw that they were on track to meet their 12% Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participation rate goal, but knew they could do better.

WATCH Project staff carefully reviewed a number of program elements looking for opportunities to improve TANF participation across its ten-county service area. Specifically, WATCH staff found that, anecdotally, those counties with informal working relationships between WATCH Career Coordinators, workforce development agency case managers, and TANF agencies had the highest rates of TANF participation. These informal connections tended to promote more frequent and better communication between WATCH Career Coordinators, workforce development, and the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) (Pennsylvania's TANF administrator, currently called the Department of Human Services) on shared issues of concern like progress or challenges of co-involved participants. WATCH used this information to develop a plan of action for improved communication between WATCH Career Coordinators and case management staff in partner agencies across the ten-county service area in Central Pennsylvania.

WATCH took a “bottom up and top down” approach to implement the plan, using strategic communication and collaboration opportunities to gain active support from state-level DPW staff while building trust and sharing accountability between WATCH Career Coordinators and partner agency staff throughout the central Pennsylvania region. Understanding Pennsylvania's

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goals as a “work-first” state and demonstrating how WATCH could help meet them was essential to interagency engagement.

A particularly effective part of WATCH’s plan was to approach workforce development agencies in each county serving TANF clients and request permission to attend their cross-system team gatherings called Direct Service Team (DST) meetings. Held monthly, DST meetings were attended by representatives from the County Assistance Office (which housed the county TANF office), workforce development, and subsidized child care. While attending these meetings, WATCH Career Coordinators explained how WATCH could help DST members guide their clients into nursing careers through WATCH’s short-term training programs. They shared how the programs can result in immediate employment for participants—something TANF staff were particularly interested in to meet their goals. Career Coordinators also discussed the importance of communication between agencies and noted that, for TANF case managers who referred clients to WATCH, they would receive regular updates about participants’ progress and the agencies could take steps together to ensure clients stayed on track. Attending these meetings improved service coordination between participating organizations and communication about referrals and shared clients.

According to local evaluation and internal data sources, WATCH’s “bottom up and top down” approach, which included state and county level communications about WATCH’s program and services, has paid off (see Figure 1). Over the years, WATCH has achieved significant increases in the number of TANF enrollees, even as the number of TANF-eligible individuals in the state has decreased. In 2011, 12% of WATCH’s enrolled participants were receiving TANF and in 2014 its TANF enrollment was up to over 16%. These results convinced state-level DPW leadership to issue a memo to County Assistance Office administrators in the WATCH ten-county service area, which shared the effectiveness of the WATCH Project as an employment resource and encouraged increased referrals to the program.

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Figure 1: TANF Completion and Employment Rates (2011-2014)

Counties in the WATCH Service Region	% of TANF Completions with Health Care Credential	% of TANF Employed in Health Care
Centre	83.3%	83.3%
Clinton	100.0%	100.0%
Columbia	66.7%	66.7%
Lycoming	90.0%	86.7%
Mifflin	81.8%	72.7%
Montour	N/A	N/A
Northumberland	100.0%	66.7%
Snyder	100.0%	75.0%
Tioga	N/A	N/A
Union	100.0%	100.0%
Total	89.6%	83.6%

WATCH Project staff attribute the overall increases in TANF referrals, enrollments, completions, and employment rates to their stronger state partnerships that were formed because of their ongoing face-to-face meetings with DPW and workforce agency case managers.

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Student Success Plans

CNA to RN Career Ladder Program at College of Menominee Nation

The [College of Menominee Nation's](#) (CMN) [Certified Nursing Assistant \(CNA\) to Registered Nurse \(RN\) Career Ladder Program](#), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) initiative funded by the Office of Family Assistance seeks to provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other low-income individuals with the resources, structure, and support to enter and succeed in the nursing profession. In the spring of 2011, the College began implementing individual Student Success Plans (SSP) to more accurately evaluate progress, for both student and HPOG staff, in preparing CNA to RN Career Ladder participants for academic and career success. Since that time, CMN has refined the SSPs, over a series of versions, with each iteration seeking to enhance the documentation and development of long-term academic and employment goals, students' plans for using supportive services, and post-graduation connections to the program.

The Success Plans serves two purposes: (1) to clarify for both student and HPOG staff the academic and job preparation goals and expectations of each party for the coming semester; and (2) to document an action plan incorporating all supportive services needed for academic and job attachment success. Both the Student Support Service Coordinator (SSC) and the Nursing Academic Skills Lab Instructor (NASLI) work in partnership with the student prior to semester course registration to prepare goals and expectations to include in the SSP. This is completed in a "tag team" format where the student first meets with their SSC and then with their NASLI. The SSC would explain and discuss support services, job preparation goals, and expectations and the NASLI would do the same for academic goals and expectations that promote academic success.

Earlier Success Plan versions, specifically in 2012 and 2013, focused primarily on students' academic plans. While effective in mapping out an education completion plan, staff found that they didn't adequately help students connect academics, support services, and employment. Through trial and error, the College HPOG team found that highly detailed and comprehensive SSPs (that included both short- and long-term education and employment goals), when paired with weekly monitoring meetings, were directly linked to higher levels of student academic success. These more comprehensive SSPs guide students in developing goals (see Figures 1-3),

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ongoing assessment of goals results, and statements of understanding and confidentiality. Beginning in 2014, CMN began using these updated SSPs with their Technical Practical Nurse (TPN) students.

Figure 1: Excerpt from a Student Success Plan--Short-Term Completion/Support Services Focused Goal

Goal 4: To be successful in the HPOG nursing program, the student will use available study resources.	Service(s): May 2015	Met
Objective 1: The student will complete at least 20 hours of ATI (modules that include exercises requiring the application of nursing knowledge) study time for TPN 150 course (Nursing Care of Children) and online exam preparation. Documentation (time and activity log) will be shown to NASLI bi-monthly.	Ongoing	Met
Objective 2: The student will complete at least 20 hours of ATI study time for TPN 160 course (Adult Medical Surgical Nursing) and online exam preparation. Documentation (time and activity log) will be shown to NASLI bi-monthly.	Ongoing	Met

Figure 2: Excerpt from SSP--Short- and Long-Term Employment Focused Goal

Goal 5: To be successful in the HPOG nursing program, the student will meet with HPOG Job Placement Coordinator and update needed information.	Service(s): April 2015	Met
Objective 1: Create employment plan which includes, documenting employment goals and steps; writing and updating resume; and, discussing job interview techniques.	Ongoing	Met

Figure 3: Excerpted SSP--Post-Graduation Tracking Focused Goal

Goal 7: To be successful in the HPOG Nursing Program the student will become employed as a LPN.	Service(s): September 2015	Met
Objective 1: The student will complete HPOG employment exit form.		
Objective 2: The student will complete HPOG 6 month follow-up exit form.		

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During the 2014 spring and fall semesters, the College introduced comprehensive Success Plans to 51 TPNs. While staff were initially nervous about students successfully completing the program given the rigorous nature of CMN's nursing courses, completion outcomes at the end of the year were far higher than anticipated. According to the College's internal data, of the 51 TPNs enrolled in 2014, 43 completed the program (84% completion). This was especially significant since, combined, this has been the college's largest TPN cohort to date.

Staff members believe that the academic accountability, individual support and encouragement, as well as goal development incorporated into the SSP have had a profound impact on the program's improving completion outcomes. The CMN HPOG team continues to evaluate and enhance the SSP with a renewed emphasis on job placement. In spring 2015, CMN will add a new component to the SSP that focuses on Certified Nursing Assistant student use of HPOG job replacement services.

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Use of Cohorts

CareerAdvance® at Community Action Project of Tulsa County

With support from the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, the [Community Action Project of Tulsa County](#) (CAP Tulsa) uses a cohort model for training in its CareerAdvance program. The cohort approach--a foundational strategy since the beginning of the program--is used to identify a group of participants who are all seeking the same type of credential (e.g. Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)) to provide interactive and dynamic settings for students to improve their knowledge and skills. CAP Tulsa finds that the cohort model builds community, fosters creative problem solving, builds leadership skills, and encourages greater student progress through training.

Each cohort begins their training with a course referred to as “CORE.” CORE is a four week course that covers basic computer literacy, study skills, conflict resolution, writing, and stress management, as well as soft skills, all of which are important for positive work behaviors. The CORE class prepares participants for entrance exams, helps them learn college readiness skills, and sets the stage for higher completion rates. Along with regular occupational training, each cohort group meets outside the classroom throughout their time in training in structured “Partner Meetings.”

Partner Meetings occur weekly during the first semester of training, twice monthly during the second semester, and monthly beyond the first year of training. The Meetings are facilitated by CAP Tulsa’s Career Coaches and are a time dedicated for each cohort to gather students dealing with similar academic, financial, parenting, and career goal challenges. The overall purpose of these meetings is to create an environment where students can support and learn from each other. The content of each varies and is somewhat customizable to the specific needs of each cohort or their academic focus. Some examples of Partner Meeting content are: business etiquette and communication, resumes, employer speakers, and self-care techniques.

Focus group data indicates that the cohort model is associated with reduced rates of attrition and an increase in completion and graduation rates. With the consistent use of cohorts, CAP Tulsa has also steadily improved program completion and retention numbers over the life of

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the HPOG grant. According to performance reporting data, in 2011, 22 students completed the program--a number that nearly doubled in 2012 and 2013 (44 and 49 graduates respectively).

CAP Tulsa's cohort approach has shown that students who have opportunities to meaningfully connect with their similarly situated peers are more successful as they make their way through their individual programs, and graduates are more successful once they begin to practice in their new careers.

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Engaging Tribal TANF to Remove Employment Barriers

Health Professions Opportunity Grant at Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc.

The [Health Professions Opportunity Grant](#) program at Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC HPOG), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) funded project of the Office of Family Assistance, aims to improve economic stability among Anchorage's Alaska Native population by increasing the proportion of health professionals who are Alaska Native/American Indian. As part of the CITC Employment Training and Services division, the HPOG program provides access to training that extends a “hand up” to Alaska Native/American Indians interested in a health care career.

CITC HPOG has focused its program on eliminating employment barriers for individuals with limited education, limited work history and employment skills, who are living in poverty, or have substance abuse problems. The program is particularly focused on helping individuals transition off of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). CITC HPOG has done so by working closely with the Tribal TANF program, also administered by CITC's Employment Training and Services division. As a part of this partnership, CITC HPOG and the TANF program have created a shared case management approach to help HPOG participants receiving TANF realize success as health care professionals. This has involved multiple aligned strategies, which are described below.

Accessing multiple services efficiently

HPOG/TANF participants often need numerous critical and basic supports to succeed in training, including help with housing or rent assistance, heat and food. Without these basics, making progress towards training and job readiness is virtually impossible. To address these issues proactively, CITC HPOG has relied on CITC's centralized intake process and data system to streamline needs assessments, eligibility determinations, and information sharing between CITC divisions. With confidentiality safeguards in place, CITC HPOG sees information most relevant to participant support service needs without compromising on privacy. CITC

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HPOG and Tribal TANF case management staff also use the centralized system to jointly identify and address critical needs to help students succeed in training.

Maintaining TANF benefits during training

To facilitate a clear pathway for participants to complete training, CITC HPOG staff worked closely with Tribal TANF leadership to seek TANF work exemptions where appropriate. Early in the HPOG grant, CITC HPOG staff noticed retention issues among TANF participants. The team found that allowing participants to substitute training for work hours made it possible for many trainees to maintain their TANF benefits while completing training. Tribal TANF was willing to grant this exemption for CITC HPOG participants because of HPOG participants' employment opportunities upon the successful completion of health care occupational training. CITC HPOG and Tribal TANF also created an accountability system to provide relevant rewards for participant efforts in the classroom and other employment skill building activities by including HPOG training goals and participant requirements in TANF Family Self Sufficiency Plans. These efforts bolstered retention rates and participant engagement.

Offering multiple employment supports

Other key components to CITC HPOG's and Tribal TANF's partnership have been the use of dedicated employment specialists as well as offering additional work experience options during training. For example, CITC HPOG provided job shadowing opportunities with a large Native health care employer in the area. CITC also offered supported work experiences and career-ready programming for participants in partnership with local health care employers.

The overall mission of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council is "to work in partnership with Our People, to develop opportunities that fulfill Our endless potential." This mission is certainly being achieved through the close partnership between CITC HPOG and Tribal TANF. According to performance reporting data 58% of TANF recipients who have entered the CITC HPOG program were successfully employed when they completed the program. Importantly, according to reporting and TANF data, HPOG/TANF participants who graduate from the health care training program experience an increase in their wages by 9%--moving up the earnings ladder from virtually no earned wages for the majority of participants to \$8.28/hour, on average.

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Using Intensive Coaching to Achieve Student Success

Project HOPE at Eastern Gateway Community College

Since Fall 2010, [Project HOPE](#) at Eastern Gateway Community College in Steubenville, Ohio has successfully trained 1,087 low-income individuals for careers in health care. When designing its [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, the Project HOPE team decided that intensive student coaching would be a key component of their model. Now in its fifth year, coaching remains an integral support service for students. Because Project HOPE works with 10 educational partners across a four county area, developing consistent coaching practices has ensured that all students benefit from the educational and personal supports student coaches provide.

Coaches are trained in the policies and procedures of Project HOPE and each new coach is given a training manual at orientation that clearly defines program policies, roles, and responsibilities. During orientation, coaches are trained on team meeting facilitation, exciting customer service, conflict management, and required student contact policies. To help maintain consistency among coaches, Project HOPE requires that coaches connect with their assigned students four times per month and record those interactions in the students' case notes. Each coach is assigned no more than 30 students, which allows them to provide this level of attention to each student.

Once per month, coaches meet one-on-one with students to discuss academic progress, soft skills, and personal barriers. Upon entering the program each student is given an extensive community resource guide, which coaches use to connect students with external community resources when needs arise.

Coaches also meet with groups of students in mandated monthly peer gatherings called Team Meetings. Each coach receives a binder that outlines the content for nine meetings, each focusing on a topic related to soft skills for employment, such as: resume writing, health care customer service skills, interview skills, and stress management. For each topic, the binder

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contains an agenda, facilitator notes, a PowerPoint presentation, a handout, and informational flyer.

Project HOPE coaches are also required to use more informal channels to connect with their students-- using platforms that are most comfortable for each individual student. Coaches must have two conversations per month with students via Facebook, text message, phone, email, or in person. By using the communication platforms that students use regularly, coaches are better able to stay connected with students, even after they graduate from the program.

Coaching also extends beyond these four mandated interactions. Each coach maintains a professional Facebook page that they use to communicate with students. They also maintain a [blog](#) where they share tips for success, job postings, and all the materials students need for monthly Team Meetings.

The impact that coaches have on students' ability to manage their personal, academic, and employment challenges is evident in both program outcomes and the student success stories that Project HOPE has highlighted over the years. Project HOPE's employment-focused coaching has resulted in higher than anticipated job placement numbers. To date, according to program performance data, 842 Project HOPE students have attained employment in health care jobs. As one student noted, "Project HOPE helped prepare me for my new career by teaching me the soft skills that normally are not taught in the classroom." Another student reflected on the emotional support she received from her coach, Pam. "She provided the shoulder I needed to cry on. She also set me up with counseling services...if not for the unconditional support, I'm certain I would have given up." As the Project HOPE team looks to the future, student coaching is an element of the program that the

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Creative, Adaptive, Inclusive Management

Creating Access to Careers in Health Care at Edmonds Community College

It is often said that change is the only constant in life. This idea is embraced by the student-focused management team of the [Creating Access to Careers in Health Care](#) (CATCH) program at Edmonds Community College and their partner, Everett Community College. Part of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, CATCH trains students in a Nursing Assistant-Certified (NA-C) certificate program, as well as supports student progression beyond NA-C towards other in-demand health care occupations in Snohomish County, Washington. The program also provides support services to help students achieve their educational and employment goals.

The CATCH team has embraced the challenges and opportunities they have encountered to continuously adapt their program to better support students. In order to do this, the CATCH team, beginning in 2013, developed a management approach that is driven by four principles:

- Be open to new ideas and opportunities.
- Anticipate and prepare for the future.
- Take advantage of available resources.
- Use conflict as an opportunity for improvement.

These principles have encouraged the CATCH team to make many small, yet intentional, student-focused improvements. These improvements have positively affected all CATCH students, including CATCH's largest student population, NA-C trainees. Since 2013, NA-C completion rates have risen from 46% to 80% when comparing similar cohorts before and after improvements were implemented. CATCH attributes this significant increase in completion rates to their management approach and the combined effects of the resulting program changes, which are discussed below.

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Be open to new ideas and opportunities

The CATCH team prides itself on remaining open to opportunities to transform practices from good to excellent. For example, a May 2014 *New York Times Magazine* article, “Who Gets to Graduate?”¹, highlighted research results from interventions at the University of Texas focused on the positive impact that messages of belonging and brain malleability (the ability of the brain to produce more connections over time) had on disadvantaged students.² The researchers found that exposure to 25 to 45 minutes of these messages cut the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students’ first-semester completion rates in half. The CATCH team wanted to take advantage of these findings and since May of 2014 have hosted panels of CATCH graduates during current students’ College Success courses. Four student cohorts, comprised mostly of NA-C students, have participated in the panels, where CATCH staff facilitate a guided conversation between students and graduates on belonging and student worth.

Anticipate and prepare for the future

CATCH’s management approach also includes using data to anticipate future challenges. For example, after seeing a decline in registration after the start of the impact study randomization, the team predicted a significant compound loss. By coordinating with Nursing faculty, CATCH staff at Everett Community College, and with [Business Access](#) (a partner that provides each student with a laptop, internet access, and access to online training modules), the CATCH program was able to add an additional cohort at Everett Community College. This additional cohort allowed CATCH to enroll 17 more NA-C students, which represents 4% of their total enrollment goal.

Take advantage of available resources

The creative CATCH team is also always looking for additional community resources that will bolster student success without burdening the program’s limited budget. The local workforce agency, [WorkSource](#), was sponsoring a monthly event called Diversity Labor Exchange, which consisted of an employer panel and live resume review. Unfortunately, the event was not well attended by business leaders or students. Seeing an opportunity for a mutually beneficial partnership, CATCH’s employment navigator volunteered to assist with the planning, beginning in November 2014. He modified the event to happen quarterly based on local employer feedback and invited CATCH students to attend. WorkSource was pleased to have a

¹ Tough, P. (May 15, 2014). Who Gets to Graduate? *The New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/magazine/who-gets-to-graduate.html?_r=0

² Disadvantaged students in this study were defined as Black, Latino, or first generation college students.

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streamlined event that was better attended, and the CATCH program valued the additional opportunity for students to be exposed to employers. To date, CATCH students have participated in two Diversity Labor Exchanges, and at least three students have been hired at the event.

Use conflict as an opportunity for improvement

The CATCH team encourages students to view challenges and conflict as growth opportunities, and they use the same approach with staff. Early in 2013, there was tension between faculty and guidance staff about confronting individual student problems. The negative back-and-forth email exchanges were not productive and made the staff problem-focused, rather than student-focused. To address this issue, leadership from the Edmonds Community College Allied Health Department and from CATCH developed a process for conducting weekly in-person meetings to review every student's progress, both good and bad. The focus of discussions stayed on the students: their crisis, their progress, and ideas for positive intervention. After a few months of these meetings, trust was created between faculty and guidance staff and both were better able to address student needs. As a result of these improvements, staff and partners are able to mobilize quickly to address challenges, which have resulted in increased persistence and completion rates among CATCH students.

The CATCH team looks forward to continuing to use these management principles as the program evolves. These small changes have helped build strong teams and strong programs in the long term. The CATCH team has created a culture defined by creative, forward-thinking, resourceful staff, and students who embrace opportunity, even when presented with challenges.

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Employer Engagement

21ST Century Healthcare Works Program at the Full Employment Council, Inc.

The [Full Employment Council](#) (FEC), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance has developed a comprehensive suite of best practices to work directly with employers. FEC staff has developed long-term relationships with area employers, associations, and suppliers who represent the needs of the medical community and work closely with FEC to negotiate and place its training graduates. Building on previous business and community engagement efforts, FEC management began to make concerted efforts in 2012 to develop partnerships with the medical community to plan and provide employment opportunities for its HPOG graduates.

Practices FEC has used to build and maintain these partnerships include:

- Maintaining regular communication with existing employer partners.
- Convening roundtables, focus groups, and job fairs to connect with and educate current and future employer partners.
- Participating in employer association meetings.

Maintaining regular communication

FEC leverages employer relationships by meeting with employer partners on a regular basis to stay connected. This frequent engagement has improved its hiring processes and has allowed FEC to incorporate employer feedback into its job placement process. FEC business representatives regularly meet and interact with employers, focusing discussions on sharing information about the HPOG program, hiring opportunities, local demand for medical occupations, and future trends.

Maintaining regular communication with employers has resulted in several hospital partners adding FEC as a referral source in online applications. This connection also allows hospital human resource departments to produce weekly reports that notify FEC that their trainees have submitted applications and the results of those applications. This provides FEC program

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development specialists with valuable feedback regarding job placement activities of recent HPOG graduates and job seekers.

Convening events

FEC convenes roundtables, focus groups, and job fairs. Roundtables and focus groups are held quarterly with employers and industry experts, community, and four year colleges to determine employer needs and to create training curriculum or programs aligned with those needs. All FEC locations also hold weekly and monthly hiring fairs where job applicants can meet with employers and interview for job openings.

During these events, FEC business representatives are able to discuss FEC's training programs and the credentials needed for jobs, as well as promote employment for HPOG graduates. These events have positioned FEC as a valued resource to employers in identifying medical talent in the region and as a result, FEC counts 51% of the Missouri Acute Care Facilities in Kansas City as partners in talent acquisition. Employers know that FEC provides high quality candidates and supports those candidates before and after hiring.

Participating in association meetings

Since 2012, FEC senior staff has been attending the Missouri-Kansas Hospital Association (MKHA) quarterly meetings. Attendance at this event has provided significant networking opportunities for FEC. MKHA invited FEC to attend after the two organizations collaborated on a project to increase the number of new faculty at area nursing schools. During the meetings, which are attended by hospital administrators and health care providers, FEC staff share information about HPOG and receive employer feedback. The partnership has also resulted in several other programs and pilots that will help FEC HPOG students. For example, because of FEC's attendance at MKHA's meetings, the program connected with John Knox Village, a Missouri continuing care retirement community. FEC and John Knox Village partnered to create the first U.S. Department of Labor-approved health care apprenticeship in the state to train Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA). This partnership will help increase FEC's HPOG enrollments beginning in February 2015. The MKHA partnership also has led to FEC's involvement in a pilot project to build customized career pathway supports for members of Kansas City's Hispanic community interested in the nursing profession, as well as a pilot to encourage more men to enter the nursing field.

The employer engagement strategies discussed above have resulted in innovative and lasting partnerships with many employer partners in the Kansas City area. They have created

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opportunities to participate in promising pilot projects, as well as help HPOG graduates find employment. Since implementing these strategies in 2012, FEC's HPOG employment outcomes have improved significantly. According to performance reporting data, the number of HPOG participants who entered a paid job went up substantially from 2012 to 2013--from 103 to 181 participants. 2014 data also shows that FEC has maintained high employment numbers, with 156 participants entering paid jobs.

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Using Case Management Workshops to Improve Student Retention and Job-Readiness

Health Profession Opportunity Project at Gateway Community and Technical College

Gateway Community and Technical College's (Gateway) [Health Profession Opportunity Project](#) (HPOP), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, helps students with multiple barriers succeed in Allied Health occupational training programs. Students accepted into the program often have complex challenges within and outside of school that can significantly impede academic progress and employment without the necessary supports to strengthen student retention, academic performance, job-readiness, and foundational capacity building skills.

Gateway's HPOP case management staff work closely with students starting at program admission to identify their academic, career, and personal goals and develop plans to ensure each student has the information needed to graduate and enter the workforce with the technical and professional development skills demanded by local health care employers. An effective strategy the Gateway HPOP program has used since 2012 to accomplish these goals is its case management workshops. The workshops are designed explicitly to improve student success, retention, and job-readiness skills.

Case management workshops include facilitators who speak with students about work habits, communication skills within a professional environment, study skills, and professionalism on the job. Specific topics covered have included: resume construction, interviewing skills, critical thinking, educational technology, stress management/coping skills, and goal setting. Gateway has also offered workshops on financial literacy and financial aid. The workshops help students develop life management skills in addition to the health care and workforce development essentials. They also help students develop a level of professionalism that will leave them prepared and confident to maintain stable employment and achieve financial stability once they enter the workforce.

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Gateway tries to schedule workshops to coincide with core health care occupational training courses whenever possible. Workshops are often offered either before or after classes to support student participation, typically last an hour, and are mandatory. Beyond HPOP staff, the workshops often include other professionals and instructors, like financial aid specialists, supplemental instructors, career specialists, and external community-based agency representatives. Additionally, a college academic advisor attends each workshop to share relevant campus-wide announcements, opportunities, and resources. Gateway also offers incentives, like gas cards, to ensure student participation in the workshops and uses information gathered in the workshops to identify and resolve individual student barriers that might impact retention.

Gateway HPOP incorporated feedback from local health care employers to inform and update the content of the case management workshops. For example, employers noted professional development skills of HPOP graduates as an area for improvement. As a result, program staff added workshop topics like professional communication, critical thinking, and “putting your best foot forward during the first 90 days.” Since making the suggested changes, Gateway’s employer partners have noted improved workplace preparedness and performance from new Gateway HPOP hires. In addition, analysis of internal data from the fourth year of the program (2013-2014) suggests early signs of success for the case management workshops as a tool for improving retention. Though preliminary, the data indicates students who attended case management workshops are one to two times more likely than those who did not to complete training. Further, the more case management workshops students attended the more likely they were to complete their training. As other programs consider strategies for student skill development and retention, Gateway HPOP has found its case management-style workshops helpful in building the professional skills needed in the workplace and encouraging student resilience to successfully manage unexpected crises that inevitably arise on the job and in life.

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Strengthening Job Placement through Employer Engagement

Health Profession Opportunity Program at Gateway Technical College

According to the Wisconsin Hospital Association's 2012 annual workforce survey,¹ the health care sector employed over 300,000 people in the state of Wisconsin that year, representing 13% of the total non-agriculture workforce in the state. The survey also projects continued growth and need for highly trained and skilled health care professionals as the population ages and the workforce reaches retirement age. Even in a relatively strong health care sector like Wisconsin, the need for educational institutions and health care training programs to actively engage employers is essential to filling job openings. The [Health Profession Opportunity Program](#) (HPOP) at Gateway Technical College (Gateway Tech) in Wisconsin, a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, has developed a strategy for engagement that balances the needs of employers with the interests of the college and its students.

Gateway Tech HPOP's strategic approach to employer engagement has been driven by three primary objectives: (1) provide employer engagement activities of value while being easily accessible for busy professionals; (2) reinforce the reputation and credibility of the community college as a high quality, state-of-the-art health care training institution; and (3) showcase the professionalism and work readiness of HPOP graduates. With these objectives in mind, HPOP expanded its employer engagement approach to include a number of ongoing activities that serve the interests of employers, the community college, and HPOP program graduates.

Building employer capacity through knowledge sharing

Gateway Tech HPOP hosts employer roundtables, which began in 2011, to create opportunities for employers to network and also to learn from each other. For example, during the Spring 2014 employer roundtable human resources staff from one of the local hospitals delivered a presentation on emerging best practices in patient-centric care through existing

¹ Wisconsin Hospital Association (2012). *Wisconsin's Healthcare Workforce 2012 Report*. Retrieved from: <http://www.wha.org/pubarchive/reports/2012WorkforceReport.pdf>

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human resource processes, i.e., pre-screening, hiring, etc. In addition to employer presentations, HPOP uses the roundtables as forums for employers to receive HPOP program updates and information about credentialed graduates ready to begin their careers. As a follow up to employer roundtables, HPOP has been disseminating an employer-focused newsletter since 2011.

Increasing institutional credibility

As a way to reinforce the quality training provided by Gateway Tech, HPOP conducts Allied Health career open houses to encourage employers to come onto the campus, tour the facilities, meet instructors, and interact with current students and graduates. The open houses, which began in 2013, are publicized through on-campus media but also advertised in community news sources. HPOP staff make a special effort to include alumni from the college's Allied Health program in its outreach efforts. Past alumni attendees will share information about available job openings with HPOP staff.

Strengthening student readiness for improved job placement

In addition to the quality health care instruction delivered to HPOP students, the program leverages the active involvement of employers on its advisory council to strengthen student professional development skills through activities like employer panels. The panels have served to reinforce messages about the demand for professional skills and technical competencies students are learning from employment specialists and instructors. In addition to the employer panels, HPOP offers on-campus and virtual career fairs that attract employers from facilities throughout the region and has incorporated a new hybrid event that's part student graduation celebration and part career fair, called Evening of Excellence. This event brings together top leadership from the college, recent and past graduates, and employers.

As a result of Gateway Tech HPOP's multi-pronged approach to employer engagement, the program has realized consistent gains in job placements for its graduates. According to program performance reports, first-time health care employment increased 83% from 2012 to 2013 and 27% from 2013-2014. In addition, the project's employer engagement approach has helped HPOP exceed its five-year employment goal of 257 placements a full year ahead of schedule. HPOP has been strategic in creating multiple avenues for employers to learn about the program and identify and hire well-prepared employees. Its approach is valued by the employer community and is accessible, both for students and busy health care employers.

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Partner Engagement Roundtable

Kansas Health Profession Opportunity Project at Kansas Department of Commerce

The Kansas Department of Commerce's [Kansas Health Profession Opportunity Project](#) (KHPOP) is a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) funded project of the Office of Family Assistance. KHPOP's local Workforce Area IV affiliate has, over the course of the HPOG grant, used Partner Engagement Roundtables to share successes with partners, address program changes, and discuss new opportunities to improve program enrollment. Workforce Area IV held one such Roundtable before HPOG funding (2010-2011), another before implementation of the HPOG impact study in 2011, and another in December 2014 to increase referrals. KHPOP has found that "soliciting input" from Roundtable participants has "promoted 'buy-in' for the program and yielded better outcomes" in both referrals and in coordination with community partners.

For each Roundtable, Local Area IV conducted an extensive outreach campaign to ensure all relevant community partners could be represented at the event. They sent an email invitation to each partner and included a flyer describing the purpose of the meeting and benefits of participation. Invitees then received follow-up phone calls and emails, as appropriate. At the December 2014 event, which was focused on increasing referrals to the program, the Area IV Program Supervisor provided a report detailing KHPOP's previous year's accomplishments and outlining goals for the following year. Participants then engaged in open, facilitated dialogue about what has worked for the Local Area in the past and how they can do better in the future. KHPOP partners invited to participate in the Roundtable represented organizations that may provide referral sources for the program and other community partners that can help improve program outcomes. They included: His Helping Hands (a faith-based organization), Housing and Community Services City of Wichita, the Department of Children and Families (DCF), SER Corporation (community non-profit helping individuals with job searches and training), Kansas School for Effective Learning (KANSEL), Butler Community College, the Workforce Alliance, and the Department of Commerce.

Kansas's Local Area IV did not experience many challenges with this approach but does note that diligent follow-up with invitees is essential to ensuring representation. Giving participants ownership over the dialogue and creating free-flowing opportunities to discuss ideas also

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facilitated engaging conversation. Local Area IV anticipates repeating this process in the future. KHPOP attributes the success of the Roundtable to:

- **Inviting participants from active *and* inactive networks:** The Roundtable presented a great opportunity to reengage partners that had drifted.
- **Promoting dialogue:** The Roundtable offered participants a chance to share their experiences, as well as opportunities for the collective group to “get the ball rolling” in certain areas, driven by participant ideas and suggestions.
- **Being flexible:** An important aspect of the Roundtable was listening to partner suggestions, including “out of the box” ideas that may provide new opportunities for success.

Partners left the Roundtable with a better understanding of the goals and opportunities between them as well as dispelled any misconceptions partners may have had about the KHPOP program or process. Following the December 2014 Roundtable there has been a noticeable increase in partner participation in the form of referrals, as well as follow-up questions. Workforce Area IV had zero enrollments for December 2014-January 2015, but 13 enrollments the following month, which it attributes to referrals stemming from the Roundtable. KHPOP has also arranged several follow-up meetings with partner organizations to provide additional information about KHPOP to their staff and clients, which will result in improved coordination between organizations and support ongoing referrals.

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CareerWorks HPOG Employer Newsletter

CareerWorks Healthcare Training Institute at the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board

When the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board's (MAWIB) [CareerWorks Healthcare Training Institute](#) (HTI), a project of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance was launched in 2010, MAWIB staff knew that getting employer buy-in may be difficult. HPOG was a new program, targeting a low-income demographic who often face multiple barriers to finding and maintaining employment. As part of their initial outreach to employers, MAWIB hosted an open house celebration of the HTI facility to increase community awareness of the program, but also drum up employer interest. MAWIB staff also developed a HTI brochure targeting prospective employers, summarizing its program, and services available to program participants.

After three years, however, MAWIB realized that it needed to retool its employer engagement approach. According to its performance reporting data, as of September 15, 2013, MAWIB had only met 45% (405 out of 900) of its stated goal for first-time employments in the health care sector. To address this issue, MAWIB staff met with their current employer partners and other relevant stakeholders, including MAWIB board members and foundation partners, about how to better reach employers to improve employment placements. Employers and other stakeholders suggested that HTI should, in addition to explaining the program to employers, also share program results and overall benefits to the health care employer community.

Following this advice, MAWIB developed a quarterly newsletter targeted specifically at employers that would make the case for them to consider partnering with MAWIB and to hire HTI graduates. Three years into the program, HTI had developed a brand in the community, had collected quantitative and qualitative data that it could easily access, and share through this newsletter. MAWIB was careful in developing the newsletter to ensure that it wasn't merely promotional or filled with empty promises, but rather a data-driven communication tool that would succinctly showcase the value of HTI. Typical features in each newsletter include: a

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compelling feature article focusing on a federal, state, or local workforce initiative, grant announcements, or other significant labor market news specific to the health care employer sector, a project scorecard, project highlights, and success stories.

MAWIB turned to its regularly updated database of approximately 400 regional health care recruiters, talent acquisition specialists, and other HR staffers to build its newsletter mailing list. The database largely represents individuals who have attended and/or participated in local job fairs, including those that were hosted by state agencies specific for health care employers. The newsletter is also placed in packets given to employers and other health care stakeholders who are contacted via MAWIB's other outreach efforts and events.

MAWIB's [first employer newsletter](#) was released in April 2014 and they have since issued two more. Following the newsletter releases, MAWIB's internal data shows that it has experienced increases in referrals for enrolling and training incumbent workers from its current employer partners as well as interest from new employers (such as Molina Healthcare, a managed care company). For example, since April 2014, MAWIB has had more than 100 nurse student enrollments and 33 placements. Of those 33, at least seven nursing placements were with employers new to MAWIB since the issuance of the newsletter. MAWIB also attributes seven recent Community Health Worker placements to connections with new employers that became aware of HPOG via the newsletter. Their starting salaries for jobs ranging from program instructors to health care administrators ranged from \$9 to \$36/hour.

Following the first newsletter's announcement of a Career Expo, soliciting employer involvement, 10 health care employers attended, with a combined total of 175 job openings they were looking to fill. MAWIB selected and pre-screened approximately 20 HPOG candidates to refer to these open positions and 13 were hired within 30 days of the Career Expo. MAWIB has had similar successes with subsequent newsletters. MAWIB included information on an August career fair in their July 2014 employer newsletter and 10 health care employers attended the fair with over 300 open job opportunities. Of those 10 employers, five were new to the HPOG project, and placements have since occurred at three of them. One of these new employers, Rodgers Memorial Hospital, has since joined MAWIB's Employer Advisory Group, and is currently building a new hospital in the Milwaukee Area, reaching out to MAWIB to help with fill over 120 job opportunities. Following the release of MAWIB's most recent newsletter in December 2014, an employer partner requested that MAWIB host a mini job fair for employers looking to hire community health workers. Approximately five employers will attend and interview at least 10 pre-screened and job-ready HPOG graduates.

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Since disseminating the newsletter, MAWIB has expanded its connections to local health care employers. As a result of the targeted outreach through its newsletter, MAWIB is now projected to exceed its 5-year goal for first-time employments in the health care sector by 35 individuals. MAWIB's employer newsletter is also becoming an important part of HTI's larger sustainability plan--building new and lasting employer partnerships.

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Removing Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Criminal Histories

New Hampshire Health Profession Opportunity Project at the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs

By young adulthood, millions of Americans already have state or federal criminal histories. The consequences associated with an arrest or conviction can negatively affect one's employment prospects, especially in the health care field, for the rest of one's life. The ability to expunge these records, called an annulment in the state of New Hampshire, provides an important buoy for individuals who have met their conditions of parole and are ready to move forward with their lives.

Early on, the [New Hampshire Health Profession Opportunity Project](#) (NH HPOP), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, decided to accept individuals with prior criminal histories into their training programs. The decision was made, in part, based on feedback from health care employers on the program's business advisory council, who advised NH HPOP that the presence of a criminal record would not automatically disqualify job applicants from employment opportunities in their facilities.

NH HPOP's approach is to reviews applications of individuals with criminal backgrounds on a case-by-case basis. During this initial review, staff collect basic information, such as what the offense was, when it occurred, and what the applicant has done since to move forward. Reviewing these elements is essential to ensuring accepted applicants have the internal commitment, desire, and ability to complete health care training and ultimately to become employed.

Once accepted into the program, case management staff immediately begin working with participants on filing annulment petitions. They review with the participant their criminal history

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to help determine their eligibility for an annulment petition, as well as develop an annulment petition action plan that will include concurrent health care training and employment case planning objectives. Often lengthy and costly, case managers will then guide participants through each step of the filing process, which requires separate petitions and procedures for the required court, state office of corrections, and state safety department filings. Filing fees, which can range from \$100 to \$500, can often be prohibitive for many participants, most of whom have little or no income coming into the NH HPOP program. NH HPOP helps pay these costs, as well as provides tuition assistance to ensure participants can enter and succeed in their health care training.

Beyond helping participants annul their records, NH HPOP case managers also offer intensive and extended case management services to individuals with criminal histories to prepare them for the health care workforce. This includes engaging job development staff early to maximize the time available to prepare annulment petitions, while simultaneously preparing participants for a fruitful job search. Specifically, case managers include coaching on how to disclose their criminal background and how to handle related interview questions. Relatedly, case managers provide participants tips on writing letters of explanation to employers, the courts, and relevant licensing boards. Throughout the case management and annulment process, case managers act as coaches and informed guides to help participants focus on self-advocacy and resiliency skill development. They do not do the work for participants and ensure that each individual takes the lead in completing his or her work.

NH HPOP's investment in participants with prior criminal histories is paying off. As of April 2015, according to internal data, NH HPOP has enrolled 110 individuals with criminal backgrounds. NH HPOP was able to help 58 submit annulment petitions, and 86% of them have successfully entered a health care occupational program. Of those who have entered training, 70% have completed it so far and several more are still in training. As of April 2015, 50% of those who completed a health care training program are now employed in a health care job, with an average increase in wages of 78% (many had not been previously employed).

Access to employment in well-paying jobs that provide opportunities for advancement, like those provided by the NH HPOP program, are widely considered an essential factor against recidivism. Finding health care jobs for individuals with criminal records is possible when programs are flexible, supportive, can help ease the costs associated with annulment, and guide participants through the often long and difficult annulment process.

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Employment Case Manager

Health Profession Opportunity Grant Program at Pensacola State College

In 2013, the staff at [Pensacola State College's Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, identified a gap in services for students who had completed training, started to job search, and were connecting with health care jobs. From June 2013 to December 2013, 8% of HPOG students lost contact with HPOG staff after completing their health care training. During that time, case managers were juggling their focus between students completing training and beginning their job search, and they struggled to keep track of individuals who were no longer in training. Interested in improving supports and contacts with program graduates as they commence job searching, the program created an "Employment Case Manager" position.

This new case manager works closely with the HPOG business service representative to update students about career fairs, employers who are hiring, job readiness workshops, and career service events through the college. The Employment Case Manager also tracks students' employer contacts through an Employment Search Log, which each student fills out and shares with the new case manager. The case manager then closely monitors each student's job search efforts and assists with any barriers that arise. The program also carves out time during weekly staff meetings, which are attended by the new Employment Case Manager, the business service representative, and other HPOG staff, to discuss student progress towards job placement. If, during the meeting, staff identify a student struggling to find employment, he or she is referred to the business service representative for additional assistance.

The Employment Case Manager has been working with HPOG students since January 2014 and the college has experienced noticeable improvements in the number of students who maintain contact with HPOG following program completion. According to performance reporting data, from January 2014 to June 2014 only 4% of HPOG students lost contact with HPOG staff (compared to 8% in the previous six months). In fact, only 2 out of 62 students who were on the Employment Case Manager's caseload during that time lost contact with the program. Overall employment outcomes have also improved in the first half of 2014, going up by about 3%, with now 58% of all students becoming employed. Students assigned to the Employment Case Manager are doing particularly well, with about 84% obtaining employment in their chosen

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health care field. Although the Employment Case Manager position is new, its benefits have already been noticeable and other case managers are now able to focus on monitoring and assisting students in training.

When students complete their health care training, they now receive necessary assistance with job search efforts and are better informed of hiring events, employment resources, and other employment-related activities. The above data suggests that having an Employment Case Manager dedicated exclusively to assisting students with job search activities can help increase program retention as well as improve overall employment outcomes.

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Pre-Class and Weekly Study Groups Increase Student Completion Rates in Occupational Training

Pathways to Healthcare Program at Pima County Community College District

The Nursing Assistant (NA)/Patient Care Technician (PCT) career pathway is the most in demand training program for students participating in Pima County Community College (PCCC)'s [Pathways to Healthcare](#) program, part of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance. For the first three years of the HPOG grant, NA and PCT students averaged a 90% completion rate in their occupational training. Both staff and instructors, however, were concerned about the 10% of students that did not complete their certificate programs. In year four of the grant PCCC began to explore ways they could increase completion rates for this subset of the student population.

Through discussions with students and staff, PCCC found that students often entered the NA class with limited college readiness skills, such as time management, study skills, or test-taking, and often had a hard time comprehending different aspects of the curriculum. In response, the Adult Developmental Instructor, NA/PCT Instructor, and Program Advisor created an approach that would educate students in these needed areas, while increasing completion rates. They developed a two-prong strategy, which included an introductory four hour pre-class to prepare students to enter the NA/PCT class followed by a weekly drop-in study hall offered for the duration of the training.

The program used the pre-class curriculum, titled “Getting Ready for Nursing Assistant,” with three separate NA/PCT cohorts during year four of the HPOG grant. The pre-class included topics on how to manage and organize your time, ways to study, note taking, reviewing class curricula, taking practice tests, and cohort building. A recent NA/PCT graduate would also meet with pre-class participants and share his/her experience in the NA/PCT program, offering advice on how to successfully navigate the experience. Students have been pleased with the

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pre-class opportunity, one noting, “it really prepared me for what the NA/PCT class was going to expect of me. I also liked meeting my classmates before the class began.”

Once students begin the NA/PCT class they are then encouraged to attend a weekly 90 minute study hall. The study hall, run by the NA Instructor and Adult Development Instructor, is a time for students to ask questions about the training and address other issues, ranging from test anxiety to questions about medical terminology. The drop-in format allows students to participate based on their interests and needs. Over time, students who were excelling in the training, as well as those who were struggling, began to attend study hall. “At times the stronger students would end up explaining things to the weaker students which helped them both,” stated Elizabeth Koleski, NA Instructor.

Internal data analyzed by the grantee shows the performance of NA/PCT pathway students. Their completion rates before and after implementation of the pre-class and study hall show it has been a success. Between January 2012 and December 2013 (before implementation), 90% of students who entered the NA training successfully completed it. Ninety-five percent of them continued on to the PCT and 90% of those PCT students completed their PCT training. By comparison, starting in March 2014 (after implementation), 96% of students required to attend the four hour pre-class and optional weekly study hall completed the NA certificate, 93% of whom continued on to PCT training. Of those that continued on to PCT training, 100% completed it. With these documented completion increases, PCCC plans to continue providing pre-class and study hall supports to NA/PCT students to afford all students an optimum learning opportunity.

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Improving Data Management and Support Systems

Allied Health Career Pipeline Program at Research Foundation of City University of New York--Hostos Community College

Midway through Hostos Community College's (Hostos) [Allied Health Career Pipeline](#) (AHCP), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Hostos undertook an intensive review and redesign process to improve its performance measures. By the fall of 2013, year three of its HPOG grant, Hostos was falling short of some of its projected performance goals, along the continuum from enrollment to completion and employment. Having projected five-year enrollment numbers of about 924 students, Hostos' 197 enrollees that year were not enough to ensure it met its projections.

After careful consideration of the best course to take, Hostos AHCP leadership agreed to undergo the difficult task of closely and thoroughly analyzing a range of its business, data, and policy practices to identify and resolve challenging areas. In the fall of 2013, Hostos performed an intensive review, identified strategic areas of need, and implemented new steps to improve its enrollment, completion, and employment performance goals.

To assist in this effort, and with OFA's approval, Hostos engaged a third party management consulting firm from August to December of 2013 that specialized in public and non-profit sector evaluations. The firm worked directly with staff to assess program strengths and weaknesses and made recommendations on how to streamline and improve program effectiveness. Through its review, Hostos and the firm quickly realized that there were opportunities to enhance data collection, tracking, and analysis. Hostos surmised that if it improved its data management and monitoring systems, there would be increased efficiencies. They believed that this could improve enrollments, completions, and job placements.

As a result of the in-depth analysis, Hostos realigned its leadership structure to promote a sustained and long-term focus on system accountability and efficiencies. Hostos created a new Workforce Development Executive Director position to oversee the program and act as the interim Program Director. The Executive Director worked with the firm to identify which

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program areas deserved a close review and decided upon an analysis of outreach and intake processes, tracking and data systems, case management and cohort planning, and career services. The Executive Director then constructed a blueprint to revise to the program. In addition, Hostos brought in new leadership, including a Program Director and a Database Manager. The new Program Director ensured goals and performance results became an integral part of the program's culture, promoting accountability. The new Database Manager revamped data collection tools to create a data-driven culture in every aspect of the program. Combined, these positions created a powerful team to refine Hostos's new focus on improving data system management and ensure tracking became a part of the program's day-to-day work.

As part of this overall revision process, Hostos streamlined several of its data management approaches relating to intake, enrollment, and employment services. First, it developed a single outreach and tracking tool utilizing a spreadsheet that would help plan monthly events based on targeted cohort enrollment. On a monthly basis, staff would review the spreadsheet to identify events they could attend to help increase enrollment goals, such as a local employer health fair or high school career fair. Attending these events helps staff "know the audience" to better tailor outreach strategies.

Hostos also improved how it tracked potential students' progress through the program's intake processes. Enhancing its existing tracking spreadsheet, the new spreadsheet would allow Hostos staff to quickly and easily identify which potential students were missing documents or were not following the proper intake procedures. By improving the tracking form, staff were more easily able to identify applicants who needed extra assistance at intake, decreasing the likelihood of unintentional or avoidable dropouts. Hostos also revisited how it tracked employment and job readiness supports. The program created a new tracking spreadsheet tool, which allowed staff to monitor where a student was in the job placement process. This tool allowed staff to identify and assist students based on their placement in internships, externships, or on-the-job.

Hostos's data management improvements and creation of a supportive leadership structure was successful. Today, Hostos is well positioned to meet its year five goals for the HPOG grant and is working toward the long-term sustainability of the program. According to performance reporting data, Hostos's enrollment, completion, and job placement numbers have increased significantly. From year three to year four, Hostos's enrollments almost doubled (from 197 to 289). Its training completions went up from 165 to 251 and its employment rates nearly doubled (from 87 to 140). Hostos believes that the time and front-end resources it devoted to this careful review process were well worth it as its performance continues to improve across so many measures that affect student success.

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Employer Outreach Team and Engagement Socials

Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry at the San Diego Workforce Partnership, Inc.

During the fourth year of [San Diego Workforce Partnership's](#) (SDWP) [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) project, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, San Diego's contractors and partners have focused intensively on employment strategies. While SDWP students were successfully completing training, due to the prolonged economic slowdown in San Diego, many were not finding jobs. In the program's third year (September 2012 to September 2013), for example, despite having approximately 500 student enrollees complete training, less than half were placed in health care jobs.

To address this issue, SDWP staff assessed their efforts to help students search for jobs and also analyzed local labor market trends through one-on-one consultations with hospitals and other health care employers, both large and small. They used the data they gathered to identify and define barriers or issues that were preventing students from rapid employment placements. They found that students' limited job application and interviewing skills were some of the biggest barriers hindering the program's placement rates. Using this information from the employer interviews, SDWP staff developed new, intensive employer-student engagement strategies to improve placements outcomes.

SDWP's first step in this new, more intensive approach was to support subcontractors in hiring navigators to provide specialized supports for students through the job application process. Navigators also reached out to area health care employers to help facilitate the hiring process.

Next, SDWP created an Employer Outreach Team that was tasked with building new employer partnerships through face-to-face meetings and supporting informal student-employer engagement. SDWP Business Services Representative, Dan Cabrera, facilitated and directed Employer Outreach Team interactions, as well as led new navigators and job developers in creating new employer engagement strategies. His extensive experience with employer

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engagement, job development, and placement activities provided the leadership SDWP and its subcontractors needed to build and sustain a strong job placement team.

One of the first efforts of the Employer Outreach Team was to create networking opportunities for employers and SDWP students. They created an approach, which they call Employer Socials, to informally bring students and employers together. Each subcontractor, with the support of the Employer Outreach Team, would hold a social on a quarterly basis. Socials would include between 15 to 25 student participants, as well as three or more employer participants. In preparation for each social, navigators would prepare students for the event by having them participate in mock job interviews, update their resumes, and receive additional work readiness training.

Each Employer Social is an informal gathering where employers can present information about their company and job openings. Students and employer representatives then have an opportunity to have informal conversations, where students can ask individual questions and prepare for the formal job interview process. This strategy has helped many students in reducing nervous behaviors that can often occur in a formal interview setting. In 2014, the Employer Outreach Team supported 12 Employer Socials among its subcontractors.

Since SDWP began these more intensive efforts to connect employers and students and better support job placement activities, its placement numbers have increased. In 2014, according to performance reporting data, 314 participants obtained health care employment for the first time. This represents a 41% increase from the previous program year's first-time health care employment placements. SDWP attributes this increase to placements following Employer Socials, as well as students' improved preparation for interviews, both due to the support of navigators and job developers at subcontractor sites and participation in the Employer Socials. Students have also reported feeling more prepared and confident in the interview process as a result of attending these events.

Other programs interested in implementing this multi-pronged approach to job placement should be prepared to expand job development staff and to involve a business services representative or manager who can oversee the effort and serve as a liaison to the health care industry. With these additions, job placements can increase and become more predictable.

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Drive to Success: Overcoming Participant Transportation Barriers

Health Profession Opportunity Grant at Schenectady County Community College

[Schenectady County Community College](#) (SCCC) operates a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) project, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, and offers, among other things, certifications for Personal Care Aides (PCA) and Home Health Aides (HHA). Both occupations have very high labor market demand in the Schenectady area; the New York State Department of Labor projects that in that region PCAs are the fastest growing profession in the next 10 years (46.2%), and HHAs will experience 40% growth in the same timeframe.

A critical component to PCA/HHA work, however, is having reliable transportation to get from one client's home to the next. Because of this, potential students often self-select out of training because they simply do not have a vehicle or a means to reliably travel to clients' homes. Others enter the program, get a job, but then cannot maintain it because of transportation issues.

To begin to address these issues, SCCC formed a collaborative partnership with the Schenectady City Mission (a faith-based organization), Schenectady Works (a job training, retention and career advancement program) and Transfinder (a New York-based, national and international leader in student transportation management systems and services). In the spring of 2014, SCCC hosted a planning meeting with its new partners to creatively and collaboratively think about how to resolve transportation issues for entry level workers. The partners conducted a gap analysis and feasibility study related to current transit operations and merged that information with data provided by employers. After two and half months of information and data gathering, SCCC and its partners launched their pilot transportation program in September 2014, called "Drive to Success."

Under the program, volunteers transport employed PCAs and HHAs to and from their places of work. Other key elements of the program include:

- **Navigators:** Navigators assist in creating and encouraging a mutually professional and uplifting environment for participating volunteer drivers and employee passengers. They

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offer basic coaching related to timeliness, positive attitudes, resource-building, and barrier removal. Navigators ride along and assist volunteer drivers in transporting employee passengers to various work-related destinations, while adhering to confidentiality and program guidelines, as well. Having another person in the vehicle also alleviates any employee passenger concerns about getting into the vehicle with an unknown driver.

- **Dispatcher:** The transportation dispatcher is an important logistical coordinator for the entire operation because he receives PCA/HHA schedules from employers and matches them with available volunteer drivers and navigators. He also arranges for alternative transportation if there is a change, cancellation, or delay.
- **Training:** City Mission developed a volunteer driver orientation and training to cover expectations, health privacy rules, and PCA/HHA routing. They also recruited and trained volunteers from a network of faith-based organizations to become drivers.
- **Data-informed transit:** Transfinder used their software for school buses and updated several modules, merging demand for PCA/HHA services, with the availability of volunteer drivers and the identification of efficient travel routes. By determining duration of trips, avoiding construction areas, and accounting for schedule changes, PCA/HHA transportation to and from job sites becomes efficient and on-time.

SCCC's pilot has been a success. Anecdotally, employee morale is up and productivity has improved, while their transportation costs have decreased significantly. In the first month of the pilot, funded by SCCC's HPOG program, Transfinder data shows that three HHAs were driven to and from clients, with help from five navigators and 10 volunteer drivers. These three HHAs went on a combined 160 trips in that month, traveling 843 miles. At the end of the first month, the partners decided to extend the pilot, now funded by other sources, through December 2014 to work out additional details and increase the number of PCA/HHA employees participating in it. From October to December 2014, SCCC transported six HHAs, using eight volunteer drivers and five navigators who, in total, travelled more than 3,800 miles over 594 trips. All PCA/HHA employees who have participated in the program have maintained their employment and some, with SCCC's help, are beginning to work toward independence, finding reliable means of steady transportation.

In its next phase of the project, City Mission plans to add Drive to Success to its already existing Employer Resource Network, which will open the service to employers who are not on the bus route and expand services to other categories of health care workers, such as

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Certified Nursing Aides. SCCC's goal is to inform employers and employees that transportation should never be considered a barrier to successful employment.

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Using Boot Camps to Boost Student Readiness

Project Health Occupations Preparation for Employment at South Carolina Department of Social Services

A boot camp-style training can introduce program candidates to the type of commitment needed to complete coursework, as well as enhance their pre-requisite skill sets. The primary objective of the boot camp approach is to provide a realistic environment where students must learn to adapt to demanding situations typically encountered during their training program and professional life. [Project Health Occupations Preparation for Employment](#) (Project HOPE), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, has used the boot camp approach to introduce individuals to health care occupations and their training requirements. Boot camp training focuses on providing a highly engaging, intensive learning environment at the front-end to ensure a successful transition to and completion of occupational training by the student.

Project HOPE's HPOG program consists of five phases: (1) Recruitment/selection, (2) Boot camp, (3) Introduction to health care, (4) Health career preparation, and (5) Employment readiness/job placement. The boot camp is a four-week intensive training program that incorporates job readiness, academic and hands-on training sessions taught by a team of Project HOPE staff and health science instructors from the technical colleges. The boot camp is an in-residence training program requiring students to attend each session of the boot camp on the community college campus with lodging accommodations nearby. Training content is based on the National Healthcare Foundation Standards and Accountability Criteria curriculum. Topics include: health care academic foundational knowledge; medical terminology and effective communication skills; health care delivery systems; legal and ethical issues; safety practices; and teamwork within a health care environment. All Project HOPE participants are required to complete boot camp prior to entry into any health care occupational training program supported by the project. Additional content includes adult basic education where deficient math, reading, and writing skills are remediated, so participants are able to transfer more easily into a local community or technical college for health care occupational training.

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Boot camp students go through a thorough screening and assessment to determine academic, economic, social, and emotional barriers that could impede student success across all phases of the project—from boot camp to employment placement. From the moment participants enter the boot camp they are surrounded by a team of professionals working to guide them through the program. Career counselors (also known as case managers) and retention advocates (RAs) provide intensive case management to support student success in the accelerated format. RAs, along with students, work closely with job developers and mentors from the health care employment sector to establish clear educational and employment goals consistent with students' intended career pathways. The instructors, retention advocates, job developers, mentors, and students become a supportive, collaborative team who provide encouragement, coaching, and a broad base of support that promotes accountability as students learn to be resilient in the face of the inevitable setbacks along the way.

Project HOPE has implemented boot camps since the beginning of the HPOG program in 2010 and generated compelling results to date. Overall, according to internal data, the project has enrolled 800 participants, 741 of whom have enrolled in the boot camp. Of those 741 boot camp participants 85% completed it and moved on to health care occupational training. Eighty-nine percent of participants completed their certificate training and of those completers, 55% become employed in health care jobs. Wages range for those completers from \$8.50 to \$24.00 per hour (average wage is \$9.29 per hour). Project HOPE's program data also suggests the boot camps are fulfilling their intended purpose—to provide students with intensive educational and case management supports for successful entry and completion of health care occupational training.

Other programs interested in implementing a boot camp should first, and most importantly, target their focus on employment. Project HOPE staff utilize every opportunity to bolster the goal of employment by helping students develop the kind of work ethic demanded by health care employers before training begins. Project HOPE has found the boot camp model an effective means for cultivating the professional skills needed on the job, especially for those with little or no professional work experience and/or who are transitioning off of public assistance.

Second, with its intense focus on accountability, the boot camp model requires careful attention to participant benchmarks and a wraparound support system to enable student success. Case management is a team effort between the instructors, career counselors, RAs, job developers, and health care mentors. Project HOPE has found this to be the right mix of skills and staffing to enable student success in the boot camp. Career counselors and RAs are particularly important to this effort—providing intensive yet compassionate case management while

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maintaining a system of accountability with students. Project HOPE's boot camp has been an important first step for hundreds of students seeking better wages, better jobs, and a better life for their families.

Promising Practices

Empowerment-Based Workforce Development Model

Pathway to Health Care Occupations at Southland Health Care Forum, Inc.

[Southland Health Care Forum](#) (Southland), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance in Chicago Heights, Illinois, provides low-income individuals with education, training, and supportive services that prepare them to enter and advance in the health care field. Southland's applicants often face many barriers to successfully completing their training, frequently related to students' lack of self-confidence and poor academic experiences.

Since 2010, Southland has used an empowerment-based workforce development model to arm students with the inner power and belief that they can complete their employment training, obtain certification, and advance in their chosen profession. Southland's empowerment model is premised on the notion that psychological self-sufficiency (PSS) positively affects economic self-sufficiency (ESS), including a student's capacity to find and retain a health care job. PSS represents a dynamic individual process where students overcome perceived employment barriers and develop "employment hope" within the realities of their career goals. "Employment hope" is when a student is psychologically empowered along a goal-oriented career pathway. A student's employment hope is intimately related to his or her perceived barriers, both of which must be addressed in tandem.

Southland incorporates principles of PSS into its empowerment model approach by offering students intensive life skills training and case management augmented by regular peer-to-peer group meetings focused on problem solving skills and coping mechanisms.

As a part of the model, Southland also divides students into cohorts based on similar barriers they face. Within cohorts, students participate in group training on life skills and problem solving techniques and are taught how to use peer-to-peer interactions to help each other. Students then use their peer-to-peer problem solving skills in their health care training classes to help each other solve academic and personal problems. As a result, the model has helped

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students increase their resiliency, improve self-esteem, self-efficacy, future orientation, and goal setting.

In 2010, Southland partnered with Dr. Philip Hong of Loyola University of Chicago, an HPOG University Partnership Research grantee to evaluate its empowerment model. With Dr. Hong, Southland and other Chicago-area HPOG programs combined to study how PSS and supportive services make a difference in program success. As part of the evaluation, all program participants were asked to participate in four surveys (at the start, middle, end of the program, and six months after program completion). As of January 2015, this ongoing survey of Southland students has had 328 (86%) participants complete the first survey, 265 (70%) complete the second survey, and 149 (39%) complete the third survey. Over the four points at which each HPOG student was surveyed, 66.3% reported having increased in their “employment hope” and 55.8% reported having decreased in their perceived employment barriers. The survey also collected basic demographic information, measured feelings and attitudes participants had towards employment, and asked about their barriers to employment.

Dr. Hong also held focus groups of Southland staff, employers, alumni, and current students to supplement the survey data, as well as consolidated and analyzed discreet PSS measures relating to perceived barriers and “employment hope.” His overall preliminary findings suggest that students’ hopes and beliefs in their capacities to become employed are affected by their perceptions about the barriers they face. These beliefs and perceptions, he found, ultimately affect students’ ability to complete the program, obtain, and retain employment.

Southland is using these findings to bolster its empowerment model--having HPOG employment specialists work closely with students to overcome fears and build hope and motivation throughout their training and beyond. Southland is also engaging employers in this process through internships and employment, ensuring they understand the model and challenges faced by HPOG students.

Southland hopes that these findings will prompt other programs to consider using PSS as another tool to help coach and support their students. As more evidence is gathered on PSS, it is poised to become an important enhancement in community college core health care training programs.

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Building a Foundation for Success: HPOG Student Orientation and Mid-Semester Support Group

Suffolk County Healthcare Occupational Opportunity for Learning at Suffolk County Department of Labor

The Suffolk County Department of Labor in Hauppauge, New York has been a grantee of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, since 2010. In February 2012, Suffolk's HPOG program, Project Suffolk County Health Occupational Opportunity for Learning (Project SCHOOL), began implementing a two-part group orientation for all participants that addresses student retention, completion, and achievement. It was believed that this innovation, which included an all-student orientation meeting and mid-semester support group, would enhance students' experiences, lead to better grades, and stronger student retention and completion rates.

In designing the approach, Project SCHOOL first looked to staff members who had experience and training in meeting facilitation. The program also researched the most pertinent information to share with students to make the meetings timely and relevant to their needs, either at the beginning or the middle of their training experience. Project SCHOOL also assessed staff schedules to ensure the right staff would have time to prepare for the group meetings and any follow-up. Finally, the program made sure that the meeting times would be convenient not only for staff, but for students.

The student orientation meeting, held at the American Job Center before classes start, is an opportunity for scholarship recipients to meet classmates and to address concerns and questions as they embark upon their health care training experience. The mandatory meeting, which lasts approximately two and a half hours, is also a chance for facilitators to explain the unique features and benefits of Project SCHOOL. Facilitators explain the types of encouragement and supports students will receive, helping alleviate any fears they may have as they begin their health care training program. At student orientation, students are also given

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tips for balancing home-life and school responsibilities, which may relate to child care, time budgeting, study habits, and managing stress. Students are also urged to partner with other productive students and to mentor one another.

Halfway through the semester, students are asked to return to the American Job Center for a two and a half hour mid-semester support group meeting. During this time, students discuss their coursework, their challenges, and next steps after graduation--job searching. During the meeting, the Project SCHOOL staff offer students training on resume development, interviewing skills, networking, and job search strategies. Students are also encouraged to use the placement services at their schools, as well as the American Job Center's resources. Students participate in a tour of the American Job Center, where staff share information about upcoming job fairs, employee recruitments, and event schedules. The meeting also includes dedicated time for dialogue between facilitators and participants. If/when facilitators learn about specific individual student needs, they follow up with those students to provide needed supports.

As an example of the benefits of this process, Thadine and Cornisha, both Certified Nursing Assistant students at Western Suffolk Board of Cooperative Educational Services, met at their student orientation meeting. They became friends during the program and supported one another throughout their training journey. Thadine was the stronger classroom student and Cornisha was the stronger clinical student. When Cornisha found out that she did not pass the classroom portion of the course, it was Thadine who convinced her to re-take the course with additional encouragement from Project SCHOOL staff. Cornisha signed up to re-take the course the following semester and is on her way to graduating. Thadine is now attending the clinical portion of the Nursing Assistant program and is excelling with Cornisha's support.

Project SCHOOL has heard many similar stories of friendships, support, and encouragement because of its two-part orientation/support group approach. Since February 2012, over 550 students have attended these orientations and mid-semester meetings and according to performance reporting data Project SCHOOL student completion rates have increased by 15%. Using Project SCHOOL's internal data to track a cohort of students who attended the orientations, the grantee found that student completion rates improved from 74% to 89%. Project SCHOOL's placement rates have also increased. Twenty eight participants secured employment during the first year of Project SCHOOL's grant, while a total of 288 individuals secured employment during years two through four--an average of 96 placements per year.

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Changing TANF Recruitment Strategies

Health Information Professions at Temple University

Temple University's [Health Information Professions](#) (HIP), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, provides Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals an opportunity to be trained in and enter the in-demand health information field. To meet Temple's TANF student enrollment objectives, it formed stronger partnerships with state and local TANF programs. These partnerships have helped HIP recruit potential students, assess their eligibility, and invite them to information sessions where they take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

Around the summer of 2012, HIP began to struggle with recruiting TANF participants. The requirements of Pennsylvania's TANF program (the Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network, known as EARN,) impacted staff's ability to go onsite and make presentations to TANF staff about the program and recruit participants. HIP's single orientation and testing session per cohort to assess basic skills of interested HPOG applicants was also making it difficult for EARN centers to refer clients. EARN centers could only refer clients to HIP if they had completed a 90-day job search, had time for training, and the client was not on extended TANF.¹ EARN centers also struggled to hold potential students until the next HIP information session--the wait time was simply too long, and the clients needed to participate in work and/or training activities to continue to receive TANF.

To address these challenges, HIP began to analyze its referral data in July 2012 to assess its referral sources. A few months later, in January 2013, the Temple HPOG Advisory Board met to discuss HIP recruitment strategies. HIP's evaluation team presented statistics related to recruitment and enrollment, sharing information about which target populations recruits were

¹ Under federal law, states have the option to extend TANF beyond 5 years (60 months) to a limited number of families on the basis of hardship. Extended TANF can give families the ability to receive cash assistance contingent upon participation in employment or other work activities designed to move them toward economic independence.

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coming from, what subsequent enrollment numbers looked like, and what those trends meant for the HIP program. For example, the data showed that a high percentage of TANF recipients failed to attend their HIP orientation sessions compared to applicants receiving other types of safety net supports, such as unemployment insurance. From the beginning, a smaller number of TANF recipients were being included in the final pool of applicants applying for the HIP program. The presentation also clearly showed that referrals from EARN centers were low to begin with and consistently decreased over time. The HIP evaluation team shared that in July 2012, TANF enrollment was at 20%, but dropped to 9% by September 2012. TANF enrollment was at 0% in October 2012 and recruitment for the next cohort in March 2013 had no referrals from EARN centers. The HIP team was worried that if something did not change, it was not going to reach its projected enrollment numbers for TANF recipients.

Following this meeting and discussion, HIP began to systematically identify and implement targeted enrollment strategies that would help boost referrals and enrollments for TANF participants. First, HIP increased the number of TABE testing/information sessions so that EARN centers could more easily refer TANF recipients. This strategy not only increased the number of TANF referrals, but allowed HIP staff to more easily follow-up with a smaller pool of potential students for each session and if a potential student missed a session, they could easily enroll them in the next one.

Next, HIP connected with Sanje Dawdanow, the Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency through Employment and Training (RESET) Program Manager at the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. HIP coordinated with Mr. Dawdanow to participate in a monthly EARN administrators meeting where HIP staff presented on the HPOG program, sharing program timelines and benefits. Mr. Dawdanow was then able to provide technical assistance and guidance to EARN center managers about when to refer potential students and how to report HIP training in their TANF automated reporting system so the HPOG participants' training and employment outcomes were tracked correctly and RESET was credited for the HPOG participants' hours.

HIP staff also began participating in EARN center cluster meetings. These meetings were an excellent venue for staff at Temple and the county staff and other partners to get to know one another better. County staff became more familiar with the Temple HIP program and Temple's staff became more familiar with TANF regulations and resources. It also helped HIP identify those individuals who are not referred from the EARN centers, but are receiving TANF or other forms of public assistance, so students could be properly assessed, served with TANF resources, and counted as receiving TANF in HIP's numbers. With enhanced contact with

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TANF staff, eligibility issues were handled much more quickly and efficiently; an advisory board was created to tackle recruitment issues for HIP; and other partners joined the meetings, such as child care and health centers, so resources could be managed and utilized more efficiently for students.

Since implementing the above changes, HIP's performance reporting data shows that its TANF recruitment and enrollment numbers are on the rise. HIP has received increased referrals from the EARN centers, as well as referrals from other community agencies serving TANF clients. Seventeen percent of HIP's October 2014 and January 2015 cohorts were referred from EARN centers, and 29% of those two cohorts were receiving TANF. Today, 21% of all of HIP's students are receiving TANF, but moving toward self-sufficiency with the help of the HIP program. Temple's HIP program continues to concentrate efforts to develop and improve partnerships with other community agencies to help increase enrollment of those on TANF and other forms of public assistance.

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Life Skills Coaching Improves Participant Outcomes

The Health CareRx Academy at The WorkPlace, Inc.

Since its inception, a key component of [The WorkPlace](#)'s Health CareRx Academy program (Academy), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, has been its seven day Foundational Skills Workshop. Every Academy participant must complete the seven day, intensive course before enrolling in Academy health care training programs. The workshop, which is supported by several local community partners, including the Morrison Group and the Connecticut League for Nursing, aims to put all future Academy students on a level playing field in terms of their academic and emotional readiness to participate in training and find and retain a health care career.

Prior to participation in the workshop, each participant must complete a diversity and personality assessment, as well as research health care occupations that may be of interest to them. During the workshop, participants engage in courses that teach them about work readiness, goal setting, stress management, and health care customer service.

Despite the level of rigor and length of the workshop, by 2013 (year two of their grant), the Academy found that many participants were not passing the workshop phase of their training or not completing their training program. This prompted the Academy to take a critical look at what was happening to participants and what barriers they were facing that would prompt them to drop out. "We were paying for all costs," said Ashley McGuffie, Health CareRx Academy Director, "transportation, child care, tuition, and books...but participants were still not successful. We had to look back and determine what they needed to be successful." The Academy revisited participants' assessment forms and met with workshop facilitators. What they found was that many failed participants lacked the organizational and life skills they needed to succeed in a training program. As Ms. McGuffie put it, "if the barrier was transportation, getting a participant a car wouldn't help, if they didn't know how or where to get the license."

With a goal of improving participant retention and their ultimate success in the job market, the Academy developed a partnership with a local service provider, [Stamford Clinical Services](#)

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(Stamford), to build upon the life skills component of the Academy's seven-day workshop. In the fall of 2013, the Academy contracted with Stamford to offer life skills coaching courses within the foundational Workshop, as well as offer one-on-one coaching of up to two sessions for approximately 30 Academy participants. Stamford's owner, Alejandra Hockstedler, who specializes in cognitive behavioral approaches, mindfulness, and neuroplasticity as an integrative evidence-based approach, began offering the workshop life skills training to all Academy enrollees and individual support to selected Academy participants who self-identified or were identified by Academy staff.

Within six months, however, the Academy realized that two one-on-one sessions was simply not enough for participants to build the life skills they needed to succeed in the training program. The Academy amended their contract with Stamford, allowing Hockstedler to have increased one-on-one and group interactions with selected Academy participants.

Today, for each participant identified as needing additional life skills supports, Hockstedler meets with them individually two to three times over the course of their training. During that time, she develops and helps participants implement an individualized "life plan." Each life plan identifies the specific barriers the participant may be facing and breaks down solutions into easy and digestible steps that the participant can implement. The life plan is also adjustable, depending on participants' changed circumstances or needs. Hockstedler convenes small groups where participants facing similar barriers, such as transportation or day care coverage, meet to collaboratively problem-solve. The Academy has found these group sessions to be invaluable for participants in building their self-confidence and life skills. "They are building their life plans on the same trajectories," said Ashley McGuffie, Academy Director; "they are building shared support systems and learning to problem solve, not only for others, but themselves."

A core principle of the Academy has always been to be client-focused. The Academy builds teams of professionals around their participants to ensure each succeeds in training and in work. Infusing life skills coaching into the program for those participants who have needed it has increased the Academy's retention and employment rates. Since the life coaching program began, the program has reviewed internal data and found that approximately 60 participants have completed it. Fifty-nine of the 60 that have participated in the life skills program are still moving through the Academy's training and only one dropped out, which was due to health issues. The Academy believes that these participants' future completions will boost the program's overall completion and employment rates, as evidenced by their high and improving retention rates.

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Summing up the program, Ashley McGuffie said, “this isn’t just about identifying barriers, it’s about finding solutions.” Our life skills program, she said, is helping people become proactive and gain the organizational skills they need in life and work. “Too many of our participants were giving up on themselves before they even took the opportunity to succeed,” she stated. With this program, she said, they are gaining that language, those skills, and capacities to “pull themselves up” and build their self-confidence.

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Early Employer Relations/Job Development Interventions for Students

Project CHOICE at Turtle Mountain Community College

Starting in September 2013, [Turtle Mountain Community College](#)'s (TMCC) Project CHOICE, a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) initiative funded by the Office of Family Assistance, began connecting Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) students to their Employer Relations/Job Developer (ERJD) office during the beginning of CNA classes and during Project CHOICE orientation. Project CHOICE's goals with this effort have been to introduce students to the concept of a health care career pathway, the critical stages of job development, and to help students visualize early the possibility of finding employment outside the local community.

Once connected to the ERJD office, the approach engages Project CHOICE students in a series of job development and career planning activities, including identifying locations outside the Turtle Mountain reservation they would be willing to relocate to for employment. In collaboration with ERJD office personnel, Project CHOICE staff lead students along a five phase employment and career pathways development process (also known as the Student Transition Plan). While TMCC offers the five phase supports to all Project CHOICE students, the project makes a concerted effort to target CNA students, as they represent their largest training occupation.¹

TMCC's job development support system includes:

- **Phase One:** Orienting students to the basic concept of job development--career interest assessment, development of an employment plan, and setting up ongoing meetings with the job developer.

¹ In 2014, Project CHOICE's total enrolled student caseload comprised nearly 63% CNAs (77 of the 123 actively enrolled students).

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- **Phase Two:** Students work intensively with ERJD coaches on steps to develop tailored and effective resumes.
- **Phase Three:** For those interested in off-reservation employment, this phase involves Project CHOICE staff accompanying students to job sites to meet with hiring managers throughout North Dakota. These trips include investigating housing options, connecting with tribal support organizations and, when possible, meeting with a tribal mentor (e.g., former TMCC graduates working in the area).
- **Phase Four:** This phase commences after students identify a position of interest and involves ERJD and CHOICE staff assisting students in applying and preparing for the job opening (e.g., conducting mock interviews).
- **Phase Five:** The final phase involves providing students moving off-reservation for employment with transition supports such as short-term rental, child care, and transportation subsidies.

The need to move students along a career pathway that possibly takes them outside of their local community stems primarily from the dearth of local employment opportunities. In TMCC's experience, students are hesitant to leave their local community, family, and cultural supports even at the prospect of securing a well-paying job. The five-phase job and career development process helps students envision the long-term steps of job development, familiarize themselves with non-local environments, and create connections to potential employers and community assets outside the Turtle Mountain reservation.

While job placement continues to pose challenges for TMCC, the program's five-phase early and ongoing job development intervention has shown promise. In December 2014, TMCC's performance reporting data showed that they had 55 successful CNA job placements--well exceeding their original target of 42 for 2014. The intervention has also increased CNA student motivation to enroll and complete the program. For CNA students, TMCC exceeded its enrollment (77 out of a target of 64) and completion (70 out of a target of 64) outcomes for 2014. Moving forward, TMCC anticipates an increased number of off-reservation job placements (both for CNA and other training categories) as student knowledge of these supports increase and staff become more adept at connecting with employers and mentors outside the reservation.

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Improving Supports to the Pharmacy Technician Externship Program

Healthcare Careers--Skilled Workers, Strong Earnings at Will County on Behalf of the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago

The Pharmacy Technician Training Program in suburban Chicago, Illinois is a project of Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), a sub-contractor of the [Workforce Investment Board of Will County](#), a [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance. JVS has operated the Pharmacy Technician Externship program on behalf of Will County since 2013.

Externships are a critical component of any pharmacy technician training program. In years past, JVS pharmacy technician trainees began their externships after they finished their vocational classroom experience. This often added at least two to three months to the program for each trainee, extending the time they had to wait before beginning job placement activities. Technician trainees would not have access to support services or job counselors until their externships ended. This linear process, however, didn't provide the strong and sustained supports many students needed to succeed.

JVS, therefore, redesigned their Pharmacy Technician Training Program in two phases. In the first phase, in late 2013, JVS began its background and drug testing efforts earlier in the program, so that trainees could begin externships sooner. They also moved licensure courses to earlier in the curriculum, so that trainees could obtain the licenses they needed to begin their externships. Because background and sex offender checks can take some time, JVS also began these checks once a trainee was accepted into the program and before training began. All these efforts have helped expedite externship and later job placements.

In the second phase of the re-design, in 2014, additional supports were built into the vocational training program to bolster the job placement process. For example, students would receive drug testing paperwork on the first day of class and as a homework assignment had to

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complete it within the first week of training. Additionally, once trainees received their necessary licenses, JVS gave them externship materials and instructors encouraged them to begin connecting with pharmacy managers to discuss externship opportunities. JVS staff would provide support and suggestions throughout this process, as needed. JVS's goal would be to provide as much support as each trainee needed, but also to encourage trainees to work independently and use the externship search experience as practice for their post-training job search. Overall, JVS found that securing externships during training boosted trainees' confidence and helped ready them for successful job searches after program completion.

Requiring staff to conduct training, help students find and secure externships, as well as evaluate externship experiences all at the same time, however, was an adjustment. JVS helped staff adapt by moving certain topics to later in the training curriculum and shifting work to other team members, when needed.

Trainees have benefited greatly from the revised externship process. Each trainee is able to participate in an externship experience while maintaining the supports of the classroom and regular JVS staff engagement. Students are afforded classroom time, about 30 minutes per classroom period, to discuss their externship work, troubleshoot, and collectively problem-solve. JVS's job placement specialists and trainees form working relationships with pharmacy managers at each externship site, giving trainees a 'leg-up' with potential employer hiring managers. JVS's employer service representatives also visit each externship site twice during the trainee's externship--dropping off evaluation forms and reminding the pharmacy manager of the trainee's graduation date and potential availability for work.

The combination of these efforts has boosted JVS's employment rates. According to JVS's internal data, before the pharmacy technician training was changed only two trainees had secured employment from their externship site. Following the 2013 changes to the program, that number went up to six or 21% and since the 2014 change it has gone up to 16 students or 57%.

Overlapping trainee externship and vocational training experiences offers trainees a supportive environment to begin their first steps toward a health care career. It helps avoid long waits for licensing and background checks and ensures trainees are ready to begin employment after program completion.

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Health Careers for Youth Model

Health Careers for All at the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County

[Health Careers for All](#) (HCA), a project of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) (HPOG) program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance, is a multi-faceted program serving youth and adults. The youth component of HCA, known as Health Careers for Youth (HCY), is designed to make education and employment in health care more accessible to low-income youth, including bilingual youth of color. The model helps participating youth earn college credit while still in high school, explore health care careers, and gain industry-recognized credentials. HCY students engage in career exploration and planning, develop skills for college success, and learn health care content. Students participate in classroom and hands-on learning activities, gain certifications in CPR, first aid, and blood borne pathogens (AIDS/HIV). In addition, some HCY students take the complete training for Certified Nursing Assistants (NA-C).¹

HCY is a summer cohort model, approximately seven to eight weeks in length, typically serving 14-18 students per cohort, and offered on three King County community/technical college campuses. One campus typically offers a cohort designed for students who may not yet be ready, or are not interested in NA-C training, and the two others offer cohorts built around the NA-C curriculum.

In the first case, activities include classroom instruction in health and nutrition, lab time focused on basic clinical skills (blood pressure, patient transfer, etc.), academic/college success (e.g., math), and field trips and speakers designed to expose youth to a wide variety of occupations in the health care field. These students also complete first aid/CPR and AIDS/HIV instruction and conclude the course with a presentation to their peers regarding a specific health care occupation that they have chosen to research during the course. Presentations include labor market/employment data and information about education/training requirements for the chosen occupation.

¹ In Washington State, individuals can become licensed as either a Registered Nursing Assistant (NA-R) or a Certified Nursing Assistant (NA-C). NA-C and the more commonly used CNA are interchangeable acronyms for Certified Nursing Assistant.

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In the second case, students typically receive orientation to college/college success skills instruction and career exploration activities wrapped around the college's accredited NA-C curriculum. These students complete the first aid/CPR and AIDS/HIV instruction as well, but also complete both NA-C theory and clinical site-based instruction. At the successful conclusion of the program, these students are eligible to sit for the national NA-C credentialing exam.

Participating students range from rising high school juniors to high school graduates/dropouts in their late teens. For students returning to high school, HCY can inform both their course planning during their junior and/or senior years, as well as longer-term planning for college and careers. For older students, the NA-C credential can be a gateway to immediate employment and the first step on a career ladder.

Since the summer of 2011, the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County (WDC) has been supporting summer HCY cohorts under its HPOG grant in partnership with Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth service providers and area colleges. Over four summers, nearly 200 youth have participated in HCY with 83% of students successfully completing their training. Of those 200, 133 youth enrolled in NA-C training, a rigorous program that is additionally intense during the compressed summer quarter. According to internal data a significant majority of these youth (77%) have successfully completed NA-C training, and more than two-thirds of them have taken and passed the national NA-C credentialing exam. A small number of the older students have moved directly on to NA-C employment, but others have returned to high school or gone on to college/more advanced health care training.

This model is particularly well-suited to youth because it is a relatively short-term commitment with tangible benefits, and provides intensive, hands-on exposure to health care. The program has both prepared youth for additional training and/or employment, as well as helped participants assess whether or not clinical health care work is a fit for them. Qualitative data collected through a survey instrument suggest that students find the HCY experience valuable in their development, noting in particular the value of “hands-on” learning opportunities (labs, field trips, guest speakers, clinical site instruction) to help clarify their career goals. Preliminary analysis of this data suggests an increase over the short duration of HCY in student commitment to a career in health care, as well as increases in “developmental assets” (e.g., social competencies, positive identity, internal assets, social context).

Because the model is built as a partnership of the WDC, its WIA service providers, and area colleges, students are able to continue to receive support following their participation in

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summer HCY cohorts. For example, the WDC covers training costs during the summer under its HPOG grant, but because the students are co-enrolled in WIA, they also receive case management and support service assistance as needed throughout the summer and as they transition to their next steps following the summer training. This may include return to high school, dual enrollment in high school and college, paid work experience through WIA-funded internships, employment placement, or transitions to post-secondary. Students who are unable to successfully complete are similarly supported to transition to appropriate next steps, and support service funding may be used to assist students to re-take coursework or certification exams as necessary. The colleges also support students who are transitioning directly to post-secondary institutions, facilitating connections to registration and financial aid systems and funding streams where students are eligible.

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High Impact Tutorial Practices

Northeast Louisiana Professional Healthcare Opportunities--Careers and Support at the Workforce Investment Board SDA-83, Inc.

The [Northeast Louisiana Professional Healthcare Opportunities--Careers and Support](#) (PHOCAS) project at the Workforce Investment Board SDA-83, Inc., a grantee of the [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) program funded by the Office of Family Assistance, knows that all of its students can succeed. They have implemented a strategy called High Impact Tutorials that adapts to students' needs by "teaching to the student" instead of merely "teaching the student."

PHOCAS reports that over 300 of its 1,200 students have voluntarily participated in High Impact Tutorials (tutorials) since 2013, when the practice began. The tutorials are small group learning sessions facilitated by a health sciences instructor/tutor. Based on students' own reporting, verified by instructors, grades and completion rates have improved since the beginning of the tutorials. Basic components of the approach include:

- Working in small groups.
- Using flexible formats to deliver content.
- Collaboration with classroom instructors.

Working in small groups

Tutorials are offered to students prior to the class start date. Students volunteer to join the group but there is also an opportunity for instructors to suggest that students join the program. PHOCAS has found that the mutual support study group members offer each other connects them to their learning community and increases persistence levels. Because many of the students in PHOCAS are working toward passing a Certification Exam, such as the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nursing (NCLEX-PN), these small groups give students an opportunity to drill one another with practice questions. Tutors also meet individually with some students, as well as facilitate the small group meetings.

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Using flexible formats to deliver content

A key component to tutorials is also using a proactive, rather than reactive, tutoring model. Tutors will help students with reading comprehension, time management, and organization skills. Tutors regularly ask, “if you were the instructor, and you wanted to make sure this class knows the material, how would you go through the chapter and what you would put on the test?” Taking this approach helps students learn in new and different ways--changing their perception on how best to study. Tutors also use a practice called “flipped learning,” which allows students to learn concepts in advance of classroom time, where they can practice what they learned with the tutors and other students to make sure they understand and have mastered it. For students who cannot afford to purchase books until the first day of class, this gives them an important first glance at textbook materials. It has also helped prepare students for their quizzes and exams throughout the semester.

Collaboration with classroom instructors

It has also been important to have PHOCAS program instructors supportive and involved in the tutorial process. For example, instructors identify content that needs to be addressed during the tutoring process. They have found that the proactive flipped learning and reactive tutoring approaches have also created a more interactive classroom dynamic that increases student preparedness and success.

Since implementing tutorials in 2013, according to performance reporting data, training completion rates have increased overall by 35%. Reviewing a sampling of 50 students who received tutorial services from December 2013 to December 2014, PHOCAS found that 88% of them earned their credentials in the health care field, ranging from Patient Care Technicians and Certified Nursing Assistants to Registered Nurses. In addition, 100% of those students who passed their state board exams attained employment in the health care field. By comparison, students who did not receive tutorial services have about a 50% training completion rate--much lower than the 88% experienced by tutorial students. PHOCAS has found that by meeting students “where they live intellectually” and offering High Impact Tutorials, student outcomes improve as does the program’s demand for excellence.

