



31st Wisconsin Family Impact Seminar February 13, 2013

Preparing Wisconsin's Youth for Success in the Workforce

This seminar was funded by the School of Human Ecology, the School of Social Work, and the College of Letters and Science at UW-Madison, and Cooperative Extension at the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Executive Summary

Young people have been hit harder by unemployment than any other age group in the current recession. Unemployment among 16- to 24-year-olds has doubled over the past decade, with low-income, minority teens especially hard hit. For decades, efforts have been made to reform K-12 education, promote college enrollment, and enhance work-based learning. Yet academic achievement and college graduation rates have failed to improve. Many U.S. employers still complain that today's young adults do not have what it takes to succeed in the 21st century labor market. This report presents cutting-edge research on the most effective, evidence-based strategies for preparing our youth for success in the workforce. Two approaches in particular offer some of the strongest evidence for improving the life prospects of youth—early childhood education and Career Academies for making high school more engaging and career-relevant. Working together, youth, families, schools, employers, and policymakers can ensure that today's generation of youth do not get left behind in the global economy.

William Symonds

In the first chapter of this report, William Symonds from the Pathways to Prosperity Project at Harvard University provides an overview of the factors that influence youth workforce success and strategies states are using to create more and better career pathways for students. The United States is no longer a global leader in education. Many of our youth are not developing the skills they need to prosper in the 21st century economy. Unless we equip youth with the education and workforce skills they need to succeed, we are in danger of leaving millions of young people on the sidelines, severely jeopardizing our nation's ability to remain competitive in a global economy. Harvard's 2011 Pathways to Prosperity report challenges the prevalent mentality that a four-year college degree is the best path for all students, and argues instead that we need to create multiple pathways for youth to succeed. These pathways must combine rigorous academics with strong career/technical education and work-based learning that provide the skills and credentials youth need in today's changing labor market. All this will involve intensive collaboration between youth, families, schools, employers, and

policymakers. Multiple local, state, and national initiatives are described that hold promise for improving economic and life outcomes for struggling youth.

James Kemple

The second chapter of this report by Dr. James Kemple of New York University describes Career Academies, one of the best-studied and most successful models for helping youth transition into work and family life. Over the last 40 years, Career Academies have become a widely used high school reform that aims to keep students engaged in school and prepares them for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment. Career Academies are organized as small learning communities within high schools that combine academic and technical curricula around a career theme. They also work with local employers to provide career-based learning opportunities. Since 1993, MDRC has been conducting a rigorous evaluation of the Career Academy approach in a diverse group of nine high schools across the United States. Career Academies have been shown to improve labor market outcomes, especially for young men. Eight years after scheduled graduation, young men in Career Academies had earned an average total of nearly \$30,000 more than their peers. In addition, young men in Career Academies were more likely to be married, to be custodial parents, and to be living independently with their children.

Seminar Presenters

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Timothy Bartik

In the third chapter, Dr. Timothy Bartik of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research shows how investing in children at the earliest stages of life can have lasting effects on children's future employment outcomes. High-quality early childhood programs provide sizable benefits to state and local economies. For each \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood programs, a state economy will get a \$2 to \$3 return on investment, measured by increased jobs or earnings for state residents. Such benefits are similar in magnitude to what states would get from investing in well-designed business incentives. Benefits come mainly from the effects on child participants, who are more likely to be educated, trained, and employed as adults. In addition, when stable, affordable, high-quality child care is available, parents are able to improve their productivity by putting in more work hours, missing fewer work days, experiencing less stress, and/or pursuing education. Ensuring that early childhood programs are of high quality is key to fully realizing their benefits. Although it can be a challenge to finance early childhood programs up front, states can capitalize on several substantial short-term benefits that these programs produce. Over the long term, these programs will pay for themselves.

L. Allen Phelps

The final chapter by Dr. L. Allen Phelps of the University of Wisconsin-Madison overviews the efforts Wisconsin already has in place to help prepare youth for the workforce. Since establishing the nation's first apprenticeship program in 1911, the State of Wisconsin has sponsored an array of programs designed to prepare youth for workforce success. For more than a century, Wisconsin has supported a two-tier or dual strategy designed to address workforce preparation and development priorities, with a largely separate focus on preparing youth for college versus careers. The current economic slowdown

has heightened the importance of providing high-quality job preparation for youth and adults in all education and training settings, from K-12 through graduate and professional schools. This chapter overviews promising career preparation options for high school students in the state, including the Youth Apprenticeship Program, Project Lead the Way, Youth Options, and Dual Credit opportunities. Although a relatively high percentage of the state's young adult population (18-24) either has a degree or is enrolled in postsecondary education, a lack of data exists on how and why these students are not succeeding in college and/or in the economy. Such information is vital to improving the state's workforce productivity.

Families are the cornerstone for preparing youth to succeed in the workforce and in adult life. Families are key to producing the human capital that businesses need to remain competitive and innovative. Human capital in today's knowledge-based economy requires both hard and soft skills, which are shaped, to a large extent, by socialization that occurs early in family life and in early childhood programs. Families are also pivotal in encouraging older youth to explore career choices and to set high educational and career goals. Families are increasingly important given the prolonged transition to adulthood in recent years, with youth requiring far more time to complete their education, secure employment, form stable families, and establish financial independence. This strains the resources of parents at the same time that it limits the earnings potential of youth and impedes economic growth. In turn, young people's preparation for the workforce affects their family life. When youth are exposed to career-related experiences during high school, this can improve their labor market prospects and ease their transition into marriage and family life. Two key economic development tools that policymakers have at their disposal are strengthening today's families and providing youth with the education and workforce skills needed to build strong families tomorrow. ■

Where research meets family policy

The Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars are a continuing series of policy forums that provide policymakers with objective, high-quality research on issues such as jobs, evidence-based budgeting, growing the state economy, cost-effective corrections programs, long-term care, prisoner reentry, health care quality and cost, and workforce development. The Seminars aim to build greater use of and respect for evidence in policymaking, encourage policymakers to examine policies and programs through a family impact and a racial equity lens, and provide opportunities for policymakers to develop relationships across party lines and build common ground. Check out our website (www.familyimpactseminars.org) for audio and video of speakers at previous seminars (click on "State Seminars"), and for briefing reports and other resources written specifically for state policymakers attending over 170 Family Impact Seminars convened by 24 different states (click on "Publications"). The briefing report described here, "Preparing Wisconsin's Youth for Success in the Workforce" accompanied the 31st Wisconsin Family Impact Seminar. The full report, edited by Olivia Little, Interim Associate Director, Stephanie Eddy, Consultant, and Karen Bogenschneider, Director, can also be downloaded from our website. Hard copies are available to state legislators at no charge by contacting Seminar Coordinator, Jennifer Seubert, at (608) 263-2353 or jseubert@wisc.edu.