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## The Employment Retention and Advancement Project

# Results from Two Education and Training Models for Employed Welfare Recipients in Riverside, California

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This report assesses the implementation and two-year impacts of two education and training initiatives — together called Phase 2 — for employed, single-parent welfare recipients in Riverside County, California. The first, Riverside’s Work Plus program, encourages enrollees to meet the welfare system’s quid pro quo “participation” requirements by combining at least 20 hours of employment per week with up to 12 additional hours of attendance in remedial education, postsecondary education, or vocational training. The second, Riverside’s Training Focused program, allows enrollees to substitute additional hours in school or training for hours on the job or even to forgo employment temporarily and instead participate full time in approved skill-building activities. MDRC is relying on a random assignment design to evaluate the Work Plus and Training Focused strategies — employed recipients are randomly assigned to one of the two special programs or to a control group (whose members are not encouraged to enroll in education or training and are expected to maintain or seek full-time employment). The Work Plus and Training Focused programs are among the 16 models being tested by MDRC in the national Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) project under contract to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with additional support from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

### Key Findings

- **The two programs had only small impacts on attendance in education or training overall, but they showed larger effects among more disadvantaged groups.** Surprisingly, many control group members participated in an education or training activity on their own initiative during the first year of follow-up — a level of participation only slightly below those of the Work Plus (37 percent) and Training Focused (41 percent) groups. Impacts differed markedly by subgroup. Among single parents who were high school graduates or working full-time hours at random assignment, the two programs had difficulty getting more people to attend school or training beyond those who probably would have done so anyway. In contrast, among more disadvantaged recipients, including nongraduates and part-time workers, the two programs boosted participation by a considerable margin above the control group, primarily in remedial education activities.

- **Over two years, neither program increased employment and earnings levels above the control group.** Work Plus and Training Focused group members remained employed for about the same length of time as control group members, and all three groups received about the same amount in total earnings. No increases in employment or earnings above the control group were found for any subgroup, including more disadvantaged groups with relatively large impacts on attending school or training.

Although not encouraging, these results are not the final word on the Work Plus and Training Focused approaches (longer follow-up periods eventually will be analyzed) or on other strategies that encourage employed single-parent TANF recipients or other low-income workers to combine work and training.