

Education Pilot Program

Final Report



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EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

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EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM: FINAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 the focus of public assistance shifted from income maintenance to employment. There has been much debate as to whether it is more effective to focus first on education or work activities in order to reach this goal. The literature suggests that a mixture of work activities supported by education is most effective (Gueron and Hamilton, 2002) unless the person has no basic education. In this case, it is best for the individual, their children and society to focus on education.

The lack of basic education has long been associated with long-term FEP assistance in Utah (Taylor, Barusch, Vogel-Ferguson, 2002). The lack of a high school diploma or GED (HSD/GED) has also been associated with closing FEP due to non-participation and leaving without employment (Harris & Vogel-Ferguson, 2004; 2005). Findings from Wave 1 of the FEP Study of Utah (2006) indicated 30% of new FEP recipients enter without a HSD/GED. In 2007 only 76 customers completed their HSD/GED, significantly lower than recent years, likely due to policy changes.

Education Pilot Program Design

In Spring 2008, Central and North regions were charged with piloting a program for assisting DWS customers without a HSD/GED in obtaining this basic level of education. While the focus was on moving customers into a HSD/GED program, the charge included providing appropriate “next step” education resources and referrals to those who were not able to pursue this basic level of education. The pilot was also to assist HSD/GED graduates in pursuing additional training or schooling programs currently in demand by the labor market.

Between May and September of 2008, program developers used the data presented above to design and implement the “Education Pilot Program.” The HSD/GED portion became known as “Inve\$t In You” (IYY). While many offices were interested, the Midvale, South County and Ogden South offices were invited to participate in the pilot. Pathways were developed which required referral of customers to the new program. This offers each customer an opportunity to learn about IYY directly from the employment counselor assigned to this program and make an informed choice regarding participating in IYY.

Customers not appropriate for IYY were referred back to their original employment counselor and encouraged to engage in other education and training activities. Customers who were appropriate for IYY were accepted into the program. While the goal of IYY was identical in each region, the programs looked different in each setting. The Central region IYY program was located at Salt Lake Community College, South Campus. The North region IYY program located at Lewis Elementary, the local adult education facility. Piloting the program in two different settings provided an opportunity to learn more about specific aspects which support success.

Education Pilot Outcomes

The education pilot contained several components designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Findings reported in this study focus on 1) the specific education pilot cohort which was defined and tracked for a period of time, 2) data gathered from the larger groups of pilot participants through an Education Questionnaire, Exit Survey, Administrative data on FEP closures, employment plan activities and wage data.

From December 2008 through June 2009 all new FEP cases in which the primary person on the case did not have a HSD/GED were tracked. This cohort of 448 qualified FEP customers (174

from North region and 274 from Central region) was initially tracked for six months. These cases continued to be monitored through March 2010. Outcome for this group are as follows:

Education Pilot Cohort	N = 448
Customer unable to engage	25 (5.5%)
Did not complete IY entry process	176 (39.3%)
Inappropriate for IY	83 (18.5%)
Accepted into IY	164 (36.7%)

In the beginning, employment counselors struggled to follow the referral pathways. After additional training this improved. Lack of customer follow through was the most common reason for not completing the IY process. Most customers who were found inappropriate for IY were engaged by their employment counselor in a conversation regarding alternate schooling options.

Outcome for those who were accepted into IY:

IY Participants	N = 164
Never started classes	20(12.2%)
Withdrew prior to completion	54 (32.9%)
Still in school	12 (7.3%)
Graduated with a HSD/GED	78 (47.6%)

Input from customer surveys at program entry and exit provide insight into the meaning of this program and the potential it has for changing the lives of both customers and the next generation. There was a strong connection between a customer’s interest in completing their HSD/GED and improving the lives of their children, both now and in the future. Many customers spoke of wanting to set an example for their children. They wanted to be able to provide for their children on their own and show them how to be responsible. Graduates often amazed themselves at what they accomplished and were very proud to share with family, friends and their own children what they had accomplished.

For those who graduated, employment plan activities were evaluated to determine the scope of “next steps” that had been taken by customer graduates. Only three types of post-secondary education or training type activities were found listed on all employment plans: unpaid internships, occupational skills training and associates degree. There were eight graduates who had completed post-secondary certificates. This lack of additional activities suggests a need for greater follow-up with appropriate activities to build on the successes already gained.

Reviews of the administrative wage data regarding earnings during and following the pilot period show that 46.7% of those who graduated from IY and 47.2% of those who participated for some period in IY had wages reported. Only 39.7% of those who never entered IY had wages reported. All three groups had similar rates of FEP closure due to income - ranging between 22% and 24%. Those who withdrew early from IY were most likely to close non-participation (43%).

What Works in IY

The IY pilot was evaluated in two very different settings, a local adult education facility and a community college. Each had strengths and areas of concern. However, customers also come with a variety of needs and success was most often experienced when the needs of the customer and the aspects of the setting were a good match. Both settings allowed for the evaluation of components of the IY program which lead to success. Important components and lessons learned include:

- ▶ Intensive case management is critical to customer success
 - this includes onsite presence of the employment counselor when possible
 - the case manager was the factor rated highest in created success
- ▶ Mandatory participation in the HSD/GED orientation works
- ▶ Having standards for attendance and progress is important
- ▶ Offering an incentive to join the program is essential
 - important for creating interest; less important over time
- ▶ Celebrations: A time for encouragement, hope and possibilities
 - provides modeling, a chance to share with family, friends and children,
 - it is the only graduation many customers will experience
- ▶ Ongoing training of DWS workers is critical
 - balancing support of education and participation requirements is challenging
- ▶ Navigating the adult education system can be daunting
- ▶ Program Improves DWS Worker Morale
 - workers view themselves as agents of change; experience work as fulfilling and making a difference in a customer's future
- ▶ Inve\$t in You - More Than a Name
 - models view of customers as capable people taking personal responsibility for their futures and the future of their children

Where To Go From Here

There are approximately 75 customers currently working on completing their HSD/GED. This report outlines principles which would be important to incorporate into any process of expanding this program to other offices or to the state as a whole. There are still some unanswered questions which would need to be addressed if the pilot were to become an option for participation through DWS. Based on personal experience, all who have been involved with the pilot are in strong support of further exploring the option of continuing and expanding this program.

Conclusions

Many important lessons regarding the establishment of an adult education program focused on assisting customers in obtaining a HSD/GED have been learned. While much patience was required from the initial stages to where the program is today, the patience has paid off. As of the end of April 2010, 213 customers have completed their HSD/GED through the Inve\$t in you program. This means 213 more current and former customers can proudly list this level of education on future job applications, or on applications for future education or training. There are also 213 parents who can now say to their child, "see I did it, you can too!"

KEY FINDINGS

1) Establishing a functional working relationship with the partner adult education providers was very challenging and required more time than anticipated.

Initial challenges involved developing a program which served the purposes and goals of each of the partners involved. There were also challenges working out many practical details from office space to securing transcripts. Ultimately all parties are extremely pleased with the relationships that have been developed and sustained.

2) Only 36.7% of those who entered FEP without a HSD/GED made it through the orientation and testing process, and were found eligible for IY.

The primary reasons for not completing the process included lack of customer follow-up (20.3%) and low TABE scores (17.2%). Other reasons included the employment counselor not following the pathway (7.6%), the customer deciding they were not interested in the program (6.5%) and physical/mental health problems (4.0%).

3) Nearly half (47.6%) of the customers who engaged in the IY program graduated.

More than half of the 266 DWS customers who completed their HSD/GED as an activity on their employment plan in 2009, were IY graduates. Among IY participants who did not complete, most did not feel there was anything DWS could have done to prevent them from leaving. Most noted other life issues simply needed more attention and they were not able to manage it all.

4) The average time required for customers to complete a HSD/GED was much shorter than had been anticipated by both pilot designers and most customers engaged in the program.

It was originally anticipated that customers would require on average 12 months to complete their HSD/GED. Many customers also reported reluctance to return to school due to fear of how long it might take to complete. To everyone's surprise, the average time to graduation was only 2.3 months. One 27 year old customer learned she had already completed all her credits and did not know it.

5) The role of the employment counselor in providing intensive, supportive case management was the highest rated factor among graduates as contributing to their success.

Selection of the appropriate employment counselors who worked in IY was critical. These employment counselors believed in the capability of each customer and partnered with them for success. Customers who graduated rated the intensive case management and involvement of the IY employment counselor as the most significant element of the program contributing to success.

6) Most customers reported that the incentive was a significant factor in initially attracting customers to the program. However, over time the influence of this benefit faded and personal determination, desire, and hope for success motivated customers to complete.

The incentive clearly caught the attention of customers during orientation, especially the idea of earning portions of the incentive along the way. Many who had reluctantly attended orientation were encouraged to give the program a try. Seeing others receive an incentive reward at the celebrations made it real. However, many also reported that while they started the program for the money, they "hung in there" to show themselves they could complete the program and reach their goal.

7) Although ongoing education and training were built into the pathways beyond the HSD/GED, very few customers immediately pursued additional education and training.

It was assumed that after completing their HSD/GED, customers would then pursue additional education or training. However, this did not often happen. Some customers needed to return to work immediately and felt they could not continue the “luxury” of going to school when they needed to have an income. Others were interested in school but were not directed toward such activities nor given assistance in finding out what might be available.

8) The two pilot models evaluated each had strengths and weaknesses in supporting customers in moving toward success.

Younger customers tended to like the Lewis elementary classroom model, whereas older students were especially appreciative of the community college setting where they could blend in. The option for evening classes worked well for some who were combining school and employment, whereas others appreciated just being in school when their children were in school and/or daycare providers were open and available. The key to success was providing a good fit between what the program had to offer and each customer’s particular circumstances.

9) The impact of participation requirements greatly influenced referrals into the IY and the scope of activities offered both at the beginning of the pilot and when customers returned to their employment counselor post graduation.

Employment counselors have fully embraced the agency goal of increasing the participation rate. As the pilot was introduced, employment counselors were trained to engage customers in the pilot process however it was very difficult to convince them that it was “ok” to do this. It was hard on worker morale, knowing that engaging customers in the pilot would result in lower participation rates. When customer’s returned after graduating from IY, few employment counselors discussed additional education or training options but immediately put them into work sites which “count.”

10) The reality of having earned a HSD/GED was nearly unbelievable to many customers. The impact receiving a HSD/GED reached far beyond the customer, impacting family members, friends and children.

“Celebrations” were a time of recognizing the accomplishments, great and small, of customers who were entering, progressing in, and completing the program. Many proud parents and friends attended the celebrations where their loved ones were “celebrated” in a way many had never dreamt possible. Participants brought their children to the “graduation” recognizing that by completing a HSD/GED they were taking a step toward preventing their children from dropping out in the future.

11) Several core elements of the IY program surfaced as keys to success. These elements would be important to incorporate in the future if the program is continued or expanded:

- ▶ Intensive case management is critical to customer success
- ▶ Mandatory participation in the HSD/GED orientation works
- ▶ Having standards for attendance and progress is important
- ▶ Offering an incentive to join the program is essential
- ▶ Celebrations provided the additional encouragement and hope needed for success
- ▶ Additional and ongoing training of DWS workers is needed
- ▶ Navigating the adult education system can be daunting

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings.....	iv
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INTRODUCTION

Education and Training under TANF: A Review of the Literature.....	1
Utah FEP Education Data.....	3
- Completion	
- Lack of Completion	
DWS Administrative Data.....	4

EDUCATION PILOT: PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Initial Framework.....	4
Education Pilot Pathways.....	5
A Step forward: Inve\$t In You (IY).....	6
- Introduction to IY	
- Determining Eligibility	
- Program Participation	
- Celebrations	
- Beyond IY	
- IY Setting	
Education Pilot: Challenges Faced and Overcome.....	8
- Engaging with Adult Education System	
- Changing Pathways	
- Changing Perceptions	
- Balancing the Development of a “Pilot” Versus a “Program”	

PROGRAM EVALUATION: FINDINGS

Education Pilot Cohort.....	10
- Pilot Exits Prior to IY	
- IY Participants	
Education Questionnaire.....	13
Exit Survey.....	17
- What Caught Your Attention at Orientation	
- Quality of the Learning Environment	
- North Region	
- Central Region	
- Experience with Pilot Employment Counselor	
- What Contributed to Success?	
- What Hindered Successful Completion?	
- Next Steps in Education/Training	
- Influencing the Next Generation	
- Final Thoughts on IY	
Post IY Outcomes: Activities and Employment.....	24

DISCUSSION

Lessons Learned: Program Components that Work.....26

- Intensive case management is critical to customer success
- Mandatory participation in the HSD/GED orientation works
- Having standards for attendance and progress is important
- Offering an incentive to join the program is essential.
- Celebrations: A time for encouragement, hope and possibilities
- Ongoing training of DWS workers is critical
- Navigating the adult education system can be daunting

Lessons Learned: One Program - Two Models.....28

- Central Region
- North Region

Lessons Learned: Seeing “People” in the Process.....29

- Program Improves DWS Worker Morale
- Invest in You - More Than a Name

Current Status of Education Pilot.....30

Where to Go From Here - And How to Get There.....31

- Questions to be Resolved

CONCLUSION.....32

REFERENCES.....34

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Invest in You Pathway for North Region.....35

Appendix 2: Invest in You Pathway for Central Region.....37

Appendix 3: Pilot Flow Chart.....40

INTRODUCTION

Education and Training under TANF: A Review of the Literature

The role of education and training in welfare programs has been a debated nationally among welfare reformers and program implementers since before TANF came into being. All agree employment is the goal. Less clear is the best path to get there. Do work-first or education-first policies best serve the purposes of TANF? If the discussion ended there the answers might seem simple, however, proponents on both sides of the question agree that the issue is not as clear cut as it might seem. Questions regarding the quality of employment, increasing earning potential, and the long term impact on families, especially children, linger in the wings. Suggestions regarding mixed strategies toward education and training attempt to provide a balance, as noted in a study produced during the last period of welfare reauthorization.

“Some participants, usually those lacking a high school diploma or GED, are assigned initially to basic education or training, while others are most often assigned first to job search. Subsequent activities vary for those still on welfare. Some mixed programs strongly emphasize employment: staff urge participants to find work and permit only short-term education or training activities. Others emphasize skill-building: participants may enter long-term education or training programs, and getting a job quickly is not paramount” (Gueron and Hamilton, 2002, p. 1).

The primary focus of the mixed strategy approach is on securing employment with the option for short term education or skills training as needed. This is especially true if the goal of the TANF program is not simply to move recipients into work, but to help the recipient be able to remain off of assistance. One study found that while the frequency of welfare exits into employment were not effected by having focused on education or work activities, hourly wages and the number of hours worked were higher for those with more education (Deskins and Bruce, 2004). Full time permanent employment is often connected to greater opportunities for access to health care benefits and unemployment insurance should they be laid off.

Work is often viewed as the way of welfare, however adequate education is the way to self-sufficiency (Lyter, 2002). Thus, it has been suggested that the strongest programs incorporate education and skills training into one program with the central focus of employment. These programs are necessarily intense and require a significant number of classroom hours per week for a short period, a close tracking of participation in training and job search activities which focus on obtaining higher quality jobs currently known to be in demand by the labor market (Martinson & Strawn, 2003).

Examples of programs which provide the mixed strategy of education and work focus programs include the Pennsylvania's Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) Program, Kentucky's Ready-to-Work Program and The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative. All three programs work within the current federal participation guidelines to guide participants into high demand fields that pay family sustaining wages through appropriate education and training (CLASP). Such programs work well in matching the participants strengths to the needs of the market and provide an opportunity for matches which serve both TANF recipients and the needs of businesses. It should be noted that these programs generally assume the education and training provided is post-secondary, occupation targeted programs. Because most of the programs referenced to this point require a high school diploma or GED, those who do not have this level of

education are generally excluded from the conversation (Bell, 2000). This is the population with which we are primarily concerned.

In addition to limiting access to many job opportunities and education and training programs, the lack of a high school diploma or GED is associated with many other factors affecting both individuals and their children. The discussion around whether or not it is appropriate to assist welfare recipients in securing a basic education generally involves two areas: the impact of basic education on the ability to obtain adequate employment and a larger question regarding the impact of parental education on improved outcomes for their children.

The lack of basic education affects both access to jobs and adequate wages. The U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported that women who have less than a high school diploma earn an average of \$23,348/year while high school graduates earn an average of \$32,240/year (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics). Analysis of a Survey of Income and Program Participation Public (SIPP) sample of 4,500 working mothers found that graduating from high school increased working mothers' earnings by \$1.60 per hour. While each year of work experience was worth only seven cents more per hour (Tally, 2002). The work-first approach becomes ineffective as a pathway to success when the wages will likely never rise enough to move the family out of poverty. The lack of earning capacity of the parent predictably leads to the children growing up in poverty.

Multiple studies have linked education levels of parents to their children's achievement levels in school. When lower parental education levels are coupled with growing up in poverty the increase in learning disabilities, health problems and sub-standard learning opportunities, children's achievement levels are on average reduced further (Lyter, 2002). It is not surprising then that a study of characteristics associated with welfare receipt found that the mother's lack of formal education was *the most predictive factor* of a child's future welfare receipt. It was more significant than having been on welfare as a child, growing up in a single-parent home, a history or parental alcohol abuse and even a history of childhood sexual abuse (Seth-Purdie, 2000).

On the other hand, parental educational attainment has been linked to increased resilience when faced with stressful situations, fewer incidences of depression and suicide, and being more informed about medical and mental health issues. In most cases these benefits generally extend to the family's of educated women, creating a healthier and more stable home environment (Madsen, Hanewicz, & Thackeray, 2010). Expanding a parent's human capital, that is, the personal resources and capabilities available to help a person manage the tasks of daily living (Seth-Perdie, 2000), has a direct effect on the early development of human capital in their children.

Children do not typically have the capacity to develop their own human capital. They need mentors and guides in learning to navigate the tasks of daily living. The bulk of these skills must be transmitted to a child through their parents. The ability of a child to develop human capital is directly linked to a parent's ability to assist in meeting the developmental needs of early childhood (Seth-Purdie, 2000). When a parent is given an opportunity to expand their human capital through gaining a basic level of education, they also gain the ability to pass on, through modeling, the reality that educational success is a normative part of this family's reality.

Clearly the role of education and training in TANF is complex. Employment is the primary goal of all TANF programs. However, the paths to employment vary as considerations of the educational starting point, best practices for today, and the future for both recipients and their children are considered.

Utah FEP Education Data

Evaluating the education levels and learning experiences of FEP customers has consistently been an element of SRI research studies conducted for DWS. The lack of basic education has long been associated with long-term FEP assistance (Taylor, Barusch, Vogel-Ferguson, 2002). The lack of a HSD/GED has also been associated with closing due to non-participation and leaving FEP without employment (Harris & Vogel-Ferguson, 2004; 2005). To evaluate the level of basic education in the new FEP customer, a set of questions regarding education was incorporated into the longitudinal FEP Study of Utah starting in 2006.

Findings from Wave 1 of the FEP Study of Utah (2006) indicated that a majority (70%) of new FEP recipients enter with a high school diploma or GED (HSD/GED). However, educational attainment was not equal by region. The completion rate for Central Region was 65.5%. North region was very close to the study average at 69.7%. The other three regions all have higher completion rates of 79.2% for both Mountainland and Western regions and 83% for Eastern region.

In the North region the median age of new FEP customers was 28.5 but the median age of those with no HSD/GED was 21 years. Nearly half (46%) of the racial/ethnic minorities in North region had no HSD/GED while this was true of only 23% of Caucasian respondents. Just over 30% reported problems reading or writing or having been diagnosed with a learning disability. In addition to these personal factors, respondents in North region with no HSD/GED were *more likely to have*: grown up in a family which used welfare, never been married, been a teen mom, no regular computer access, been involved in a violent romantic relationship, and problems with access to transportation.

In the Central region the median age of new FEP customers was 29 while the median age of those with no HSD/GED was 23 years. The racial/ethnic disparity was not as large here as in North Region but it was still statistically significant. In Central region 40.5% of minority respondents had no HSD/GED while this was the case for 32% of Caucasian respondents. Just over 27% reported problems reading or writing or having been diagnosed with a learning disability. In addition, respondents in Central region with no HSD/GED were *more likely to have*: grown up in a family which used welfare, no access to a computer, never been married, and been a teen mom.

Between Wave 1 and Wave 2 more customers pursued education goals. While some customers were still in school, many had ended their previous connection to schooling.

Completions: Of the customers without a HSD/GED who expressed an educational goal of some type, 24 (8.3%) completed their HSD/GED between waves 1 and 2. Those who viewed a HSD/GED as a stepping stone to a higher goal such as medical assisting, an LPN or a business degree had a higher completion rate than those whose only goal was the HSD/GED.

Lack of Completion: The primary reasons for not going to school even when a person was interested in obtaining a HSD/GED were very similar to reasons why, once having started an education program, individuals dropped out and were unable to complete their studies. The most frequently named issues included:

- *Can't afford to go to school - must work* - 29%
- *No time for school, work and family* - 25%
- *Lack of child care* - 23%
- *Transportation problems* - 16%
- *Need/want to be home with kids* - 16%
- *Physical health problems* - 15%
- *Other family demands* - 7%
- *Mental health problems* - 6%

Support from the employment counselor in whichever avenue a customer pursued was consistently critical to success. Customers reported that often it was the employment counselor who made the difference in being able to achieve success. Customer feedback from the study suggested several key elements which are likely to facilitate positive outcomes for customers:

- Personal presence on site to be available to customers for support and to answer questions.
- A thorough knowledge of DWS and other community resources and supportive services.
- Assistance in preparing financially to participate in the HSD/GED pilot: helping the customer plan how to "make ends meet" while in school reviewing the budget and discussing potential financial difficulties.
- Discuss potential problems to continuing schooling such as child care or transportation issues and devise back-up plans to reduce absenteeism.

DWS Administrative Data

Administrative data were queried to identify the typical rate of HSD/GED completions through DWS. As shown in Table 1, the number of HSD/GED graduates has fluctuated over the years. The sharp decline in HSD/GED completions beginning in 2006 likely reflects the implementation of the more restrictive countable participation activities initiated at that time. Graduations through the education pilot provide a perspective of this program's impact.

Table 1: HSD/GED Graduates

YEAR	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
All DWS HSD/GED Completions	247	260	267	176	76	86	266	?
Education Pilot Graduates						19	138	56

EDUCATION PILOT: PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

In Spring 2008, Central and North regions were charged with piloting a program for assisting DWS customers without a HSD/GED in obtaining this basic level of education. While the focus was on moving customers into a HSD/GED program, the charge included providing appropriate "next step" education resources and referrals to those who were not able to pursue this basic level of education. The pilot was also to assist HSD/GED graduates in pursuing additional training or schooling programs currently in demand by the labor market. Between May and September of 2008 program developers used the data presented above to design and implement the "Education Pilot Program." The HSD/GED portion became known as "Inve\$t In You."

Initial Framework

From management to front line staff there was great excitement around the idea of being able to offer basic education opportunities to customers, without requiring the person to split her/his

focus between school and 10 or 20 hours of additional activities. Several core elements framed the process from the outset. Both regions sought to:

- Engage existing adult education providers in shaping the program. This included site location, content of the program, participation standards and customer qualifications.
- Identify an employment counselor who would work particularly well with this customer group, someone who could provide support, guidance, and structure while being flexible and sensitive to customer needs.
- Provide onsite services to customers who were involved in pursuing their HSD/GED. This would best happen through locating the identified employment counselor on site at the primary educational facility where customers attend classes.
- Address known challenges to pursuing education by providing access to child care and transportation for all program participants as well as full payment of all tuition, fee and book expenses. Additional needs, such as appropriate clothes for school, would be addressed on an individual basis.
- Encourage participation in the program by providing financial incentives for program completion as well as celebrating smaller successes along the way.

With these core elements framing program development, the North and Central regions quickly and enthusiastically moved forward in initiating the education pilot. As one worker said:

“I think this will be a wonderful way to gain support for activities that make sense for our customers who don’t have a HSD/GED and will impact them in many positive ways – income, job maintenance, career path, desire to get additional training, self esteem boost and help their children value education.”

While many offices were interested in participating, it was decided that three offices, Midvale, South County and Ogden South would be invited to participate in the pilot.

Education Pilot Pathways

The pilot was intended to focus on customers who were opening a FEP case at a pilot office and who did not have their HSD/GED. Each region established specific pathways based on current office practices and adjusted these as needed. (See Appendix 1 and 2 for region pathways.) The primary components of the pathway used in each region include:

- Customer education assessment
- Brief introduction to pilot program
- Completion of Education Questionnaire
(a short survey of education history and attitudes)
- Mandatory referral to the Inve\$t In You orientation
- Scheduling the customer to take the TABE test

- Completing a 360 referral to the pilot case manager
- Eligibility criteria for acceptance into Inve\$t in You
- Outline of non-participation process for customers engaged in Inve\$t in You
- Next steps to take if customer found inappropriate for Inve\$t in You
- Next steps if customer graduates and seeks further education/training

The goal of the pathways are to 1) identify customers with no HSD/GED, 2) provide an opportunity for the customer to learn about Inve\$t in You from the employment counselor assigned to this program and thus make an informed choice regarding participation, 3) determine if the customer was appropriate for Inve\$t in You, and 4) assist the customer in moving to the next phase.

A Step Forward: Inve\$t In You (IIY)

The core of the education pilot was Inve\$t In You (IIY). This program was specifically designed to assist FEP customers in obtaining a HSD/GED.

Introduction to IIY: Customers entering FEP who do not have a HSD/GED are referred to the group IIY orientation. This referral is mandatory thus each customer is exposed to the content of the program in a similar manner and provides then the opportunity to make an educated decision about participation in the pilot.

The core content of the orientation in each region is the same. The topics covered include all requirements for participation as well as the incentive structure and support services which accompany the program. In addition, much emphasis is placed on helping the customer better appreciate the benefits of taking personal responsibility for making a commitment to pursuing education as a path to self-sufficiency. Employment is the goal and securing a HSD/GED is a step toward that goal, a step toward ending reliance on assistance through increased wages.

Much emphasis is placed on the impact obtaining a HSD/GED will have on the customer's children. However, customers are also encouraged to see view education as something they do for themselves. With the support and encouragement of the DWS case worker, and teachers who truly care, customers can reach this goal. It is a goal which has often felt beyond their reach. They are not alone. Just attending an orientation shows them this. Communicating the real possibility of success is important and a primary reason why attendance at orientation is mandatory.

Determining Eligibility: Not everyone who attends IIY orientation and is interested in the program is admitted. Because this is a pilot, minimum TABE scores or number of credits standards were set. The purpose of this was to ensure that program participants could complete the program in one year or less. These minimum standards were changed during the pilot process as more was learned about how quickly individuals could complete the process even with lower scores. The current minimum standards are outlined in each region's pathway (See Appendix 1 and 2).

Even if a customer attends orientation and meets the minimum standards a conversation with the IIY employment counselor is held to ensure that the customer understands the program, to answer individual questions, and to discuss issues which might make full participation too difficult. IIY employment counselors educate customers about multiple supportive services which are available, including assistance with child care, transportation, all school expenses and even appropriate clothing as necessary.

If it is determined at any stage that a customer is not appropriate for IIY, the customer is

transferred back to the original employment counselor. Alternate education and training options are discussed with the customer and documented. Depending on the situation, the employment counselor is encouraged to continue to support the customer in pursuing education and training activities which would enhance their ability to obtain and retain employment.

Program Participation: If challenges arise after a customer starts IYY, the employment counselors are pro-active in trying to contact the customer to determine what is happening. Attendance and progress standards were established to make it clear to customers that participation is still required and to remind them that there are consequences for not meeting the attendance standards. A shorter probation period for poor attendance was developed with the goal of addressing issues very quickly and either assisting the customer in moving past the problem or transitioning them back into the regular FEP program.

Celebrations: Early in the process each region established a tradition of holding a monthly “celebration” to acknowledge the accomplishments of program participants. Held in the classroom in North region and DWS Admin. South in Central region, these gatherings became an integral part of the pilot. Celebrations typically include a light lunch or snack and a guest speaker from DWS, local educational institutions or local experts on topics related to employment success and life skills. New customers receive certificates of recognition for having the courage to start the program. Steps of progress such as GED sections passed, packets completed, etc. are recognized and incentives distributed. These elements all support and lead up to the highlight of each celebration which is the recognition of graduates.

Each person enters IYY with their own story, however, the common element among all program participants is that each had “failed” to complete high school in the traditional manner. During celebrations graduates are encouraged to share some of their story and what it means to them to have made it to this moment. Family and friends proudly attend and cheer a graduation which has often been long in coming. Over the months new graduates now speak of how listening to others share their story has given them the courage to “hang in there” and do it for themselves.

Beyond IYY: Upon completion of IYY, customers were originally transferred back to their initial employment counselor to engage in discussions regarding possible options for next steps in education. Given the growing case loads and the somewhat specialized knowledge needed to make appropriate connections. Both regions now have graduates continue to meet with their IYY employment counselor to explore further education. Not all customers are ready or interested in continuing their education. Some want a break from school and others need to move toward employment immediately. Those who are interested in school are assisted by the IYY employment counselor in determining an appropriate program of study, applying for all possible financial aide and applying for a program. Once the education plan has been established the customer is transferred back to the previous employment counselor for ongoing case management services.

IYY Setting: While the goal of IYY is identical in each region, the program looks very different in the setting in which it is delivered. Table 2 presents a side by side description of the programs, highlighting the unique nature of each. The process of setting up and fine tuning each of the settings was not without challenges, however, much has been learned by having two distinctive models for service delivery of this pilot.

Table 2: Inve\$t In You Program Setting - By Region

	Central	North
Setting	Salt Lake Community College - South Campus - Students on campus at all levels	Lewis Elementary School: Adult Ed. Center - Ogden - students all HSD/GED focus
Classroom structure	General population of students in GED prep. classes - all ages	Enclosed classroom only for IY participants - all ages
Class schedule	Assigned to morning, afternoon or evening classes - 16 hours/week -attend 4 days a week on average	Attend daily: 9 -3 or 10 - 2 (depends on 20 or 30 hours required)
Educational focus	Primarily GED (customer's who need few credits can work with Horizonte Rep. for HSD)	Primarily HSD (customer who need many credits can work toward GED)
Instruction	Some group instruction and individual work time with teacher assistance	Primarily individual work on packets to complete credits; instructor guides content for GED
Amenities	On site computer lab for additional school work activities	On site lunch provided to students
Location	Outside boundaries of referring offices - travel time significant	In same neighborhood as most customers
Employment Counselor	Office on site	Office on site
Cost per customer:		
Application fee	\$35	- 0 -
Tuition	\$525	\$20
Books	\$200	\$20
Lab fee	\$20	- 0 -
Open lab fee	\$50	- 0 -
TABE test	\$20	\$35
GED test	- 0 -	\$60
	<u>\$850.00</u>	<u>\$135.00</u>

Education Pilot: Challenges Faced and Overcome

Developing and implementing the education pilot, while exciting, was not without challenges. There were many valuable lessons learned. The major areas of challenge included partnering with the various adult education programs, developing appropriate DWS pathways and criteria for customer participation in the IY portion of the program, training employment counselors from pilot offices to engage their customers in pilot activities even though it affects participation, and balancing the implementation of a pilot versus just starting a program.

Engaging with Adult Education System

From the beginning, education pilot leaders sought expertise from adult education providers. This effort at partnering was generally well received by administrators within the adult education system. Implementing the practical aspects of the partnership was more challenging. In the partnering process it became clear that there were few common guidelines for adult education providers regarding best practices of engaging adult learners seeking a HSD/GED. Even providers in the same city identified different criteria for program participation and were often inflexible. These criteria have sometimes limited the services available to DWS customers who have extra challenges and need more flexibility.

Developing an efficient pathway for customers to take the TABE test (determines current levels of academic proficiency) and obtain high school transcripts was challenging in Central region. Finding appropriate teachers for the classroom dedicated to DWS pilot customers in North region was a struggle. The education pilot teams in both regions were promised on-site offices for the pilot employment counselor and it took several months before offices were available. As the pilot continued, the partnership with adult education providers at each site continued shaping the educational portion to meet the needs of DWS customers. There were also efforts to identify best practices in adult education and integrate these practices into the pilot.

Changing Pathways

The speed of the initial program role out and the changes introduced after the evaluator entered the process had an impact on front-line staff. Several pathways were introduced and subsequently changed as the pilot developed. Managers and staff have been very understanding and helpful in providing feedback on the most effective processes.

Practical issues such as how to issue incentives without affecting other benefits or breaking any federal rules have needed attention. Several processes such as enrollment dates for school, issuing MasterCards, and availability of test scores and high school transcripts sometimes delay the school start date. The extra attention of the employment counselor through this process is important so customers do not get lost in the system.

While the process of changing pathways was frustrating, the changes ultimately improved the pathways for all involved. Because each DWS office - adult education provider relationship is different, this type of a partnership pathway will never be one size fits all. The efforts to improve the pathways increases communication between pilot implementers and DWS office managers, supervisors and employment counselors engaged in the pilot.

Changing Perceptions

For the past 3-4 years, the impact of any decision on participation rates has driven much of program development in DWS. Leadership and staff have been trained well in this area. Creating a program in which participation (as defined for general practice) is not the central focus has required a significant mental shift. This was especially difficult in the beginning.

Many reassurances were required to help personnel at all levels believe that it was permissible for customers participating in this pilot not to “count.” Unintentionally, workers were given mixed messages as they were required to refer customers to IY and told to still strive to meet participation rates. In Central region it was especially difficult as neither of the office managers in the pilot offices were directly engaged in the pilot. However, even though the office manager in

North region was directly involved in the pilot and the IY case manager was one of their own, it was challenging, in the beginning, to convince employment counselors to engage in the pilot process. Outside the education pilot the emphasis on participation remains strong. Participation rates for offices and regions engaged with the education pilot are still influenced by the presence of the pilot and the negative impact continues to affect worker morale.

Balancing the Development of a “Pilot” Versus a “Program”

From the beginning, each region moved quickly with developing pathways for customer referrals, designing customer information materials, training employment counselors, and program implementation. These activities reflected expertise in program implementation, but were lacking basic components essential to evaluation of a pilot program. As is often the case, there was a gap between when the pilot was developed and when the evaluation component was initiated.

When the evaluator joined the team there was some initial frustration and a feeling of moving backwards in the process. Issues such as defining a measurable selection criteria for program participation, setting limits on participation based on available personnel, defining a consistent pathway for engagement, and agreeing on goals of the education pilot all needed to be addressed. On-going, open communication helped everyone acknowledge and address these frustrations so the process could move forward more effectively.

Because it was a new program adjustments needed to be made along the way. Many adjustments were minor, however at times larger changes needed to be made to better serve DWS customers. Decisions were made which had the potential to affect the findings. Clearly acting in the best interest of the customer comes first. However, when such changes likely had an effect on the reported outcomes these issues will be noted.

PROGRAM EVALUATION: FINDINGS

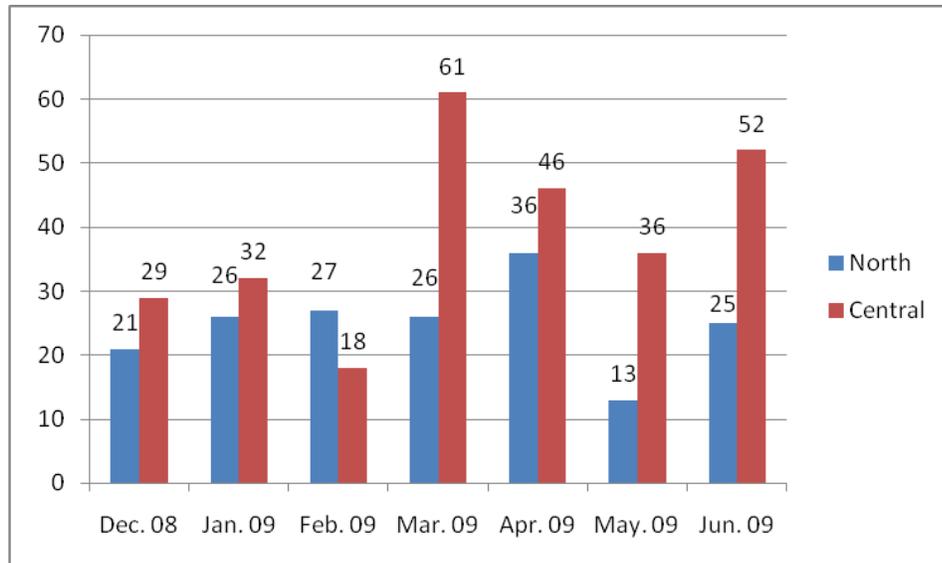
The education pilot contained several components which were designed to be used in the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the program. Each component focused on a specific group of customers who shared a similar experience or who engaged in the process during a particular time frame. Findings reported here will first focus on the specific education pilot cohort which was defined and tracked for a period of time. Then findings will be reported on data gathered from the larger groups of pilot participants through: 1) the Education Questionnaire, 2) the Exit Survey, 3) Administrative data on FEP closures, employment plan activities and wages.

Education Pilot Cohort

The goal of the Education Pilot was to engage each new FEP customer without a HSD/GED in a process which would allow the customer to connect to appropriate education resources. Following extensive discussions with managers, supervisors, and employment counselors in the pilot offices to strengthen and fine tune the pathways, the evaluation period began. From December 2008 through June 2009 all new FEP cases in which the primary person on the case did not have a HSD/GED were tracked. Each case was then evaluated at the 6 month mark. These cases continued to be monitored by the pilot case managers and the research staff through March 2010. The original

sample was composed of 548 customers. During initial case reviews, 100 customers were found inappropriate for inclusion in the pilot cohort, most often due to lack of completion of the education assessment screen. There were also a few cases which were two-parent families, customers with limited English proficiency or who had exceeded the 36 month time limit. Thus the sample for review included 448 qualified FEP customers, 174 from North region and 274 from Central region. Region and month of entry distribution is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Education Pilot Cohort



The pilot sample was 91% female in each region. The average age at entry into the process was 26.4 overall (North = 24.7 yrs; Central = 27.5 yrs). Approximately 50% of the pilot sample had only received 1 - 2 months of cash assistance prior to being eligible for this program and thus in the initial stages of learning about cash assistance. The remaining 50% varied widely in the number of months used with about 10% of customers received more than 24 months of FEP assistance.

The outcomes presented here reflect the status of each case through March 2010. In retrospect it is clear that most of the outcomes were determined within 6 months of FEP entry. There were only 36 (8.0%) customers still in the HSD/GED program after 6 months. Other than this group, only those who transitioned directly from the HSD/GED program into further education did not have a final outcome to report at 6 months.

Pilot Exits Prior to IY: There were several scenarios which led to a customer exiting the process. (See Appendix 3 for complete flowchart of the pilot process.) As described in Table 3, there were 25 customers (5.5%) who were not referred to IY due to substance abuse treatment (5), severe mental or physical health issues (18) or cognitive impairment (2). Another 176 (39.3%) exited prior to completing the evaluation process. Based on information available in UWORKS, it was determined that in 34 (7.6%) cases the employment counselor did not follow the pathway, while in 91 (20.3%) cases the customer did not follow through. There were another 29 (6.5%) customers who attended the orientation but did not want to go on with further education and another 22 (4.9%) cases in which the process was started but the case closed before eligibility for IY could be determined.

Table 3: Pilot Exits Prior to Engaging in IY

	North N = 174	Central N = 274	Total N = 448
Unable to engage:			
Substance abuse treatment	- 0 -	5 (1.8%)	5 (1.1%)
Physical/mental health	5 (2.9%)	13 (4.7%)	18 (4.0%)
Cognitively impaired	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.4%)	2 (0.4%)
Incomplete process:			
EC did not follow pathway	8 (4.6%)	26 (9.5%)	34 (7.6%)
Customer did not follow pathway	30 (17.2%)	61 (22.3%)	91 (20.3%)
Customer decided not to participate	6 (3.4%)	23 (8.4%)	29 (6.5%)
Process started but cash closed	8 (4.5%)	14 (5.1%)	22 (4.9%)
Screened out as inappropriate:			
TABE scores too low	34 (19.5%)	44 (15.7%)	77 (17.2%)
Too many other challenges	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.1%)	4 (0.9%)
Just not interested	- 0 -	2 (0.7%)	2 (0.4%)

As described in the pathway, once a customer had attended orientation to learn about IY, a TABE test was administered to determine if they met a minimum standard for participation. There were 77 (17.2%) customers who did not pass this criteria. Employment counselors reported this as an especially difficult blow to some customers. This was yet another experience of failure. In reviewing what happened with the customer upon returning to their original employment counselor, the follow-up was impressive. Notes indicate that employment counselors engaged 64 (83%) of the 77 customers denied IY due to low TABE scores in a discussion about alternate ways to obtain a HSD/GED or the option of pursuing other forms of education or training.

Clearly there were many factors which contributed to a person not being referred into IY. Nearly two thirds of those who entered FEP during this period without a HSD/GED never started in IY. The remainder of the evaluation focused on those who were qualified for and accepted into IY, a total of 164 customers - 81 from North region and 83 from Central region.

IY Participants: Once a customer was accepted into IY there were basically four outcomes which could be achieved: being accepted but never starting, withdrawing after a period in the program and completing the program and remaining in the program through the evaluation period.

Table 4 presents these outcomes. There were 20 customers deemed appropriate for IY, given a school start date yet never started. Ten of these customers were referred to other education programs and 10 were not. The referral rate was not as high for those who withdrew from IY. Only 35% of those who withdrew from the pilot discussed other education or training with their employment counselor. This low figure is understandable as many who withdrew from the pilot did so as part of closing their FEP case.

The differences in the length of time to graduation and the graduation rate between regions is substantial. One explanation for these differences may be significant changes which were made

Table 4: Inve\$t In You Participants

IY Outcomes	North N = 81	Central N = 83	Total N = 164
Accepted, never started	12 (15.0%)	8 (9.6%)	20 (12.2%)
Withdrawal prior to completion	16 (20.0%)	38 (45.8%)	54(32.9%)
Length of time in program	2.1 months	2.2 months	2.2 months
Graduated	50 (61.7%)	28 (33.7%)	78 (47.6%)
Length of time in program	1.6 months	3.4 months	2.3 months
Still enrolled	3 (3.7%)	9 (10.8%)	12 (7.3%)
Length of time in program	6.1 months	6.3 months	6.3 months

in North region’s pathway. These changes were introduced in response to the growing list of customers waiting to move into IY. Customers on the wait list often dropped from the FEP program prior to a spot becoming available. To avoid this, customers deemed eligible for IY were allowed to work on their HSD/GED in an adjacent adult education classroom yet not “officially” enter IY. During this time some customers did not attend and were dropped from the program. Others customers completed a good portion of their credits and entered IY for a very short time prior to graduation. None of this information was captured in the evaluation process. Interestingly, each region has had approximately the same proportion of graduates who received a GED (56%) or a HSD (44%).

Education Questionnaire

New customers opening FEP in a pilot office, who had not completed their HSD/GED were asked to complete an “Education Questionnaire.” This short survey gathered data regarding their attitudes toward pursuing more education, their parents’ level of education, issues hindering completion in the past and personal goals related to education. There were 827 customers who completed the questionnaire, 311 from North and 532 from Central. As shown in Figure 2, the majority reported having completed the 10th or 11th grade. While years in school does not always translate into credits received, this does indicate that most respondents had completed a majority of the traditional time in high school.

As noted earlier, much research has indicated a relationship between a parents’ level of education (especially the mother’s) and the education level of FEP recipients. Respondents to the Education Questionnaire were also asked about their parents level of education. As shown in Table 5, significantly fewer respondents had parents who had completed their basic education than the general FEP customer entering assistance. The differences in education level entering FEP is noteworthy. As indicated in the literature, employment and access to specific education and training programs are very limited for those who enter FEP without this basic level of education.

Figure 2: Highest Grade Completed

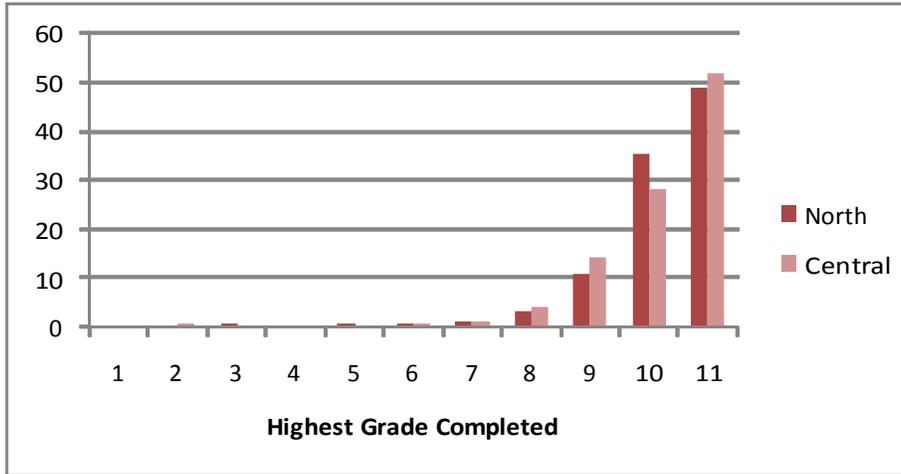


Table 5: Parents Education Level

Parents education level	North N=308	Central N=528	Wave 1 N=1144
Mother			
Completed HSD/GED	177 (57.5%)	305 (57.8%)	846 (73.9%)
Did not complete HSD/GED	104 (33.8%)	161 (30.6%)	229 (20.1%)
Unknown	27 (8.8%)	62 (11.8%)	60 (5.2%)
Father			
Completed HSD/GED	112 (37.1%)	227 (43.7%)	754 (65.9%)
Did not complete HSD/GED	88 (29.1%)	142 (27.4%)	176 (15.4%)
Unknown	102 (33.8%)	150 (28.9%)	131 (11.5%)

To better understand how customers view the role of education on the next generation, the question was posed, “How do you think getting your HSD/GED would benefit your children?” Nearly every respondent completed this question. Approximately half the respondents indicated it would help them get a better job and with this job they could better provide for their children’s needs, both now and in the future. Example of customer comments include:

- *In every way! Employers look at a person who has an education better than a person that doesn't. Better job, better pay, better life for my kids is what I think.*
- *They can see that I have had low-paying jobs and even now at moms age, I am still able to know how much school/getting my GED means for being able to keep us in our house (rent, bills, clothes, food) they will see how important it is to stay in school and to do their best.*
- *It would benefit them because I would be able to give them a better life and teach them responsibility. And hopefully be able to encourage them to want to stay in school and do the*

best that they can and graduate with honors.

- I can find a job I can feel safe at, where pay will keep my child healthy and a roof over his head and food in his tummy.

- Get on my feet to take care of my kids on my own. Not depending on anyone. I could work while they're in school / better job, better pay, steady job.....more opportunities...just everything!

A similar proportion of respondents talked about how this would allow them to be a better role model for their children. Respondents wanted to set a good example so their children would learn to set goals, do the work needed to reach the goals and be successful themselves. As they said:

- I could have a better relationship with them cause I could get better job. Also it could motivate them cause I have one - If I succeed my kids will. They are my shadow. Everything I do in life affects them and I want it to be positive.

- I would be able to support her without the help of welfare. We would have a good life and it would teach her that she needs to graduate too.

- I want to be a role model to them and have them look up to me. I would want them to make their lives better and want to be the best they could at everything they do.

- Teaching my kids how important school is. And how it will help them in the future, and get further then I did and reach their dreams, I want them to be proud of me, and know no matter what happens, you can do what your mind tells you.

- I could give him more by obtaining a better job and higher education. His chances of being successful will also increase.

- He will have an example to look at. He will see it must be important because his mom did it. A lot of jobs require that you have a GED/diploma.

To learn more about the attitudes toward their high school experience, respondents were asked to describe what they liked and did not like about high school and the circumstances which had led to not completing high school. Responses to these questions covered quite a range.

When describing what they liked *best*, nearly 38% talked about liking to learn. Learning new things was often associated with feeling positive about themselves. As one person said, *"I would learn something I found really hard and get praised."* Another respondent noted, *"I love everything about school. Knowledge is power. As long as I am learning I feel empowered."* Many times the learning was related to a particular subject as well - learning science or history, etc. As might be expected, in addition to learning, being with friends was the second most common response (34%).

When asked about what they liked *least* about school, the most common response (27%) was a particular class they did not like. The most frequently named class was Math. The next most common factor affecting school attitude was learning problems and being embarrassed and feeling "dumb," and not being able to go at their own pace (20%). As one person said, *"I hated school because there were so many things that I did not understand and I felt I was the only one that was like that and I felt very stupid."* Another person indicated, *"I was always embarrassed because I didn't understand and I didn't want people to know I didn't understand. I wouldn't ask for help. I didn't like that some teachers would seem to get frustrated when helping me."* A third response commonly mentioned involved problems with other students (15%). Ongoing teasing and bullying, peer pressure, fear of being judged, not fitting in socially and the "drama" that often accompanies the teenage years.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate what led to them not completing high school. The most common response was pregnancy (35%). This response often involved other factors such as being kicked out of their parents home at 14 - 16 years of age. Respondents of these ages were also getting married or needing to work to support their child. Lack of child care while going to school or medical needs of their child inhibited others.

Another large group (26%) of respondents indicated they dropped out after having gotten behind in school. Many indicated they lost interest, were lazy or didn't care, got distracted easily or were just making bad choices. There were a few who noted that "hanging around the wrong people" or "getting involved with drugs" led to dropping out. Others (14%) indicated family issues caused them to drop out, some needing to go to work to help support the family, and others were dealing with significant family problems (moving between divorced parents, parent incarceration, abuse) that made school a non-priority.

Given these past experiences, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much they wanted to complete their HSD/GED now. The overwhelming majority (86.5%) answered 10. It's evident that respondents have the *desire* to complete more education. Not only do a large majority have an interest in completing their education, but a similar group (84.2%) indicated they have a personal education or training goal they would like to accomplish. The educational goal most often mentioned simply involved getting a HSD/GED in order to get a better job or go on to college. The type of education most often mentioned included schooling related to entering the medical field. When asked "what would have to happen before you could reach this goal," responses were mixed. A majority (55%) indicated of course needing to complete a HSD/GED. However others mentioned issues such as getting help paying for school and child care, being motivated to stay focused, put aside fears of failure, and having enough to make ends meet while in school.

Since all respondents were in the process of applying for cash assistance while completing this survey, it can be assumed that finances were a current concern. Respondents were asked to

Table 6: Challenges to Completing HSD/GED

Identified Challenges	North N= 298	Central N=513
Child Care Problems	127 (42.6%)	277 (54%)
Problems with Math	139 (46.6%)	226 (44.1%)
Transportation	130 (43.6%)	228 (44.4%)
Can't afford to attend school/Need to work	93 (31.2%)	262 (51.1%)
I am afraid I will fail again	73 (24.5%)	134 (26.1%)
I am too busy with kids	57 (19.1%)	121 (23.6%)
I have problems reading	36 (12.1%)	63 (12.3%)
I have a learning disability	39 (13.1%)	58 (11.3%)
Other	36 (12.1%)	58 (11.3%)
I have too many things going on in my life	23 (7.7%)	62 (12.1%)
I have no family support	19 (6.4%)	60 (11.7%)
It will take too long to finish	26 (8.7%)	48 (9.4%)
I am too old	7 (2.3%)	17 (3.3%)
I just don't want to go to school	5 (1.7%)	9 (1.8%)

identify other issues which made going to school difficult at this point in life. As shown in Table 6, child care was often identified in both regions but significantly higher in Central region. This was also the case with the response, “I can’t afford to attend school, I need to work.” Problems with math, transportation, fear of failure and simply being too busy with children were also common responses. Interestingly, only less than 2% indicated they simply did not want to go to school.

In general, the Education Questionnaire provided support for the idea that most customers without a HSD/GED have a desire to obtain this level of education. The primary challenges involve moving past the negative experiences of the past and seeing a pathway to success and figuring out how to continue to care for children and manage a household while completing school.

Exit Survey

All IY participants who actually attended some period of time within the program were sent a letter and invited to participate in a short survey about their experiences with the program. A total of 219 letters were sent and 178 interviews were completed, an 81.3% response rate. While those who graduated did respond at a higher rate than those who withdrew from the program, 63.5% of those who did not complete the program did complete the exit survey. Only 7 customers indicated they did not want to complete the survey. Respondents were asked to discuss several aspects of the program including the facilities, the educational program, the case manager, their future educational plans and the program in general.

What Caught Your Attention at Orientation

As described above, all respondents attended an orientation which explained the IY program. They were asked to think about what they learned at orientation that caught their attention or made them consider entering the program. Of course the incentive that could be earned by completing parts of or the complete program was enticing, however, things like being about to focus exclusively on school in a structured environment was important. As one respondent said:

“Before, DWS had you do work-site programs and classes for 10 hours school and 20 hours work-site. So I was excited being able to go to school full-time. It was better to do 30 hours of school instead of just 10. In the end I got it done faster. I knew I wanted to get it done and was excited to get it finished, so it was just great to be able to do all 30 hours for school and helped me get it done so much faster.”

Even though most did not use help with transportation and child care, many reported that hearing about these resources gave them encouragement that this would be a good program. Respondents also indicated that they liked meeting their future employment counselor at the orientation and getting a feel for the person who would be managing their case.

Quality of the Learning Environment

Because the pilot sites were quite different in their structure and design, participants from each site were asked unique questions regarding their experience of the facility and program design.

North Region: The 101 respondents who had attended the pilot at Lewis Elementary in Ogden were asked about how features of the site contributed to the learning environment. Students were in general very positive about all aspects of the learning environment but were most positive about being able to earn credits at their own rate. Having the teacher available to answer questions was also very important to students. Less important (but still positive) features included having a classroom for education pilot customers only and having set times to come and go each day.

When asked what “other” features of the learning environment were helpful many indicated that the location was very helpful as they could walk from home or take a short bus ride to class. Many respondents also reiterated the value of having teachers who could help one-on-one and explain things as needed. As one graduate said, *“The willingness of the teachers to keep helping with the same thing over and over again - they were very supportive and patient with me.”* The only draw back mentioned focused on the environment being a little too much like high school with lots of talking in class and even clicks within the classroom. This was not viewed as helpful to learning.

Central Region: The 77 respondents who attended the pilot at Salt Lake Community College were also generally very positive about the learning environment. For this group the most positive aspects of the learning environment included having a structured environment to study away from home, having access to computers to do the work and being at a community college with students of all ages. Recall that students in Central region were on average three years older than students from North region. Respondents were less positive about the availability of teachers and advisors and the flexibility of the school schedule to work around their other obligations.

When asked to add “other” aspects that were helpful, the teachers were again repeatedly mentioned as key. The individualized help, being available to ask questions and have things explained was important. For older students the college setting was helpful. As one graduate said, *“I felt old (22) going back to school. It was good to be with other older people. They walked us around and made us feel comfortable on campus.”* Some Central region respondents were less enthusiastic about the location as the campus was not centrally located. Some customers had a one hour commute each way when child care drop offs were included.

Experience with Pilot Employment Counselor

Customer experience with the pilot case workers was evaluated by asking the same questions as have been asked of other FEP customers in other studies. The first and most general question asked respondents to rate their relationship with their employment counselor from poor to excellent. Of those sampled, 86.6% said they had a good to excellent relationship with their pilot employment counselor. There was a significant split in attitudes between graduates and those who withdrew from the program. Graduates reported a good to excellent relationship 93.8% of the time and while only 65.9% of non-graduates reported this level of relationship. Table 7 reflects the differences between groups on this general question as well as specific elements of the relationship.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they had anything else to share about their experience. Several of the comments were directed specifically toward the pilot case managers.

“The case worker is an excellent worker, she’s really caring, she wants you to be successful. She makes it so you don’t have any excuse not to. Whoever came up with the pilot, it was a great idea! They got rid of all barriers. It prepared me so that I won’t have to go back on state assistance.”

Table 7: Customer Relationship with Pilot Employment Counselor

My employment counselor.....	Percent in agreement	
	Non-graduates	Graduates
..treated me with dignity and respect.	89.4%	96.9%
..took the time to explain program rules.	89.4%	98.5%
..asks too many personal questions that are none of his/her business. (Reverse)	19.1%	5.3%
..overwhelms me with so many things to do I am likely to fail.	23.4%	3.8%
..acts more like an ally (friend) than an enemy.	83.0%	96.2%
..knew enough about me and my situation to help me reach my goals.	69.6%	96.9%
...listened to me when I needed to discuss problems I was having.	76.1%	96.2%
..helped me find ways to solve problems getting in the way of my education.	61.7%	94.5%
...helped me deal with paperwork or other problems I was having with DWS.	75.6%	95.2%

What Contributed to Success?

Those who graduated were asked to reflect on specific parts of the program, evaluating how much each contributed to their success. While child care and transportation assistance were important supports for many respondents, only about half the group indicated these resources were important to their success in the program. This was true only because some participants already had supports in these areas. For those who did not previously have access to transportation or child care, these resources were vital.

Customers were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much having the case manager located at the education facility contributed to their success. The responds averaged 4.75, indicating this factor was *very* important to their success. Some of the comments from the end of the survey provided insight as to why this was so helpful.

- *“My employment counselor was right there on campus. She motivated me and pushed me.”*
- *“My employment counselor checked in with me every day, made sure that everything was going smoothly. She was understanding and nice.”*
- *“Having my employment counselor there was a huge help. If I had issues about school they were there rather than waiting on the phone for 1.5 hours.”*

The presence of the case manager on site was actually rated higher than the promise of the incentive which would be earned at the end - but not by much. The responses regarding the role of the incentive in achieving success averaged 4.71. The final item evaluated was “seeing others complete their goals and celebrating together.” The responses to this question averaged 4.57, still indicating it

was a very strong source of support. When reporting on the role of the celebration many included comments about how inspired they were to see the success of peers with whom they had struggled.

- *“I really liked the celebrations. I really thought it was neat to show people I was accomplishing this. I missed out on my own graduation and so now I get to celebrate in a way I didn’t get to before.”*
- *“The celebrations were really motivating because I could see other people smile when they graduated and I wanted to do it too.”*
- *“The celebrations were fun. My family and friends all came and we celebrated lots of graduations. I saw the other people get their money as well so I knew it was for real.”*
- *“The celebrations were great. I cried at all of them. Especially to see my friends graduate. We were like a family there - it was great!”*

Respondents were asked to describe any other part of the program which contributed to their success. Many reiterated the items above. As one respondent from North region said, *“The celebrations were really motivating. They gave us something to look forward to. We got close in the class even though most of the girls would have been my kids.”* A respondent from Central region said, *“I tried going back to High School. The older students, smaller classes and one and one attention really helped and made it more comfortable, so they could answer questions for me.”*

In addition, several respondents spoke of success as something which came because of a new vision they had of themselves. This new vision was fueled especially by the teachers and the employment counselors who respondents’ viewed as truly caring about them and working as partners in moving toward success. The program as a whole was a key to helping them believe in themselves, some for the first time. Examples of these feeling include:

- *“Everybody was so encouraging! Even when I wasn’t going as fast as I would’ve liked they motivated me. When someone would finish their credits they would take them around to the classes and everyone would clap for them. Then they would put on their cap and gown and take pictures. It was so encouraging to see that!”*
- *“I just liked that all of them believed in me. They expressed and showed their love and confidence in each of us. I thought, if they believe in me then surely I can do this and believe in myself. The support was just great.”*
- *“The support of the teachers was huge. The support at the school was huge. Being with people in my same situation . So no one was judging each other. This was not my first attempt at getting my GED.”*
- *“The pilot helped increase my confidence so I knew I could do it. It makes you realize you know more than you think.”*

Those who succeeded in the program were asked to describe what might have made the experience easier to complete. Common themes which arose from Central region participants again included the travel distance involved, and delays in testing, which delayed graduation. Those from North region discussed the need for tutors to give more one-on-one help, the need for a quieter classroom environment in which to study and more capacity from DWS to discuss options for further education including scholarship information for college. Respondents from both sites discussed struggles with obtaining transcripts and wished for help in simplifying this process.

What Hindered Successful Completion?

Those who were not successful in completing IY were asked to describe what happened that lead to them not completing IY. Almost no one indicated that problems with the actual school work (reading, writing, math, etc.) got in the way of success. In general, most respondents who were not successful had something happen in their personal life which hindered completion. Typical problems included physical health issues, housing problems, and simply having too many other things going on in their own life or with their children.

A few program related issues mentioned included problems with child care, that is, DWS not supporting the child care of their choice. There were some individuals in Central region for whom the location was viewed as just too far and others who “gave up” due to back logs in testing at SLCC. In North a couple of individuals were working during the day and needed to attend at night and that was not possible. A couple of others reported there was too much “drama” in the classroom and that it was often noisy and chaotic.

Nearly all non-completers (89.0%) indicated they had discussed their issues with the pilot employment counselor. Most simply indicated the problem was bigger than something the employment counselor could handle and while they felt supported, there was nothing the worker could do. There were a very few who indicated the worker did not listen or was not understanding of the situation. These customers typically indicated that the employment counselor was not able to structure the program in a way that the customer liked or felt worked for them.

When asked “What else could DWS have done to help you complete the program?” many spoke of needing more flexibility in the schedule such as studying some time from home or lowering the hour requirement. As one person said, *“Let me study at home– give me a personal tutor who could come to my house. I was having trouble in math and needed one on one help.”* Others understood that, *“I really think they did do everything they could do. They worked with me on my attendance and trying to keep me there but it got to a point where they couldn’t do anything more.”* This result is not unlike surveys of the general FEP population. When FEP closes, most customers do not feel DWS could or should have done anything more. It is just life.

Next Steps in Education/Training

Both groups were asked about any future plans they had for pursuing education or training. Most (93.8%) indicated they did have future plans. Many of those who did not complete the HSD/GED still indicated a desire to finish. Some were already reapplying for IY, others discussed finding a different program that fit better with other obligations. Graduates had a variety of “next step” plans. Some were focused on short term training programs others had long term goals which included going to college. The areas of study most often mentioned were related to the medical field.

Many of these respondents were already working with DWS to enter such programs and were receiving help with paying tuition, applying for grants, and taking entrance exams. Others indicated they were receiving help with child care, school books and supplies and the emotional support they needed. There was a sense that the HSD/GED program had created a momentum that respondents wanted to use to help them get through the next step.

Some respondents who did have goals for the future indicated they were not going to be pursuing the goal immediately, primarily because they needed to work for a while before returning to school. A few were frustrated that DWS did not support the area of study they wanted to pursue or that DWS would not pay for child care to be provided by their preferred provider.

Influencing the Next Generation

Graduates were asked to reflect on how they thought their completion of a HSD/GED would make a difference in the lives of their children. Comments included a variety of ideas from how being able to get a better job and pay the bills, to setting the standard for their children to live up to in the future. Many were looking forward to increase their earning potential through having a degree and many hoped of going on to college or other training; this was just the first step. As some noted:

- Oh wow! A huge difference! I am newly separated from my husband and before this I was a stay-at-home mom. But now I will be able to support my children financially.- It will give my daughter and I a better life, more stable work, and continue to move forward with education. -I can already get better jobs with my GED alone. I can do this better job until I finish my next course.

Several respondents spoke of being the first in their family to finish their education and this means they are now the role model for not only their children but siblings and even friends. In talking about what it meant to be an example, respondents noted:

- You're making a good example about yourself. Your kids notice that you've been struggling in life and even though you dropped out of school, I went back and finished. So even though I didn't finish on time, at least they saw that I went back and finished They're proud of me and happy that I graduated. It sets a good example for them.

- Oh it's huge for them - we went to school at the same time and it was a good example to them. It will pay off down the line when they know what I did . I tried before but quit but they see I hung in there.

- Not only my kids but my nieces are seeing my success. I am stepping up to keep them in school. I beg them to stay in school so they don't have to go through everything I did. My self-esteem was so low. The program gave it all back to me.

- My oldest child (over 20) is now going for her diploma 'cause of me. She is older but dropped out. My two boys are going to go back to school too. They said, "If mom can do it we can do it."

- Greatly. Statistics show that if you don't graduate then your kids won't graduate.

- Big! A big difference. In my family the women don't have an expectation to graduate from high school. I set a new expectation for my kids. Now family is proud of me.

- Now I am able to make more \$, go on to college. It will help my kids see it's important to get education. My parents didn't have their diplomas. Now I have mine. My kids will go to college. I think I broke the cycle.

Final Thoughts on IY

Respondents were provided a final opportunity to share any other thoughts they had about the program. There were a small number (9) of negative comments typically regarding dissatisfaction with program rules or lack of understanding of particular situations. There were also a few respondents who provided specific suggestions to improve the program such as:

- "provide more locations so people don't have to drive so far,"

- "reduce the classroom sizes so it is less crowded and individuals can get more help,"

- *“provide more post HSD/GED assistance, other employment counselors really can’t help,”*
- *“be more understanding of new moms and their needs with a new baby.”*

By far the greatest number of comments spoke in strong support for the program as a whole. The availability and support of teachers and employment counselors was often mentioned as a strength. Others reiterated support for program components such as the celebrations, the strong structure, and the value of getting an education over going to a work site. These comments came from both graduates and those who did not complete the program.

Comments from graduates focused on the great sense of accomplishment they felt having completed this significant milestone. As some graduates said:

- *“Just keep people coming it is a great program that helps so many people. I was told all of my life I was retarded and stupid and that’s why I quit school. This program gives you a pat on the back and makes you feel good. They help you so much and give lots of support. I quit so many times before but they didn’t let me quit!”*
- *“It’s not just one or two of us that need that help. We see it is a lot of people. School’s so much better than a worksite. Program is great for single moms. It’s a wonderful program and I am glad it was offered for single parents and not let us get stuck in the system and show our kids we can be better parents.”*
- *“Loved being in the program. I was in another program for awhile, working on my GED, and didn’t get far. Put in this program and completed in 2.5 months, getting more credits than I needed. I didn’t think I would ever get a HSD. This was the best experience for me and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”*
- *“It was a great opportunity. I am glad they offer that here. I was the oldest person in my class and I was inspired by the young people in my class. I was there to get it done - had they not offered that program, I would have probably not ever gotten it. I have been working all my life. I am almost 40 and never thought I would need it. I am glad it was there for me.”*
- *“I had tried to get my GED before but whenever I went to sign up they looked at me funny and judged me because I am older (over 30). They made me feel ashamed and I would drop out. It wasn’t like that here. Everyone was in the same boat and just did what we had to do.”*
- *“It was scary to do the speech but I was motivated by hearing all that others had gone through to get where they are. I realized I didn’t have things as bad as others. My step daughter is now going through the program . The fact that I can now be an example to others is amazing. I will do whatever it takes to support others. I just want to say thank you!”*
- *“I just liked that all of them believed in me. They expressed and showed their love and confidence in each of us. I thought, if they believe in me then surely I can do this and believe in myself. The support was just great.”*

The comments shared here reflect the feelings which bring people to tears in the celebrations. Those whose life experience is that *everyone* graduates from high school and likely goes on for some further education are reminded that not everyone follows this course. For many, realizing the dream of earning a HSD/GED is beyond what they ever thought possible. For many it is their first “success,” something in which they and their families can take pride; something which will serve as a stepping stone to the future.

Post IY Outcomes: Activities and Employment

Customer case closure and wage outcomes were evaluated following either their time in IY or following the period which made them eligible for the pilot, even though they did not enter IY. All cases evaluated had at least one full quarter of wage data available. As shown in Table 8, wage data for those who graduated from IY and those who withdrew early from the program show very similar rates of earned wages following their IY experience. Those who never entered IY were less likely (39.7%) to have wages reported.

Of all FEP cases evaluated, 903 (77.5%) had closed at some point. Evaluation of the closure reasons as reported in UWORKS show that nearly one quarter of the cases closed due to some form of income, generally earned income. Significantly more of those who had withdrawn from IY were closed non-participation than those who completed the program. There was also a significantly higher percentage of graduates who were still open.

Table 8: Post IY Time Frame Outcomes

	IY Graduates N = 122	IY Withdrawals N = 193	Not enter IY N = 665
Worked following IY participation or application	57 (46.7%)	91 (47.2%)	264 (39.7%)
Closure Reasons Post Episode with IY eligibility	N = 181	N = 214	N = 770
Income related closures:			
Customer request - income	6 (3.3%)	15 (7.0%)	30 (3.9%)
Increased earnings	10 (5.5%)	10 (4.7%)	24 (3.1%)
Obtained employment	25 (13.8%)	22 (10.3%)	120 (15.6%)
Reached time limit - income	2 (1.1%)	- 0 -	4 (0.5%)
Total	43 (23.7%)	47 (22.0%)	178 (23.1%)
Payments from unearned income	3 (1.7%)	9 (4.2%)	29 (3.8%)
Non-Participation	44 (24.3%)	92 (43.0%)	226 (29.4%)
Married/Reconciled	6 (3.3%)	6 (2.8%)	7 (0.9%)
Customer request - no income	6 (3.3%)	5 (2.3%)	31 (4.0%)
No longer eligible	11 (6.1%)	15 (7.0%)	68 (8.8%)
Moved out of state	3 (1.7%)	12 (5.6%)	14 (1.8%)
Currently Open	59 (32.6%)	22 (10.3%)	181 (23.5%)

Each of the employment plans for graduates were evaluated to determine which activities had been opened, completed or not completed following graduation. Only activities which were identified as potentially post-secondary education or training activities were included in the query. The activities identified in the query included:

- ▶ Apprenticeships
- ▶ Apprenticeship-Training
- ▶ Associates Degree
- ▶ Bachelors Degree
- ▶ Classroom Occupational Skills Training
- ▶ Masters Degree
- ▶ Occupational Skills Training
- ▶ On-the-Job Training
- ▶ Other Employment-Related Training
- ▶ Other Work Readiness Training
- ▶ Paid Internship
- ▶ Public Paid Internship
- ▶ Public Unpaid Internship
- ▶ Trade Custom Training
- ▶ Unpaid Internships
- ▶ Youth Occ Skls Trng- Bachelor

Only three types of activities were found on any of the employment plans of customers following graduation. Table 9 presents an accounting of all activities queried which were found on the employment plans following their graduation date. Many of the graduates did not have any of these activities listed on their plans.

Table 9: Education Related Employment Plan Activities - Graduates

Activities on employment plans	N = 181
Completed activities	
Occupational skills training	1
Unpaid internships	37
Certificates	
Occupational skills training	8
Did not complete	
Occupational Skills training	15
Unpaid internships	54
Currently open	
Associates Degree	5
Occupational Skills training	12
Unpaid internships	26

A random review of cases resulted in identifying a wide variety of other activities on which graduates were focusing. These included: job search, externships, subsidized employment, employment (but under-employed). There were also cases of customers dealing with critically ill children, or personal physical or mental health issues. Several were working with partner agencies such as vocational rehabilitation and those still in the Transition to Adult Living Program (TAL) through DCFS.

DISCUSSION

During the past two years the education pilot has evolved through many stages. Important lessons have been learned, often through trial and error, but always with a focus on improving the program to better serve the needs of DWS customers. In this discussion the lessons learned regarding specific elements of the program design, the two program models and the creation of a mutually supportive system will be presented. This will be followed by a short summary of the current pilot site activities. Finally, ideas will be presented for consideration if the option of expanding the pilot to other offices and possibly the state is explored.

Lessons Learned: Program Components that Work

The education pilot incorporated principles already in use throughout the DWS system and added emphasis in areas which supported the goals of the program. The significant program components are outlined below along with an explanation of how each lead to success.

▶ **Intensive case management is critical to customer success**

Research with FEP customers has consistently shown that strong, supportive relationships between customers and employment counselors is critical to success. This program is no different. Open communication was recognized as a sign that the relationship was working well. As one employment counselor said, *“Most of our customers who struggled for a while but then kept in communication, were able to re-engage in school. Those who didn’t communicate ended up being dropped from the program.”* A key to supporting that relationship is having the case manager available to the customer (and the teachers) when there are questions or concerns that need to be addressed. If this is not possible, regular contact (at least weekly) is important. In addition, the employment counselor needs to WANT to be supportive and available to customer. The employment counselor needs to believe in the customer and work as a supportive partner, assisting with problem solving, managing life struggles, and helping to deal with challenges in an effort to gain success.

▶ **Mandatory participation in the HSD/GED orientation works**

Some customers are very apprehensive about returning to school. Many have tried before and been unsuccessful, others are older students, some just feel “stupid” or believe that it will take too long to complete. “Mandatory” referral to and attendance at the orientation gives the customer a chance to hear about the program *from the case worker with whom they would be working*. The details of the program are clearly laid out and all questions answered. Customers who walked in convinced they could not do it often left encouraged and ready to try. Even if ILY is not for them, they are reminded of the importance of education and encouraged to pursue some form of study.

The findings above illustrate the need to continue emphasizing the importance of this process to employment counselors in the pilot offices. The employment counselor’s attitude toward the orientation and encouragement of the customer is so important and is the first introduction of the customer to program and sets the tone for future success.

▶ **Having standards for attendance and progress is important**

As FEP participants, customers in this program are generally single parents struggling to manage many demands. Sometimes they have never learned to appreciate the value of education and

need support in making the effort and time to complete. Our setting attendance and progress goals communicates this message that this is important. Soft skills needed for the work place are reinforced by these standards.

Over the two years, both pilot sites developed a modified intervention process (similar to non-participation) for addressing attendance and progress issues. Tight case management is needed so that even after just 2 weeks a small problem can be addressed before it becomes a larger issue. Intensive case management allows the case manager to know the individual circumstances of the customer and make occasional exceptions when needed. Consistent effort on the part of the customer is essential but flexibility is important as life happens.

An example: One of the recent graduates was living in the shelter when she started the program. She did not meet the attendance criteria when she first started, but was trying. She was late to school a lot at first, but we excused this as she worked through this issue. She was making an attempt and attending. With the support of her counselor she was able to overcome this barrier and graduate from the program. We need to remember that it is not always black and white and there will always be some exceptions.

► **Offering an incentive to join the program is essential.**

People apply for FEP assistance because they need financial help. An incentive entices customers into the program and provides ongoing motivation. While the incentive is inviting initially, it does not guarantee success. The hard work and sacrifice involved with continuing with school can be overwhelming. It was helpful to allow people to “earn” part of their incentive along the way, for example, by passing one part of the GED or completing a number of credits toward graduation. Earning multiple smaller rewards as opposed to one large reward has been proven effective in other venues as well such as weight loss (Weller, Cook, Avsar, & Cox, 2008).

In the end, while no one refused the money, successful customers talked about personal pride, a sense of accomplishment, the support of the case workers, fellow students and family and even astonishment with their own abilities as the key factors which motivated them in the hard times to stick it out.

► **Celebrations: A time for encouragement, hope and possibilities**

Monthly celebrations facilitated many positive aspects of the program. They were extensions of the support provided by the employment counselor and an opportunity for customers to see each other succeed and encourage each other. The celebration gave graduating customers a chance to share their stories of “how they did it” and pass on bits of wisdom and encouragement to others.

This was the only graduation day many had experienced. It was often the first major life accomplishment outside having children. Customers were often surprised at their own success and expressed new belief in themselves and their potential for the future. Family members shared in the success recognized by DWS and all participants. Small successes were also acknowledged - as each step is important in the overall goal. New comers to the program got a chance to see that they were not alone, that there were others who had the same struggles, the same past failures and setbacks but have been successful. There is hope!

► **Ongoing training of DWS workers is critical**

Ongoing education of employment counselors regarding the pathways and the principles of the program never stops. Even after two years employment counselors must be reminded of the existence of the program and the pathways to follow to refer clients who are potentially eligible. Staff turnover, fears of participation penalties, lack of knowledge of additional training opportunities and customer disinterest are all factors which can undermine the principles of the program.

As one case manager said, *“It was a bit difficult for us to get buy in initially from our employment counselors. We had focused so hard on participation and letting the customer transition straight into high school completion without first participating in other activities. It was a difficult concept. We struggled with this hurting morale at first and resolved it by moving the pilot to a separate reporting group for participation. This has helped employment counselors not get hung up on whether they count for participation. Sometimes our policies conflict with what is right for the customer.”*

► **Navigating the adult education system can be daunting**

Surprisingly, many customers have no idea how to go about moving forward in their education in areas such as how many (or few) credits they need, how to obtain their transcripts, how to access a program to help them get a HSD/GED. One 27 year old customer discovered she had already graduated and did not know it. Many others only needed a few credits and were able to earn them through work credits or in a very short time. Helping customers learn where they stand relative to graduating can be a surprise, a relief, and encourage the customer to pursue the degree.

Lessons Learned: One Program - Two Models

As described above, the two education pilot sites were significantly different. Given the differences, it is not possible to say which works best, however, the strengths and drawbacks of each model have been identified.

Central Region: Located on the campus of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), the Central Region IY program provides a learning environment with a mix of students of all ages. This is important for older students afraid of standing out. IY students are in classes with regular SLCC students. Customers work with personnel from SLCC and Horizonte to earn their HSD or GED, whichever best serves their needs. In the college setting students, especially those seeking higher education, become familiar with a college campus and can begin to see themselves as someone who just might be able to be successful in school. Seeds can be planted for exploring future options. Familiarity with the campus and the counselors eases this transition.

There were some respondents who found the location of the school challenging. The distance from home to the site created long commute times for some. The size of the campus was also intimidating to some of the students who were generally younger and looking for a more “high school” type environment. With the economic downturn many have turned to SLCC to pursue more education this has created some

North Region: Lewis Elementary School in Ogden has been converted into an adult education facility. At the present time the facility serves various groups of teens and young adults. The IY students are all together in one classroom and get to know each other well. There is a comradery which develops and provides an atmosphere of support, much like a high school class. The school is centrally located and is on the bus route. The low cost of Adult Education registration makes it an attractive option financially. The daily 9 am - 3 pm class time works well for people who have children in school or child care. Onsite access to school credits and records helps this part of the process go more smoothly.

A few customers found the classroom setting difficult for study and complained of other students talking and making it difficult to concentrate. These students, typically older customers

were not seeking the social atmosphere as much as a place to finish their degree and move on. The limitation to daytime hours made it more difficult for those who worked during part of the day to participate as evening classes were not available.

As is often the case, it is not necessarily that one model is better than another but that there is a good fit between the customer and the type of program they enter. Some customers entered the program thinking only of getting a HSD/GED and moving quickly into work. Other customers have additional education suggesting that early engagement with a program connected to a community college could be helpful.

Lessons Learned: Seeing “People” in the Process

This evaluation of the education pilot has attempted to highlight programmatic elements which have had an effect on important outcomes. In addition, there has been great learning relative to the personal impact of the program on individuals involved in the process - both employment counselors and customers.

▶ Program Improves DWS Worker Morale

Case managers are able to serve customers in a way that clearly improves the customer’s life and earning potential. There is more job satisfaction in “*doing right by the customer*” and helping the customer achieve such an important step in life. Customer’s “choose” to be in program and thus are more motivated to succeed in reaching their own goal. As the employment counselors have said:

- *“The biggest highlight is the success we have seen for customers. We had so many people graduate that would not have done so without this pilot. Listening to the graduates tell their story is moving and motivating. I know this has been a significant change for them, their families and we who work with them. In the long run, these customers will be more successful and have a shorter stay on FEP than they would have without completing high school or a GED. For me, this is an exciting and fun part of my job. I do hope we can continue.”*

- *“The high point for me is when a customer is surprised by their own accomplishments. Many customers fear going back to school and some feel like they have been out of school too long and it’s too late to learn. Another high point is customers realizing that they can get their diploma and they can go further in their lives. Also, a customer who get excited about being able to focus on school and setting an example for their children. I take pleasure in hearing customers tell me about having conversations about their school day with their children.”*

- *“I feel like I’m making a difference for these customers. The ones who have had the most success have been the ones who had some of the hardest roads and I have been able to be there to encourage them and help them move forward. The highest point is seeing someone make a large turnaround from where they used to be to now getting back in school and moving on to further education and having ambition to improve their life. This Pilot has been one of the best parts of my job since being with DWS.”*

▶ **Invest in You - More Than a Name.**

The one thing that all customers have in common is having failed, at least once, in being able to obtain a HSD/GED. Some have attempted multiple times to complete this degree, whether on-line, doing packets or attending classes. Fear of failure was specifically identified by one quarter of those surveyed as a specific reason they had not continued with school. Some customers are stuck in patterns of thinking that tell them they are no good, that they cannot succeed, that a dead end job is all they can achieve. Some struggle to break out of a cycle of thinking that de-values education, especially for women. Employment counselors work hard to convince these customers that it is worth investing the time and energy in themselves, and it seems to work.

Many customers talked about the supportive nature of the IY program (employment counselors, teachers, fellow students) as a primary component of their success. Others believed in them even when they did not fully believe in themselves. Customers generally view their IY employment counselor as a partner, someone on their side, and a supporter in moving toward success. They see the case worker as truly wanting to help them make the most of this opportunity. If the customer can be encouraged to move past the fear and the negative thinking, great things can and do happen.

Current Status of Education Pilot

Both regions have continued implement the education pilot in the original offices. Customers continue to be referred to the IY orientation and TABE testing and admitted to IY as appropriate. The caseloads of all IY employment counselors remain limited to approximately 25 - 30 customers and are continually at or near full.

In Central Region the West Valley City office has set up an education specialist to help customers connect with HSD/GED services even without participation in the pilot program. The Regional director in North is exploring options for expanding the program in other areas of the region if approved to do so.

Even though the education pilot has been solidly in place for about one and a half years there are still some challenges in making the process work. Some of the issues include:

- ▶ Customers who were not appropriate for IY often did not get any assistance with pursuing Adult Basic education
- ▶ Customer's completing IY are often funneled into work sites and not given support in pursuing next levels of education
- ▶ Some employment counselors struggle to "let go" of participation mind-set in order to actively refer people to IY as outlined in their office pathway

These ongoing struggles identify areas where additional education and support are needed to encourage employment counselors and all DWS personnel involved to embrace the effort to better connect these customers with an opportunity to complete their basic education.

Where to Go From Here - And How to Get There

As a pilot, part of the purpose of this project was to discover what works and what does not. Those who have been engaged in the development and implementation of the pilot were asked to

outline principles which should be considered if others are thinking about or attempting to initiate similar programs. The core elements identified as critical to success are listed here.

- ▶ Develop ongoing relationship with state adult education leaders. Gather with adult education providers and specialized DWS workers to do ongoing education regarding each the various DWS and adult education programs, problem solve and strengthen relationships between service providers.
- ▶ Initiate communication and dialogue with local adult education providers in shaping the program. This includes site location, content of the program, participation standards and customer qualifications.
- ▶ Identify an employment counselor who would work particularly well with this customer group, someone who can provide support, guidance, and structure while being flexible and sensitive to customer needs.
- ▶ Secure support from every level of DWS management regarding the purpose of the program, pathways, and most importantly implications for participation.
- ▶ Educate referring employment counselors about their critical role in program success and provide ongoing education on the process as well as opportunities for feedback to improve process.
- ▶ Limit case loads (25 - 30) to insure availability for weekly check ins, walk-in appointments and close follow-up with customers.
- ▶ Retain a consistent message going out from all levels of management regarding the agency's core philosophy toward customers pursuing a HSD/GED.
- ▶ Support this philosophy by acknowledging and accepting the potential impact on the participation rate, including timely referral of appropriate customers in performance plans, and special recognition of employment counselors who consistently and pro-actively assist customers in pursuing education.
- ▶ Connect smaller groups of customers (or individuals) in rural areas to each other for mutual support. Possibly connect with mentors in customer's community.
- Understand that getting the program up and running smoothly will take time. Be patient with the process and hang in there. Work together to shape what works best for your customers.

This is a new way of doing business at DWS. It is also a new type of relationship with the adult education community. Forging relationships, discovering the most efficient pathways, bringing everyone on board takes time - it will not happen overnight. That does not mean benefits cannot be seen immediately. The challenge is to gain consistency in program referrals and understanding by all parties involved. As two people noted,

- There are things that you cannot plan for or expect when you're creating a program like this.

- There was such a learning curve for us and the schools when we started but the best solution is just reminding workers and providers that it takes time and things do work out and processes become more efficient over time.

Questions to be Resolved

While much has been learned in this process there are still unanswered questions which will need to be addressed if the program is to continue and expand. These include:

- 1) Should minimum standards on TABE scores or credits be set for referral into such a program? If so, it is likely that work with experts in adult education and IY case managers would be necessary to come to agreement and determine a make statewide standard for acceptance into a program.
- 2) Should education or training beyond the HSD/GED be developed by the education employment counselor before the customer is referred back to the original employment counselor? (In rural areas this would not be an option.)
- 3) How far can or should DWS go with supporting education? Could a system based on competency and motivation at HSD/GED level be used to support further education/training?
- 4) Inconsistencies in UWORKS tracking of education have already been identified. If the program is supported it would be important to explore how data could be recorded more accurately to track customer progress.
- 5) Can and should multiple adult education partnerships be developed if larger groups of customers begin engaging in this process. Providers of TABE testing and GED testing as well as assistance evaluating credits for HSDs have at times been overwhelmed by current requests for assistance. Expanding the program could create an even larger issue.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the many challenges encountered along the way, enthusiasm for the education pilot continues. All those involved see great hope for the future of the program and are encouraged that, one day, it may be offered to all qualified customers statewide. Support from all levels of management to initiate such a pilot program from DWS management has been very much appreciated. Every DWS worker who has been involved in this pilot supports the continuation and expansion of the program. The same can be said of graduates and even those who started the program and withdrew. The prospect of continuing to provide a supportive avenue for customers to gain the educational credentials necessary to improve their chances of securing employment is supported by all.

It is too early to determine the impact of adding more than 200 HSD/GED recipients to the labor market in Utah. These are people who, without this program, would most likely have not reached this goal. The movement into employment was realized by some participants, yet not all. Additional training was pursued by a few, but not many. These outcomes are still works in progress.

What is known is that well over 200 children will be able to say that their parent does have a HSD/GED. This intervention, which focused on TANF parents, has the potential to serve as a strategy for preventing the same thing from happening to the next generation. Given the strength of the research relating a mother's level of education to future outcomes for their children, it is a good place to start.

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APPENDIX 1: Invest in You Pathway for North

GED Pilot Pathway- North Region

During initial interview with referring Employment Counselor:

- ❑ Inform customers without a GED or High School diploma of GED pilot.
- ❑ Schedule appointment to attend GED Orientation.
**If the customer states that they are not interested in attending school, have them attend the orientation anyway to learn about the program and make an informed choice of whether or not to participate.
- ❑ Create 360 referral for GED Pilot Program.
- ❑ Narrate all steps taken during the referral process.

Orientation and TABE testing:

- ❑ All customers will complete the initial questionnaire at the orientation.
- ❑ Upon completing the orientation, if the customer is interested in the program, Nanette will give them the TABE testing schedule and the customer will be asked to indicate which session they will be attending.
- ❑ If the customer does not show for two orientations or attends the orientation and is not interested, the referring Employment Counselor will narrate this and continue with FEP case management. This should include scheduling a TABE test so the results can be used to assist in determining appropriate FEP activities.
- ❑ Nanette will receive the TABE test results for those pursuing participation in the GED Pilot and high school credit evaluations for each customer who has completed the test. She will review the results along with credits needed to graduate to determine if the customer can complete the program within 12 months. The following guidelines will be used:
 - **If working toward a GED, the customer must have a minimum of the following TABE test scores: Reading- 6.0, Language- 6.0, Math- 4.0.
 - **If working toward a High School Diploma, the customer must need only 12 credits or less to graduate.
- ❑ If the customer is determined to be appropriate based on TABE scores and credits needed, Nanette will assign herself as the secondary worker.
- ❑ If the customer is determined to be inappropriate, Nanette will narrate this in UWORKS and the referring Employment Counselor will continue FEP case management and explore other options for education and/or training.
- ❑ If there are no openings in the program, Nanette's secondary caseload will be the waiting list, based on the date she was assigned as secondary worker.
- ❑ Once a slot opens in the program and the customer is next on the waiting list (and still interested in participating in the pilot), Nanette will be assigned as the primary Employment Counselor to begin her assessment.

Case Management (w/ Nanette):

- ❑ Complete a thorough assessment and discuss education goals, including what the customer would like to do after they complete high school.
- ❑ Discuss ways to work around possible barriers.
- ❑ Determine if customer can complete program within timeframes based on assessment information.
- ❑ Develop employment plan based on the following guidelines:

**The customer must agree to attend at least 20 hours per week and maintain 80% attendance.

**The customer must complete at least one credit per month. Progress will be monitored by Nanette on a monthly basis.

- ❑ If the customer is not capable of participating in the GED Pilot based on assessment information (physical issues, mental health issues, housing issues, etc.), refer them back to original Employment Counselor to resolve issues and continue with FEP case management.
- ❑ If issues are resolved and the customer is still interested in participating in the pilot, Nanette will reassign herself as the secondary worker and the customer will be on the waiting list. Ensure that other resources are offered for completion of high school diploma or GED during this time.
- ❑ Narrate assessment processes, discussions with customer, and decisions made.

Problem Solving:

- ❑ Phase 1 of problem solving will begin if the customer falls below 80% attendance and/or is not earning at least 1 credit per month. The customer will be given one month to bring attendance and/or progress up to required levels. Efforts will be made to identify educational barriers, such as a learning disability or problems in the classroom setting as well as other factors that may be affecting attendance or the ability to complete credits.
- ❑ If issues are not resolved in Phase 1 of problem solving, staff case with supervisor to determine if the customer should be removed from the GED pilot program.
- ❑ If the customer is removed from the program, refer back to original Employment Counselor for continuation of the problem solving process.

On-going Education:

- ❑ As the customer gets close to completing GED/ HS Diploma, continue discussions about furthering education and begin planning for the next stage of education or training as determined appropriate.

Appendix 2: Invest in You Pathway for Central Region

Central Region Pathways Manual

Invest In You—GED/HS Diploma Pilot

Updated October 2008

Introduction:

Invest In You is a Central Region Pilot project involving a group of FEP customers without a GED or HS Diploma. These Pilot customers will primarily focus on obtaining a HS Diploma or GED. Customers will benefit from intensive case management as well as incentives for reaching milestones.

Notes:

- This Pilot is for South County and Midvale FEP customers only.
- A FEP customer will attend the Invest in You orientation and complete a TABE test within 15 day of application.
- The Invest In You Employment Counselor will assess the customer for appropriateness to the program.
- Customers who are on a FEP extension, need ESL, or are in a serious crisis, need to complete steps a through d of number 1 in the referral process, but are not appropriate for the Invest In You Pilot. The current Employment Counselor should continue to work with them on obtaining their GED or HS Diploma. (These customers are still tracked for the Pilot. A narration must be completed as to why the customer never attended the orientation and every time there is a HS/GED discussion)

Referral Process

1. Within 15 days of application the Employment Counselor will:
 - a. Schedule all FEP customers who do not have a HS Diploma or GED to complete the TABE test. (Link to Skills Center Pathway)
 - b. Assist customer in obtaining HS transcripts to help determine the need for credits to complete HS Diploma.
 - c. Complete an internal 360 referral in UWORKS to *GED/HS PILOT - INVEST IN YOU*.
 - d. Have all customers who do not have a HS Diploma or GED complete the [Pilot Entrance Educational Questionnaire](#).
 - The customer should complete this questionnaire in the office during their first appointment. The questionnaire should be given to the office contact within 2 days of completion. (Narrate under Assessment - Pilot Entrance Educational Questionnaire, when completed)

e. Schedule the customer for an Invest In You Orientation in UWORKS under workshops.

- Have a discussion with your customer that attending the orientation may not guarantee acceptance into the pilot.
 - Customers who do not attend the orientation need to be rescheduled for a second orientation. If they do not attend on the second referral (and the customer is not interested in participating in Invest in You at this time), the current Employment Counselor will continue to work with them and encourage HS/GED completion. (These customers are still tracked for the Pilot. A narration must be completed as to why the customer never attended the orientation and every time there is a HS/GED discussion)
2. Upon completion of the Orientation the Invest In You Employment Counselor will meet with the customer to answer any questions and assess interest in participating in the program. The Invest In You Employment Counselor will mark orientation complete in UWORKS and a task will be sent to current Employment Counselor notifying them of the outcome.
 3. The Invest In You Employment Counselor will assess the customer for appropriateness and acceptance into the program.

- To be accepted in the Invest In You pilot, customers must have:

A minimum TABE score of the following:

Reading	Math Comp	Applied Math	Language	Vocabulary	Lang Mech	Spelling
6.0	4.0	4.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0

If the customer does not meet the above criteria they still may be accepted into the program if they are – credits away from obtaining their HS diploma.

Note: If a customer does not meet either of the above criteria they may be considered on an individual basis.

4. If the customer is accepted as a participant in program, the Invest In You Employment Counselor will contact the current Employment Counselor to arrange for case transfer. The current Employment Counselor will complete a transfer summary in UWORKS notes.
5. If the customer is not accepted in the program the Invest In You Employment Counselor will narrate in the in UWORKS the reason for denial. The current Employment Counselor will continue work with the customer on obtaining their GED or HS Diploma. (All customers are still tracked when not accepted into the program)

Invest In You Process

1. The Invest In You Employment Counselor will meet with the customer and SLCC Skills Center Advisor to develop a time line and plan for the customer to complete their GED and/or HS Diploma.
2. The Invest In You Employment Counselor will develop an employment plan with the customer and monitor participation while participating in the program.
3. Customers are required to attend 16 hours/week. This can be negotiated based on other activities on the employment plan. To remain in the program the customer must maintain 70% attendance on a monthly basis. If customer falls below 70% in any month they will be placed on probation for one month. If they fall below 70% in the probation month they will be dropped from the program.
 - If at any time the customer falls below the required participation and does not continue to progress in the program, the Invest In You Employment Counselor will complete the Intervention part of the Problem Solving Process.
4. If it is determined that GED/HS completion is no longer an appropriate goal for the customer, the case will be transferred back to the original Employment Counselor.
 - a. If the original Employment Counselor no longer works at that Employment Center, the case will be transferred to the office via the transfer clerk.
5. Upon completion of the program, the Invest In You Employment Counselor will negotiate an appropriate employment plan with the customer. If other training is desired the Invest In You Employment Counselor will complete the enrollment process with the customer before transferring the case back to the original Employment Counselor.
 - a. If the original Employment Counselor no longer works at that Employment Center, the case will be transferred to the office via the transfer clerk.

