



## Education and Training in Welfare/TANF

Since 1881, the American Association of University Women has been the nation's leading voice in advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research. AAUW believes increased access to education and training programs are necessary for poor women to become self-sufficient, attain jobs that pay a living wage, and move permanently off welfare. AAUW's 2009-2011 Public Policy Program affirms AAUW's commitment to supporting economic self-sufficiency for all women and advocates "strengthening programs, including welfare and vocational education, to improve postsecondary education access, career development and earning potential."<sup>1</sup>

### **Increasing Education Levels is Key to Moving Families out of Poverty**

AAUW supports policies which provide long-term solutions to economic inequity, an example of which is providing women and girls with unrestricted access to education and job training. Statistics show that educational access is closely linked to economic security. Only by improving employability through education and training can women and their families become financially empowered and economically self-sufficient.

According to a U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau report, "[t]he higher a person's educational attainment, the more likely they will be a labor force participant."<sup>2</sup> This Women's Bureau study also reported labor force participation rates by educational attainment for women age 25 years and over:

- less than a high school diploma—33 percent
- high school diploma—53 percent
- some college, no degree—63 percent
- associate's degree—72
- bachelor's degree and higher—73 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Women with a college degree are not only more likely to work; they also earn more than women without this credential. For example, in 2007, on an hourly basis, women with only a high school degree earned 89 percent of what women with some college earned and only 57 percent of what women with a four-year degree earned. Moreover, during the past two decades, this difference has grown. Men and women with college degrees enjoyed a real increase in the purchasing power of their earnings between 1973 and 2001. Women without these credentials saw little or no improvement.<sup>4</sup>

AAUW also advocates "programs that provide women with education, training, and support for success in the work force, including nontraditional occupations."<sup>5</sup> Women who are trained in nontraditional jobs—defined as employment in which women comprise 25 percent or less of total workers—are able to earn more than those employed in traditional occupations. For example, a woman working as a computer scientist or systems analyst—a nontraditional field for women—can earn a mean annual wage of \$56,264, while a woman working as an

administrative assistant—a traditional field for women—will only earn a mean annual wage of \$31,928.<sup>6</sup> It is critical, therefore, that women have the opportunity to improve their employability by pursuing new skills and advancing their education. Job training in nontraditional fields can be an effective path to economic self-sufficiency.

### **Welfare Reform**

In 1996, Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).<sup>7</sup> This act radically modified the way the federal government provides financial assistance to needy families, replacing welfare entitlement programs with the newly-created Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. The purpose of TANF was to reduce long-term dependency on welfare programs by instituting work requirements and setting a lifetime limit of 60 months on families receiving assistance.

### **2005 TANF Reauthorization**

As part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, the House passed (212-206) the Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Protection Act.<sup>8</sup> This measure reauthorized the TANF program and imposed new requirements on program recipients. For example, it increased work requirements from 30 hours to 40 hours per week and required states to put at least 70 percent of their welfare clients to work by 2010. Unfortunately, the bill did very little to encourage and support the education necessary to obtain a job that pays a living wage. As a result, AAUW opposed the Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Protection Act.

During the reauthorization process, AAUW advocated the following changes to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Unfortunately, they were not included in the final measure:

- eliminate the 12-month limit on vocational education or job training
- eliminate the 30 percent cap on the number of families participating in vocational education and on teen parents pursuing a high school diploma in a state's caseload that can be counted toward federal work participation rates
- more broadly, recognize the relationship between education and quality of life while supporting dignified and empowering employment.

In June 2006, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued interim final regulations implementing changes in the TANF program resulting from the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. These regulations defined the activities that may be counted toward the work participation rate requirements and also described how the states must monitor and verify the hours that welfare recipients participate in these activities. Final regulations were issued in February 2008 and included two important changes supported by AAUW. First, unlike the interim final rules, these regulations allow states to count participation in baccalaureate and advanced degree programs as vocational educational training (or job skills training when directly related to one's employment). With this change, all types of postsecondary education are now included in the definition of vocational educational training for the purposes of counting, at least for a certain amount of time, as work. The second change involves expanded

flexibility in how states count homework time. Whereas the interim final rules required that homework time be supervised in order to be counted, the new rules allow states to count supervised homework time, as well as one hour of unsupervised homework time for every hour of class time. These revisions provide valuable options for women pursuing higher education, especially in light of concerns raised by the findings of a 2007 survey of state TANF directors, which showed decreases in the proportion of state caseloads enrolled in vocational educational training and recipients' ability to pursue BA degrees.<sup>9</sup>

### **2010 TANF Reauthorization**

The Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Protection Act containing the TANF program is authorized through September 30, 2010 when Congress will have the opportunity to modify and improve the policies and the funding. AAUW continues to advocate for a greater recognition of the role education has in increasing women's self-sufficiency and decreasing reliance on public aid and will again urge Congress to make important changes in the way education is regarded in TANF. AAUW supports the position that post-secondary education should continue to be included as training and that the 12-month limit on vocational educational training should be increased to 24 months. In addition, states should again be able to apply for waivers so that programs that work by expanding educational opportunities, such as Maine's Parents as Scholars program, can receive funds.

### **Resources for Advocates**

It is AAUW advocates across the country who speak their minds on issues important to them that truly advance AAUW's mission. Stay informed with updates about the reauthorization of Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Protection Act, education and training in welfare programs, and other issues by subscribing to AAUW's Action Network. Make your voice heard in Washington and at home by using AAUW's Two-Minute Activist to urge your members of Congress to support legislation that improves women's access to education and training. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper to educate and motivate other members of your community. Attend town hall meetings for [your members of Congress](#), or set up a meeting with your elected official's district office near you to discuss these policies. AAUW members can also subscribe to *Washington Update*, our free, weekly e-bulletin that offers an insider's view on the latest policy news, resources for advocates, and programming ideas. For details on these and other actions you can take, visit [www.aauw.org/takeaction](http://www.aauw.org/takeaction). For more information, read AAUW's related position papers on higher education and career and technical education. You can find this and other resources on our website at [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org).

### **Conclusion**

AAUW strongly believes that welfare programs should be flexible to allow the highest level of education possible, because advanced degrees are more likely to promote self-sufficiency and help ensure that women are not locked into low-wage jobs. AAUW remains committed in its push for increased education and job training programs for women as welfare reform proposals are considered in Congress.

For more information, call 202/785-7793 or e-mail [VoterEd@aauw.org](mailto:VoterEd@aauw.org).

**AAUW Public Policy and Government Relations Department  
August 2009**

---

<sup>1</sup> American Association of University Women. (June 2009). *2009-11 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved July 9, 2009, from [http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue\\_advocacy/principles\\_priorities.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/principles_priorities.cfm).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. (2008). *Quick Stats 2008*. Retrieved August 13, 2009, from <http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/main.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Economic Policy Institute. (2008). *The State of Working America 2008-2009*. Table 3.15. Retrieved August 25, 2009 from <http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/tabfig.html>.

<sup>5</sup> American Association of University Women. (July 2007). *2007 – 09 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved December 6, 2007, from [http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue\\_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf](http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (2009). *National Wage Data, Household Data Annual Averages, Table 39*. Retrieved August 13, 2009, from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193 (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-193 (2005).

<sup>9</sup> National Governors Association and American Public Human Services Association. (September 24, 2007). *State Choices About TANF Programs Under DRA: Findings from Joint NGA/APHSA Survey*. Retrieved December 13, 2007, from <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0709WEBCASTTANFSLIDES.PDF>