



SEIU UHW-WEST & JOINT EMPLOYER EDUCATION FUND

Response to the Department of Education Request for Information: Promising and Practical Strategies to Increase Postsecondary Success

Abstract

The Shirley Ware Education Center (SWEC) and the SEIU UHW-West and Joint Employer Education Fund (the Education Fund) participate in a network of industry driven, labor-management training and career upgrade partnerships. These partnerships are affiliated with major healthcare employers in regions around the country and with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and its local unions. This network serves over half a million incumbent workers in the high growth healthcare industry. Through this network (known as the Healthcare Career Advancement Program Fund Affiliate Group or HCAP), we share best practices that support education, skills enhancement and career mobility. The Education Fund has established two successful programs that result in high rates of post-secondary success, industry recognized credentials that match high demand healthcare jobs, and placement in long-term, living wage jobs for the incumbent workers we serve. Through our Health Career Upgrade program, entry to mid-level incumbent workers in the healthcare sector are supported to complete educational programs and move up career ladders without a break in employment. Our Success Through Educational Preparation (STEP) program supports incumbent healthcare workers as they complete pre-requisites and build the study skills needed to enter into post-secondary degree and certificate programs. The Education Fund serves a highly diverse group of workers, including 80% women and 75% people of color. In 2010, our Health Career Upgrade program graduates secured an average 24% (\$6.34) increase in wages. In 2010, 83% of STEP participants completed the program with a passing grade, generally an A or a B. These two programs increase college completion rates and strengthen the higher education pipeline to ensure that more students working in the healthcare industry upgrade their skills by earning certificates and degrees that lead to high-demand healthcare jobs.

Strategy and Program

Programs: The Education Fund has two distinct programs that produce solid rates of success in terms of post-secondary education completion rates, job placement, and income increases for diverse group of healthcare employees seeking to advance their careers.

- 1) Through the **Health Career Upgrade** program, entry and mid-level healthcare employees upgrade their skills along a career path without a break in employment, with the potential to advance even from an entry level position in housekeeping to a career as a registered nurse. Health Career Upgrade program participants develop competencies that are relevant across a number of healthcare occupations, with a focus on allied health care positions. Recent training cohorts have included high-demand jobs such as Medical Coding, Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)-to-Registered Nurse (RN), Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA), Phlebotomist, Sterile Processing, Medical Assistant, Clinical Nurse Instructor, and Mammographer. Our average program completion rate is 90%. In contrast, the Institute for Higher Education and Leadership



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Policy at California State University (CSU) Sacramento found that six years after enrolling, only 30% of degree-seeking students enrolled in community colleges in California had either completed a certificate or degree, or had transferred to a university (about 25% of African American students and 20% of Latino students.)

- 2) **Success Through Educational Preparation (STEP)** is a multi-semester series of English, math, and science classes offered along with tutoring, case management, and career counseling, to prepare students for entry in to allied health and nursing programs. As of spring 2012, the Education Fund is offering STEP classes at 50 community colleges. In 2010, 83% of STEP participants completed the program with a passing grade. 78% of those who passed their classes received an A or a B grade, demonstrating their readiness to take the next step up the career ladder by continuing their education.

History: Over the last 10 years, the Shirley Ware Education Center (SWEC) and the SEIU UHW-West & Joint Employer Education Fund (the Education Fund) have reached over 42,000 and provided training to more than 9,100 incumbent workers, including supporting training for 500 new registered nurses. SWEC was founded by SEIU UHW-West in 1998 with funding from the city of Oakland, California. SWEC focused on increasing career upgrade training opportunities for the benefit of healthcare employees, and filling existing skills gaps in the healthcare workforce. In December 2004, SEIU UHW-West joined with a number of employers to create the SEIU UHW-West & Joint Employer Education Fund. SWEC has since been integrated into the Education Fund and provides access to grants for additional programs and training opportunities. Since 2005, the Education Fund has grown into a multi-state organization offering career counseling and training programs to thousands of healthcare employees every year. Programs range from helping people explore their first steps in education, to providing multi-year training programs that include tuition, books, stipends, and comprehensive case management. We now serve over 71,000 healthcare workers with 30 participating employers, including four Long Term Care systems, and six participating unions throughout California, Oregon, Nevada, Washington, and Colorado.

Need: Changes in the way that medical care is provided are producing substantial demand for allied health care workers. Currently there are insufficient numbers of qualified allied healthcare workers in the training pipeline, threatening the quality and availability of medical care. Population growth, the aging population, the aging workforce, and healthcare reform are four factors driving demand for new workers in the health care industry. Kaiser Permanente, the largest employer served by SWEC and the Education Fund, has predicted that its California membership will grow 21% as the population increases over the next 10 years, not including new members anticipated as a result of healthcare reform (as described in Kaiser Permanente Human Resources' internal Medical Imaging Workforce Planning Overview & Future State Demand Forecast). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), medical imaging jobs are expected to grow by 19% by 2018. According to the Center of Excellence (COE), a research arm of California's Community College system, "between 2002 and 2007, the health care industry grew twice as fast as the overall economy, adding over 17,000 jobs in Northern California alone.



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The number of health care establishments grew by 11% from about 5,300 organizations in 2002 to 5,900 organizations in 2007. During this same time period, total wages for healthcare jobs increased by 46%.”

While over the last several years the recession has slowed short-term growth in the workforce, now that the economy is recovering, healthcare reform is being implemented and more workers are looking toward retirement, the demand for allied healthcare workers is increasing once again. Allied healthcare positions, including those targeted by this grant, are projected to be the fastest growing area of health care employment, with a projected 63% increase between 2010 and 2030. The California Hospital Association (CHA) estimates that between new job creation and the need to replace workers who retire or otherwise leave the field, California will need to train nearly 1 million more allied health workers by 2030. The aging population is one factor driving the increased demand for allied healthcare workers, as an aging population is increasing its use of the healthcare system while simultaneously reducing the supply of existing healthcare workers as older workers retire. SWEC and the Education Fund have more detailed information on employer needs available upon request.

Number of Participants and Demographics

SWEC and the Education Fund served nearly 5,000 incumbent healthcare workers in 2011, with significant growth projected over the next three years. Two thirds of the workers we serve are minorities and 80% women, representing significant diversity. The ethnic breakdown of our program participants is 27% Latino, 26% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 25% Caucasian, 16% African American, and 6% other. Age ranges of past program participants are 60% between the ages of 30 and 49 years, with 12% under 30, 20% between ages 50 and 60, and 8% over 60. The California Endowment found that graduates of entry level health education programs and consequently those employed in entry level positions -- a population similar to the one we serve -- are more diverse in comparison to graduates of advanced degree programs. By providing support for this diverse group of healthcare workers to continue their education and secure employment, SWEC and the Education Fund are directly addressing the under-representation of African American and Latino students in allied health care positions also documented by The California Endowment.

Objectives and Methodology

Our Health Career Upgrade program model has been successfully implemented by SWEC and The Education Fund for over 10 years. By designing our programs in direct response to documented employer needs and employers’ specific requests for training made by regional and facility level employer staff, we meet the needs of employers and incumbent workers. Key success factors of this model include:

- As a labor management partnership, we successfully bring employers and union leadership to the table to design programs that match the needs of both working students and employers



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- Leveraging our partnerships with community colleges, we customize training to each employer's needs and, where feasible, each facility's needs, bridging the gap between community college's standard curricula and employers' specific needs
- We provide individualized support for participants from program start to finish, including one-on-one career counseling, academic support, tutoring (in person and on-line), and significant financial investments in tuition, books, and wage replacement stipends (up to 12 hours per week)

Using job expectation documents as a guide, we first vet existing college curricula with employers to make sure we are training on the right equipment and for the right skill set. SWEC then collects input from representatives from the union, employers, and training provider on all aspects of the programs. Pre-requisite requirements, scoring criteria for applicants, release time, and adjustments to job descriptions are negotiated up front to ensure smooth career transitions. As needed we negotiate with community colleges (our preferred educational partners) and other training providers to adjust class schedules, usually to extend program lengths to accommodate training held three days a week (as opposed to the typical five days a week), so the program is accessible for working students. For shorter programs, where feasible we negotiate an accelerated program with full-time stipend support, so that participants can complete in a shorter period without having to balance the competing demands of work and school. Towards the end of the program, our career transition support services include prep classes for licensure tests.

A summary of our strategic priorities as an organization is as follows.

- To identify and develop relevant programs that address the needs of eligible workers, with an increased emphasis on the highly diverse group of entry-level and at-risk workers we serve
- To strengthen employer and employee engagement and in turn improve integration with unions and employers to meet the needs of both groups
- To increase our capacity to identify current and future workforce trends in this era of change and uncertainty around healthcare reform
- Implement an evaluation plan to better measure our results and continuously improve our performance

Outcomes

Our Health Career Upgrade program model has a long track record of success, with 2010 participants securing an average 24% wage increase (\$6.84 per hour). In satisfaction surveys, 95% of students who were served by SWEC and/or the Education Fund reported they "felt better equipped to perform their jobs. Our past programs have achieved a 90% success rate in terms of program completion versus community college results of closer to 50%. An independent 2008 evaluation of SWEC and the Education Fund noted many indicators of strong management and success, specifically that "strategic targets are met and very often exceeded; staff morale is high and turnover low; staff reports a culture of



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collaboration, flexibility, and teamwork; external stakeholders report that interactions with the Fund are efficient and consistent.”

Evaluation Methodology

Using a customized, proprietary SQL database, SWEC and the Education Fund track participant characteristics and services provided to participants, the attainment of skills and the employment outcomes of participants throughout the life of the grant, including wage, ethnicity, gender, and job classification information. Baseline data is collected on a paper application and verified with the employer, then entered by the Program Assistant. Classes attended will be verified on an ongoing basis to determine eligibility for stipend. Copies of certificates of completion are held in each participants file. Validation of placement and retention into upgraded positions is gleaned from employer data, in some cases from regularly provided reports of classification and wages for all Education Fund eligible employees at a particular employer and otherwise from custom requested reports from Human Resources staff. We recently completed a strategic planning process and are in the process of developing an expanded evaluation system in 2012.

Cost

As a Taft-Hartley Trust, the Education Fund’s programs are funded entirely by employer contributions negotiated as part of union employer bargaining. SWEC secures grants funds for specific additional programs to supplement our core funding. The cost per participant in our Health Career Upgrade program varies widely depending upon the length of the program and the type of support provided, from \$3,000 per participant for short-term upgrade programs such as Pharmacy Technician certification and up to \$30,000 per participant for long-term programs, such as Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) to Registered Nurse (RN) program. The average cost to support a STEP student through one three to five credit class is \$1,500. Through an agreement with one employer, the Education Fund captures any unused annual tuition reimbursement benefit that participants have remaining at the end of each year.

Evaluation Conclusions

When employers in the high-growth healthcare sector recognize the value of investing in education and training in partnership with unions and employees, the result is higher quality, efficient education and training that leads to more Americans earning post-secondary credentials without a break in employment, moving up career ladders, and earning living wages.

Federal Regulations and Policies

WIA funding focuses on One Stop Shops and short term job search strategies for dislocated workers, leaving a large gap in funding for long term skill development of incumbent workers. Cuts in Perkins



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funding have reduced a critical source of education funding for low-income, minority students. Reduced funding for the community college system has left many schools struggling to meet their mission with unrealistically limited funding and little capacity to adapt to the changing needs of employers and the increasing number of non-traditional learners.

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Key Words and Tags

From ROI Appendix
career pathways
certificate attainment
degree attainment
employer partnership
industry-driven competencies
industry-recognized credentials
job placement

(also possibly earn and learn, depending on your definition of that tag)

Suggested New Tags
incumbent workers
healthcare