What are the Effects of Pairing Head Start Services for Children with Career Pathway Training for Parents?

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INTRODUCTION

CareerAdvance®, developed and run by the Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAP Tulsa), is a model two-generation intervention that pairs early childhood education for children with career pathway training in the health care sector for parents.

CareerAdvance® recruits parents from high-quality Head Start centers and offers career ladders through certification programs in the healthcare field at no cost to families. Additional elements include career coaching, small peer learning groups, financial incentives for parents’ educational progress, and wraparound early care and education for children.

This represents the first study of this type of two-generation program and is the beginning of a series of evaluations of CareerAdvance®’s effects on parents and children.

We are also studying a scaled-up, less expensive version of the CareerAdvance® model. More time is needed to conduct cost-benefit analyses and measure longer-term gains.

KEY FINDINGS

CareerAdvance® promotes parents’ career certificate attainment, employment in the healthcare sector, and overall well-being.

This study provides strong evidence that pairing high-quality Head Start services with job training for parents produces positive outcomes for parents and children beyond the benefits of Head Start alone.
RESULTS

Certification in the Healthcare Sector

CareerAdvance® promotes parents’ postsecondary educational attainment: after one year, 61% of participants attained a career career certificate compared to 4% of parents in the matched-comparison group. The effect size of .57 is notable, considering low-income parents face more barriers to success than low-income adults in general.

![Career Certificate Attainment](chart.png)

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Employment and Income

CareerAdvance® achieved its goal of promoting healthcare employment in one year: 51% of program parents were employed in the healthcare sector at year end compared to 27% of the matched-comparison group.

- Parents in the CareerAdvance® program shifted from full-time to part-time employment. Part-time work likely helped CareerAdvance® participants balance the competing demands of adding school to a job and family.

- CareerAdvance® parents did not report a change in material hardship or household income at the end of the first year of the program. While participants experienced a $1,300 decrease in average earnings by the end of the first year, these losses were offset by program incentive payments over the course of the year.
Comparisons to Other Career Pathways Programs

Overall, the CareerAdvance® program resulted in greater improvements in certification and employment than comparable career pathway training programs.

- Recent experimental evaluations of career pathway training programs include Per Scholas and Jewish Vocational Services-Boston.
- The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP) program is the most comparable to CareerAdvance® (e.g., healthcare certification combined with supportive services) and reached certification rates of 45% (compared to 61% for CareerAdvance®).
Parents’ Psychological Well-Being

At the end of year one, CareerAdvance® participants demonstrated higher levels of psychological well-being than their matched-comparison group counterparts. CareerAdvance® participants had stronger commitment to careers and higher levels of self-efficacy and optimism compared to the matched-comparison group (effect sizes presented below).

Despite the challenge of balancing work, school, and parenting, CareerAdvance® parents did not exhibit higher levels of stress and psychological distress compared to the matched-comparison group.

![Improvements in Parents' Psychological Well-Being](image)

**Statistically significant at 5% level

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Key Elements of CareerAdvance®

- The program offered stackable training in three healthcare tracks —nursing, health information technology, and medical assisting— designed so that participants could make concrete progress, exit at various points with certificates, and return for further career advancement.

- CAP Tulsa developed close partnerships with community colleges and offered college coursework and trainings while children were in Head Start.
Peer meetings with other participating parents were led by trained CAP Tulsa career coaches and took place at the Head Start centers.

Incentives to reduce the financial burden of entering school (up to $3,000 each year) were offered to parents for meeting grade or credit requirements, attending peer partner meetings, or attaining a certificate.

In-kind assistance was provided to further help parents make ends meet, including bus passes, gas cards, and child care outside of Head Start’s normal hours.

All families received full-day early care and education for children at Head Start programs.
**STUDY DESCRIPTION**

- The study estimated the one-year effect of parent CareerAdvance® participation (career pathway training for parents combined with Head Start services for children) compared to a matched-comparison group that received Head Start services alone.

- All study families were low-income (average income per year of $15,190) with an average household size of four, including one preschooler (on average 4 years old) and another child. The sample was ethnically and racially diverse: 40% Black, 28% White, 9% Hispanic, and 23% other. Roughly one-third of the sample were single parents.

- Our sample included 287 CAP Tulsa Head Start parents and their young children, with 150 parents in CareerAdvance® and 137 parents in the matched-comparison group.

- The study included multiple cohorts (cohorts 4-10 of the program) that started at staggered time points (fall and winter of each Head Start year, beginning in fall 2011 through fall 2014).

- To select the matched-comparison group, we used propensity score matching, which adjusts for differences between groups in demographics and interest in pursuing educational and career activities.

- The study drew on parent surveys and administrative data from CAP Tulsa and the State of Oklahoma from 2011 to 2015.