

# **GAIN:**

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

## *Basic Education in a Welfare-to-Work Program*

*California's Greater Avenues for Independence Program*

*Karin Martinson  
Daniel Friedlander*

*Manpower Demonstration  
Research Corporation*

*January 1994*

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MDRC

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March 18, 1994

Mr. Bruce Reed  
Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy  
The White House  
Old Executive Office Building, Room 216  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Bruce:

I am pleased to share with you the newest report from an ongoing evaluation of California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program, which MDRC is conducting under a contract from the California Department of Social Services. GAIN anticipated the federal Family Support Act of 1988 by emphasizing large-scale, mandatory participation in basic education, in addition to job search, training, and unpaid work experience, for welfare recipients who were considered to need it. The ultimate goal was to equip these individuals to obtain and keep jobs. The report tracks, for two to three years, more than 2,500 GAIN registrants who met GAIN's criteria for needing basic education.

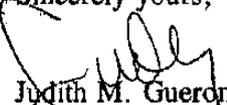
It concludes that the GAIN programs in the six counties studied all successfully met the unprecedented challenge of providing basic education to great numbers of welfare recipients, and that GAIN led to increases in the number of hours in basic education and in receipt of a GED. In only one study county, however, did welfare recipients experience significant increases in scores on a test of literacy and mathematical problem-solving. Moreover, at the two-year point, there was as yet no link between sites with educational gains and sites with earnings gains (although the report argues that two years may have been too short a time for detecting earnings impacts, and points to evidence that earnings may have improved at the three-year follow-up point). Further, the report notes that educational gains were concentrated among individuals with relatively high levels of literacy and that test score gains were concentrated in the site that created a virtually new, county-wide adult education program tailored to the special needs of people on welfare.

These results show that, while feasible, providing effective basic education services for this mandatory population can be difficult, and that longer-term follow-up will be important for detecting the full payoff of investments in education.

Finally, it must be stressed that the present results should not be overinterpreted or used to make judgments as to the value of basic education for welfare recipients or for adults more generally, who usually seek out such services and participate in them voluntarily.

I hope you find the report interesting, and welcome your comments and reactions.

Sincerely yours,

  
Judith M. Gueron  
President  
JMG/jg

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**GAIN:**

**BASIC EDUCATION  
IN A WELFARE-TO-WORK PROGRAM**

Karin Martinson  
Daniel Friedlander

Manpower Demonstration  
Research Corporation

January 1994

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation's evaluation of the California Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program is funded by a contract from the California Department of Social Services. Additional funding for the collection and analysis of literacy test data was provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This report is the latest in a series of documents from the GAIN evaluation.

Dissemination of MDRC reports is also supported by our Public Policy Outreach funders: the Ford Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, the Alcoa Foundation, and Exxon Corporation.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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to Karen Paget and Ann Van Aman. Patti Anderson, Lynn Deglin, Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Anita Kraus, Gaston Murray, and Juanita Vega-Chetcuti developed and processed the survey and other data files used in this report. Dan Lehman played a key role in programming many pieces of the study, and Johanna Walter was instrumental in the analysis of the literacy tests. Cristina Di Meo ably coordinated the report and table production. Evan Weissman served as a liaison to the county and state staff. Judith Greissman edited the report with support from Suzanne Wagner and Michael Wilde. Patt Pontevolpe and Stephanie Cowell contributed their word processing skills.

The Authors

## PREFACE

Established in 1985, California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program broke new ground by emphasizing large-scale, mandatory participation in basic education, in addition to job search, training, and unpaid work experience, for welfare recipients who were considered to need it. This new emphasis on basic education was subsequently embodied in the federal Family Support Act of 1988 and its centerpiece, the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program. The premise was that many welfare recipients -- notably, long-term recipients, who account for the bulk of welfare spending -- have inadequate educational backgrounds and basic skills for obtaining and keeping jobs, especially jobs sufficiently well-paying to enable them to leave welfare.

This report, the seventh in the GAIN evaluation, examines how the basic education component of GAIN has been operating and assesses the participation patterns and educational effects for the almost two-thirds of the GAIN caseload who, during the period of the study, were determined to need basic education. It does this by tracking the experiences of more than 2,500 of these individuals over a two- to three-year follow-up period.

The report concludes that the GAIN programs in the six study counties all successfully met the large -- and unprecedented -- challenge of providing basic education to great numbers of welfare recipients. It also shows that GAIN led to increases in the number of hours in basic education and to increases in receipt of a GED. However, in only one of the study counties did welfare recipients experience increases in scores on a test of literacy and mathematical problem-solving. Moreover, at the two-year point, there was as yet no link between sites with educational gains and sites with earnings gains (although the report argues that two years may have been too short a time for detecting earnings impacts, and points to evidence that earnings may have improved at the three-year follow-up point). Further, the report notes that educational gains were concentrated among individuals with relatively high levels of literacy and that test score gains were concentrated in the site that created a virtually new, county-wide adult education program tailored to the special needs of people on welfare. These results show that, while feasible, providing effective basic education services for this mandatory population can be difficult, and that longer-term follow-up will be important for detecting the full payoff of investments in education.

Finally, it must be stressed that the present results should not be overinterpreted or used to make judgments as to the value of basic education for welfare recipients or for adults more generally, who usually seek out such services and participate in them voluntarily.

Judith M. Gueron  
President

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A central goal of recent federal and state welfare reform initiatives has been to assist welfare recipients to become employed and move toward self-sufficiency. However, as documented in several studies, poor basic literacy skills are a chronic problem for many of those in poverty and receiving welfare, diminishing their chances of competing effectively in the labor market. An important policy response has been to provide them with basic education – classes in Adult Basic Education (ABE), which focus on reading and mathematics; preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) test; and instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL).

This report presents findings about the operation and educational effects of a welfare-to-work program that puts a considerable emphasis on mandatory basic education services: California's statewide Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program, which began operations in 1986 and is targeted to recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). For welfare recipients whom GAIN determines to need basic education – 65 percent of those GAIN served during the period of this study – the program emphasizes participation in basic education as a condition for receiving welfare. It must be stressed that this is not an evaluation of adult education services as they are normally delivered: to people who seek them out and participate in them voluntarily.

GAIN broke new ground by mandating basic education for large numbers of people. In giving basic education a prominent role, and in other respects as well, GAIN was an important precursor of federal welfare reform legislation – the Family Support Act of 1988 and its centerpiece, the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, which is the major source of federal funding for state welfare-to-work programs. Lessons on the operation and effects of GAIN are relevant to welfare reform broadly because California has the country's biggest AFDC caseload and GAIN is the largest and one of the most ambitious of all the states' JOBS programs. It is also one of few such programs to mandate basic education for large numbers of welfare recipients.

This is the seventh in a series of reports from an ongoing random assignment evaluation of GAIN's effectiveness, which is being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) under a contract from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).<sup>1</sup> Six California

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<sup>1</sup>The previous reports are: John Wallace and David Long, *GAIN: Planning and Early Implementation* (New York: MDRC, 1987); James Riccio, Barbara Goldman, Gayle Hamilton, Karin Martinson, and Alan Orenstein, *GAIN: Early Implementation Experiences and Lessons* (New York: MDRC, 1989); Karin Martinson and James Riccio, *GAIN: Child Care in a Welfare Employment Initiative* (New York: MDRC, 1989); Stephen Freedman and James Riccio, *GAIN: Participation Patterns in Four Counties* (New York: MDRC, 1991); James Riccio and Daniel  
(continued...)

counties are included in the evaluation: Alameda, Butte, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, and Tulare. Together, they account for more than one-third of the state's GAIN caseload and more than one-half of its AFDC caseload. The present report is based mainly on a sample of more than 2,500 welfare recipients, in five of those six counties (all but Butte), who met GAIN's criteria for needing basic education. They include both single heads of families with children age six or older (AFDC-FGs, who are usually mothers) and heads of two-parent families (AFDC-U's, who are typically fathers).<sup>2</sup> These individuals became part of the evaluation's research sample between March 1988 and June 1990, and the descriptions of county programs apply to the way they were operated prior to mid-1991. The report draws on previously completed analyses and also presents new data based on a survey of these recipients and the results of a literacy test, both of which were administered to them two to three years after they became part of the research sample.<sup>3</sup> This summary focuses primarily on the results for the AFDC-FG (single-parent) registrants, who constitute a large majority of AFDC recipients.

### Highlights of the Findings

*The feasibility of providing basic education through GAIN.* All six of the California counties in the GAIN evaluation were able to operate the program's basic education component on a relatively large scale. The county GAIN programs established the necessary linkages with schools, and the schools were able to enroll the new population of mandatory GAIN participants, provide them with classes that offered an "opportunity to learn" (as measured by conventional standards), and, for the most part, monitor students' attendance and performance. In San Diego, a major effort was made to tailor the services to the specific needs of GAIN participants by creating a new county-wide education program to serve them exclusively.

*Rates and duration of participation in basic education.* Fifty-eight percent of GAIN registrants determined to need basic education were referred by GAIN to a basic education program. Of those referred, 71 percent (41 percent of all those judged to need basic education) actually attended such a

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

Friedlander, *GAIN: Program Strategies, Participation Patterns, and First-Year Impacts in Six Counties* (New York: MDRC, 1992); and Daniel Friedlander, James Riccio, and Stephen Freedman, *GAIN: Two-Year Impacts in Six Counties* (New York: MDRC, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>The research sample does not include AFDC-FGs (single parents) with preschool-age children, many of whom become mandatory for GAIN under JOBS regulations in 1989.

<sup>3</sup>It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss GAIN's impacts on employment and welfare receipt over a longer follow-up period than has been presented in previous reports (most recently in Friedlander, Riccio, and Freedman, 1993) or to link the education outcomes to labor market results. Analysis of these issues will be addressed in the evaluation's final report, scheduled for 1994.

program. Those who were not referred -- or, if they were referred, did not attend -- fell into several categories. Many were temporarily excused from GAIN or had left GAIN because they became employed, experienced health problems, or had other reasons that were acceptable according to the GAIN legislation. Others were referred to activities other than basic education, primarily job search. Still others were continuing, with GAIN's approval, in post-secondary or vocational education and training activities they had begun prior to entering GAIN. The GAIN program provided a considerable amount of basic education: Those who participated attended classes for roughly eight months, on average, during a two- to three-year follow-up period. However, participants were in class for only about 60 percent of their scheduled hours, on average, indicating that, even with intensive monitoring procedures, attendance was not consistent.

*GAIN's education impacts.* This report considers two kinds of education outcomes, based on a study in five of the six evaluation counties. (Butte was not included in this part of the research because resources for survey and test administration were limited.) One outcome is educational *attainment*, which, in the context of this study, refers to passing the GED test<sup>4</sup> (or, in some cases, receiving a high school diploma). The other is educational *achievement*, which (again in the present context) denotes an increase in literacy and mathematical skills as gauged by scores on a literacy test. In the five counties, the educational effects (or "impacts") of GAIN were measured by comparing the educational attainment and achievement of two groups of welfare recipients: one group (the experimental group), who were given access to GAIN's services and were subject to its participation mandate, and another, similar group of welfare recipients (the control group), who were not eligible for the program and were not subject to its participation mandate, but who could participate in other services in the community on their own. It is very important to note that, as discussed above, many experimental group members did not participate in the basic education services provided through GAIN. However, the impacts in this report pertain to the entire group determined to need basic education -- both those who participated and those who did not.

*Impacts on attainment of a GED.* GAIN was successful in increasing GED receipt for program registrants in all five counties that were in the study of GAIN's education impacts. The impacts in four of these counties were statistically significant. Tulare produced a very large (19 percentage point) impact and Alameda produced a relatively large (8 percentage point) impact; the impacts in Los Angeles and Riverside were small; and San Diego's impact (4 percentage points) was in the middle. The GED impacts were concentrated among the individuals who were the most literate when they entered GAIN. For them, GAIN appears to have provided an accessible route for acquiring relatively quickly the specific

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<sup>4</sup>Individuals who pass the GED test receive a state high school equivalency certificate.

knowledge needed to pass the GED test. Those at lower literacy levels tended to participate in ABE (i.e., remedial reading and mathematics) classes; relatively few of them entered GED preparation programs.

*Impacts on literacy test scores.* This study also analyzed whether GAIN increased the basic skills levels of welfare recipients as measured using a literacy test – the Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS). (The test was administered only in English, so those individuals in the sample who were not proficient in English were not tested.) San Diego's GAIN program produced large and statistically significant impacts on TALS scores. No other county produced measurable impacts, and there was no impact for all counties combined, although small test score gains may have gone undetected. As was true of the GED impacts, basic skills increases were concentrated among individuals who had the highest levels of literacy when they entered GAIN; these were also individuals who spent relatively shorter periods of time in basic education classes. It is possible that those at lower literacy levels may have made gains that were not captured by the TALS, or perhaps this group may need more than the considerable amount of education they received to substantially improve their skills. Nonetheless, the results raise questions about whether the basic education services provided through GAIN were appropriate for less literate students.

The results from San Diego and Tulare offer evidence that it is feasible for large-scale, mandatory JOBS programs to produce a substantial impact on GED receipt and basic skills levels. Both counties made special efforts to gear their programs specifically toward the educational needs and circumstances of welfare recipients. The contrasting results for the other counties suggest that achieving education impacts, although possible, may require strenuous efforts to identify, implement, and maintain effective program practices.

In the three counties that produced modest to large impacts on GED receipt or basic skills levels – Alameda, San Diego, and Tulare – the GAIN program, in the short run (i.e., within the available two-year follow-up period), did not result in employment and earnings impacts for those determined to need basic education. However, in Alameda and Tulare, results for a small group of these individuals who became part of the research sample early on, and for whom there are three years of follow-up data, suggest a possible growth in earnings impacts beginning just after the second year of follow-up and increasing into the third. Results from longer follow-up, which will be presented in the evaluation's final report, will clarify whether GAIN's investment in basic education shows promise of paying off in the labor market.

## The GAIN Model

GAIN is overseen by CDSS and administered by California's 58 counties. A key feature of the program is its use of the education and basic skills levels of welfare recipients to sort them into one of two treatment streams. Those who do not have a GED certificate or a high school diploma, *or* who fail to achieve a minimum score of at least 215 on both a reading test and a mathematics test (the CASAS tests, developed by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System), *or* who are not proficient in English are defined as "in need of basic education" and are required to attend a basic education program. They may choose to participate in job search first, but if they do not find a job, they must then participate in basic education.

The other registrants -- those determined to be "*not* in need of basic education" -- usually must participate in job search first. Registrants who are already enrolled in education or training programs when they enter GAIN may continue if the programs meet certain criteria. Participants who do not find employment after completing their initial activities undergo an employability assessment designed to help them choose their next activity: skills training, vocationally oriented post-secondary education, on-the-job training, or unpaid work experience. Registrants who do not participate in their assigned activities are subject to a "sanction," i.e., a reduction in their welfare grant.

For those determined to need basic education, three types of basic education are available through GAIN: (1) ABE programs, which provide remedial reading and mathematics for those with lower skills levels (typically at or below the eighth-grade level), (2) GED preparation programs for students whose academic skills are strong enough to allow them to study productively for the GED test, and (3) ESL instruction, which teaches people who are not proficient in English to read and speak the language.

## The Policy Context

GAIN represented a new approach to welfare reform -- one that emphasized large-scale mandatory participation in basic education services in addition to the job search and unpaid work experience components that were the focus of most welfare employment programs in the 1980s. While the earlier programs produced modest increases in earnings and reductions in welfare receipt, and did so cost-effectively, they did not move substantial numbers of people off welfare. Moreover, those who did leave welfare often remained poor. Studies also suggest that programs that provided primarily job search assistance often were unable to increase the earnings of the most disadvantaged.

GAIN, in contrast, was structured so that, rather than seeking work immediately, participants who were considered to need basic education would "invest" in those activities in anticipation of future

economic gains. Since education has been shown to be strongly correlated with income, policymakers reasoned that this approach, although more expensive in the short run, would lower the costs of welfare in the long run by increasing departures from AFDC, especially if the more disadvantaged recipients thereby left welfare, and by reducing the rate at which former recipients returned to the welfare rolls.

Previous studies, however, offer little guidance about whether a large-scale welfare-to-work program that emphasizes mandatory participation in basic education would be feasible to operate or effective. Historically, adult education programs have been geared toward individuals who voluntarily enrolled and were motivated to return to school. In contrast, many GAIN registrants have had negative experiences in school, including school failure and dropping out, and may be reluctant to return. Schools and the GAIN program faced many challenges in working with this new population of mandatory students -- what types of services to offer, how much education to provide, and how to monitor and encourage attendance. This report is intended to inform some of these issues regarding the operation and effects of basic education in the GAIN program.

### The GAIN Evaluation

The GAIN evaluation, which began in 1986, is conducted in six counties, which represent a wide variety of local conditions and, as noted above, account for more than one-third of the state's GAIN caseload and more than one-half of its AFDC caseload. Three counties are in southern California: Los Angeles, with about one-third of the state's AFDC caseload and a welfare population larger than that of all but a few states'; San Diego, with the state's second-largest AFDC caseload; and Riverside, a large county encompassing both urban and rural areas. Two counties are in northern California: Alameda, an urban county that includes the City of Oakland, and, further north, the mid-sized county of Butte. The final county, Tulare, is located in the largely agricultural, rural Central Valley.

It is worth reiterating that this report's descriptions of the counties' strategies for implementing GAIN are based on data collected no later than mid-1991, and prior to that in most cases. This is the relevant information for describing the "treatment" those in the research sample experienced. However, some of the information does not portray the counties' *current* modes of operating GAIN. All of the counties have continued to revise their strategies as they have become more experienced in operating this very complex welfare-to-work initiative, and in response to changes in funding and other circumstances.

The evaluation uses a random assignment research design to assess the GAIN program. In this design, all mandatory registrants who were referred to the GAIN program in the research counties from March 1988 to June 1990 were assigned, at random, to the experimental group or the control group.

Because registrants were assigned to these two groups at random, there were no systematic differences between them except for the fact that one group was subject to the GAIN mandate and the other was not. Thus, as the evaluation tracks members of the two groups over time, any measured differences between them in the amount of education received, educational attainment and achievement, employment, or AFDC receipt can be attributed with confidence to GAIN.

During the period in which members of the research sample registered for GAIN, four of the six counties had sufficient resources to extend the program's requirements and services to all registrants in their caseload who were mandatory for GAIN under the pre-JOBS rules. The other counties -- Alameda and Los Angeles -- focused exclusively on long-term recipients.

As already noted, this report focuses exclusively on one group of welfare recipients from the overall GAIN evaluation: those determined to need basic education. The GAIN evaluation's analysis of welfare and employment impacts is based on a research sample of approximately 33,000 GAIN-mandatory AFDC-FGs and AFDC-Us, from the six research counties, who were randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. Of this number, roughly 21,000 were determined to need basic education. To collect information on participation in basic education and receipt of a GED or a high school diploma, MDRC surveyed a subset of approximately 2,500 of these 21,000 welfare recipients (both experimentals and controls) in five of the six counties (all but Butte) two to three years after random assignment. To measure educational achievement, a literacy test was administered at the time of the survey to about 1,100 of these 2,500 individuals. The test used in this analysis consists of two sections of the Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS), developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The TALS uses written materials of the sort encountered in everyday life -- such as schedules, maps, and want ads -- to gauge the test-taker's ability to understand such materials and to solve problems based on them (the problems in the quantitative part of the test require arithmetic solutions). After consultation with experts, the TALS was selected for the evaluation because of its appropriateness for disadvantaged adults and its high statistical reliability. Also, because a version of this test has been used in a recent national literacy assessment, use of the TALS makes it possible to compare the scores of GAIN registrants to those of other groups. The study also relies on data from GAIN casefiles, school attendance records, and field research.

### Interpreting the Results of This Study

In weighing the evidence about GAIN's education effects provided in this report, it is important to understand the kinds of questions this study was and was not designed to answer, the inherent difficulty

of measuring educational achievement, and, therefore, the importance of using caution in attempting to generalize these findings to other JOBS or basic education programs.

First, as discussed above, the GAIN program *mandates* basic education for large numbers of welfare recipients. This distinguishes it from most other JOBS programs, which provide basic education only to those who choose this activity. The effects of basic education for those who volunteer may be quite different from the effects for those who are required to participate if they are to avoid the possible loss of part of their AFDC grant. In particular, these results do not represent JOBS programs that offer basic education on a more selective basis or adult education programs that provide services to a non-welfare population.

Second, this report does not evaluate basic education activities alone. Rather, it examines the effects of the entire package of GAIN's services and mandates for those who were determined to need basic education. Basic education is the most important activity in this package, but not all who were judged to need it participated. In this report, basic education impacts are averaged over the full "in need of basic education" sample – those who participated in basic education (for both long and short periods) as well as those who did not.

Third, this report examines only two of the effects of basic education in a JOBS program: increased basic skills and attainment of a GED or a high school diploma. It does not measure other possible effects of basic education, such as the improved well-being of participants' children, a better-informed citizenry, or increased self-esteem. This study also contains no information on the costs of providing basic education in GAIN, which will be examined in the final evaluation report.

Fourth, the question of increased educational achievement is addressed but not answered definitively by this study owing to measurement issues. Unlike attainment of a credential (such as a GED), educational achievement is difficult to define and measure. Although the TALS is considered a good indicator of the skills needed to accomplish tasks in everyday life or in the workplace, it may have some limitations. While the TALS was designed to measure performance across a broad range of literacy levels, it is possible that the TALS was not sensitive enough to pick up achievement gains among those at very low literacy levels. It may also be that the TALS measures skills that are different from those that were taught and learned in GAIN basic education classes. The effects of unmeasured increases in skills may show up later in earnings gains.

The size of the TALS sample also limits the ability of the study to measure educational achievement. The testing was intended to measure achievement impacts for the sample as a whole, not for individual counties or subgroups. Because the sample sizes for the test score analysis for counties or subgroups are small, these estimates can only describe the direction and approximate order of

magnitude of county and subgroup impacts, not their precise amounts. In addition, the sample is not large enough to capture small educational gains. It is possible that achievement gains of a policy-relevant magnitude were made by some of those who participated in basic education, but by too few to appear clearly in the overall experimental-control comparison.

Finally, the motivation of sample members to score high on the tests needs to be considered. TALS test-takers did not face the same incentives as GED test-takers. Passing the GED test is seen by most GED test-takers as a step toward obtaining higher earnings. However, TALS test-takers may have been less motivated to do their best. This may have been particularly true for those at lower literacy levels, for whom any academic skills test would present a difficult challenge.

### Findings on the Basic Education Services and Systems

- **The adult education systems were able to accommodate the GAIN students and to provide them with an "opportunity to learn." The students usually received the same services available to other adults in the community.**

The six counties were able to accommodate the influx of GAIN students primarily by relying on the existing education services in the community and in some cases by expanding them. This was possible, in part, because California has the nation's largest adult education system. Typically, GAIN students were offered the standard basic education programs available to other adult education students in the community, and few changes were made in the services previously provided. ABE and ESL classes generally used individualized instruction. GED programs focused exclusively on the GED test.

"Opportunity to learn" is a concept education analysts often use when they attempt to gauge the quality of education programs. MDRC's field research indicates that, by conventional standards, the education programs in all six counties provided such an opportunity: There were very few capacity problems, so students could receive services; the services were geared toward individuals' educational needs and used established methods and curricula; and the classes were held for a sizable number of hours per week (usually 15 to 20) on a continuing basis.

- **In San Diego, the basic education services were redesigned on a county-wide basis specifically to meet the needs of GAIN students.**

In San Diego, and in a few schools elsewhere, efforts were made to improve the basic education services provided to GAIN students through the use of both additional funding and different curricula and instructional methods. San Diego's program was built on the premise that the existing adult education services were not appropriate for the GAIN population because of their previous negative experiences in

school. The new program was designed and funded by a consortium of agencies -- school districts, the welfare department, and the Private Industry Council (PIC). It consisted of an entirely new network of Learning Centers (i.e., classrooms) designed specifically and exclusively for GAIN students. Key features included up-to-date computer-assisted learning combined with classroom instruction, integrated academic and life skills instruction, off-campus classroom locations to reinforce the idea of a fresh opportunity, a new teaching staff, and a class for learning disabled students. In an effort to enhance accountability, another county, Riverside, developed and funded performance-based payments with several schools for the provision of basic education services.

- **Schools and the county GAIN programs found it difficult to establish reliable attendance reporting systems, which were needed to monitor and enforce registrants' participation. However, these systems developed and improved over time.**

GAIN's participation mandate required registrants to attend their assigned activities on a continuous basis until they left or were officially excused from the GAIN program. This meant that schools had to establish new procedures for monitoring attendance and performance, and for communicating this information to the GAIN program. A number of schools and counties found the new reporting systems to be very burdensome and experienced difficulty producing timely information on registrants who were experiencing participation problems.

Some counties eventually overcame these difficulties by dedicating resources specifically for intensive monitoring systems. Two counties stand out in their efforts to improve attendance. In San Diego, designated case managers were given caseloads consisting only of individuals assigned to basic education activities. These case managers spent two or three days a week at schools, assisting participants and trying to resolve attendance problems. In addition, school staff in San Diego contacted absent students, usually on the very day of the absence. In Tulare, the GAIN program employed "transition counselors," whose primary responsibility was to achieve good attendance among GAIN students. Tulare also established a uniform attendance monitoring system for all schools; several schools called participants each day they did not attend to see if the schools could remove barriers or resolve problems.

During the study period, Riverside adopted a somewhat different approach. As discussed in previous MDRC reports, Riverside's GAIN program had a strong emphasis on quick entry into the labor market. Consistent with this emphasis, registrants who were not attending regularly were sometimes transferred from a basic education activity to a job search activity -- i.e., those with poor attendance were

urged to find jobs if they did not want to attend school. While not a uniform policy, such transfers occurred more often in Riverside than in the other counties.

### Findings on Participation Patterns in Basic Education

This discussion of participation patterns is based on (1) GAIN casefiles and attendance records from education providers, covering an 11-month follow-up period, and (2) a survey of sample members, covering a two- to three-year follow-up period. (The survey, as noted above, did not include Butte.)

- **A sizable proportion – 41 percent – of the AFDC-FG GAIN registrants who were determined to need basic education actually attended a basic education program within an 11-month follow-up period. Participation rates varied substantially among the counties.**

Figure 1 shows the participation patterns (averaged across the six counties) for a typical group of 100 AFDC-FG GAIN registrants who were determined to need basic education. Fifty-eight of 100 registrants were referred to an education activity, and 41 (71 percent of the 58) participated in the activity within an 11-month follow-up period. The participation rates were highest in Alameda, Los Angeles, and Tulare (ranging from 45 to 55 percent). Similar rates were found for AFDC-U registrants.

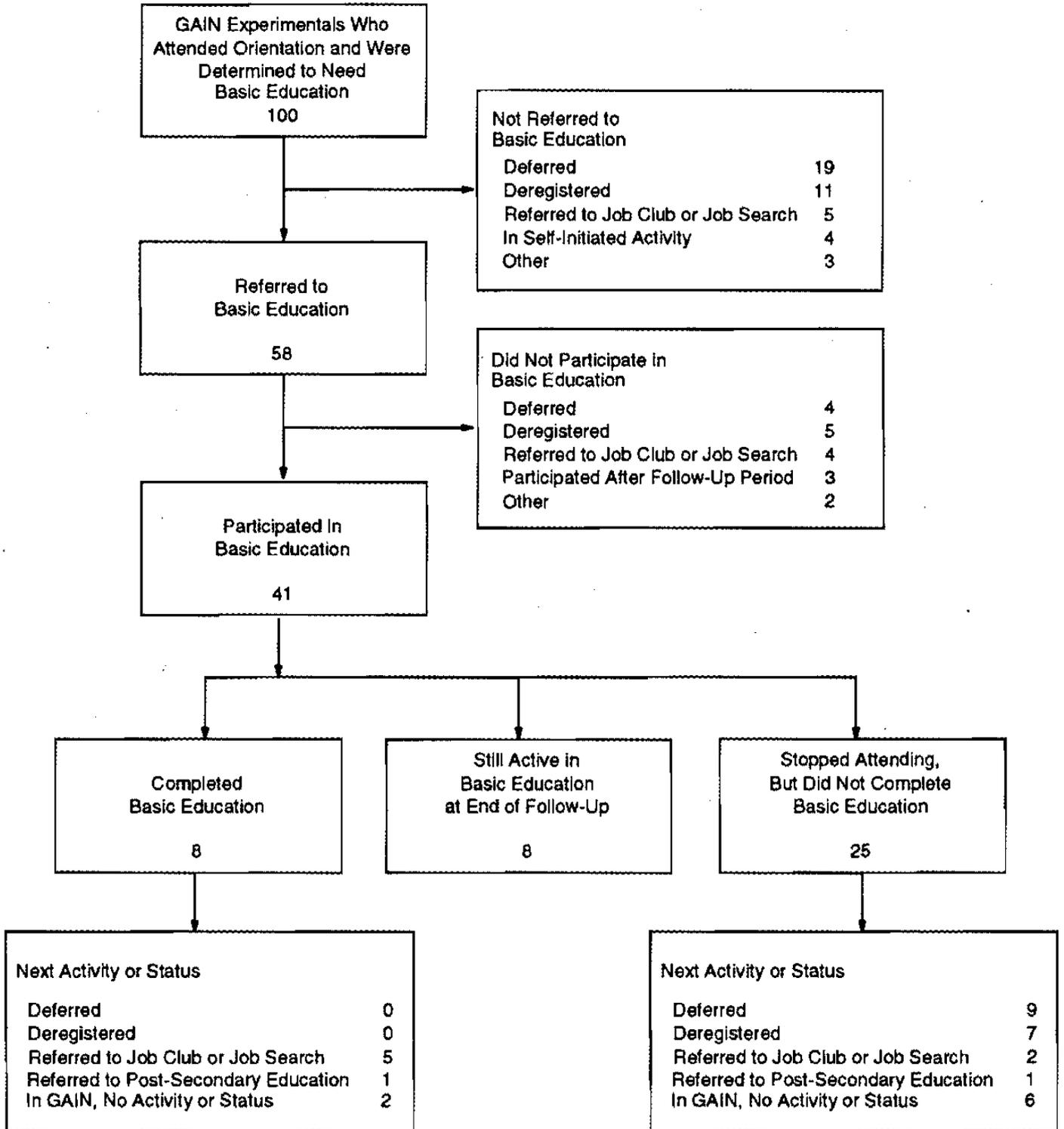
Reflecting its more disadvantaged and non-English-speaking GAIN population, Los Angeles had a low proportion of participants in GED and a large proportion in ESL. In contrast, Tulare had a relatively large proportion of registrants attending GED programs.

- **The principal reasons for nonparticipation in basic education were consistent with the GAIN legislation. Therefore, in some counties, much higher rates of participation would not have been feasible.**

As shown in Figure 1 (i.e., in the "not referred to basic education" and "did not participate in basic education" boxes), there were two primary reasons for not participating in basic education programs. First, many registrants did not enter an education activity within the 11-month follow-up period because they were temporarily deferred from the GAIN program; they had a part-time job, a temporary illness, or another situation that precluded their attending an activity. Second, some registrants left the GAIN program (i.e., they were deregistered) before they participated in a basic education activity because they obtained a full-time job, became chronically ill, or left AFDC. Also, some registrants chose or were referred to another service, particularly job search. This occurred most commonly in Riverside and San Diego. Still other registrants fulfilled the participation mandate by continuing, with GAIN's approval, in "self-initiated" post-secondary or vocational education or training activities.

**FIGURE 1**

**CLIENT FLOW WITHIN AN 11-MONTH FOLLOW-UP PERIOD  
FOR 100 TYPICAL AFDC-FG REGISTRANTS  
DETERMINED TO NEED BASIC EDUCATION**



- **Twenty percent of those who participated in basic education completed their activities within an 11-month follow-up period. Approximately 60 percent stopped attending without completing the activity. The remaining 20 percent were still participating in the activity at the end of the follow-up period.**

At the time this study was conducted, the state provided only broad guidelines for determining when participants had completed basic education in GAIN, and individual schools and counties developed their own completion standards. (Statewide completion standards were developed and implemented later.) Only in GED programs, where the program is completed when the registrants pass the GED test, were the completion standards clear. No similar guidelines existed for ABE and ESL courses. Los Angeles and San Diego were the only programs with uniform county-wide exit procedures for ABE and ESL (using a specified score on a standardized test as the exit criterion).

Figure 1 shows what happened to AFDC-FG registrants once they started a basic education activity. Within an 11-month period, 8 of 41 (20 percent) completed their education activity (according to school records), with most of these individuals going on to a job search activity; 25 of 41 (61 percent) stopped attending the basic education activity without finishing it, usually because they were deferred or deregistered from GAIN for reasons such as employment or health problems; and 8 of 41 (20 percent) were still participating in the activity at the end of the 11-month follow-up period. These completion and exit rates will have changed somewhat as participants continued to complete or leave basic education activities after the 11-month follow-up period covered in this analysis.

San Diego had the highest completion rate, with close to 40 percent of its participants completing their ABE or GED activities.<sup>5</sup> The county's concrete and uniform exit standards may have been a factor in achieving these rates, since teachers and participants were working toward a well-defined goal.

- **Basic education participants reported that they attended their basic education programs for roughly one school year (8 months) over a two- to three-year follow-up period.**

Measures of length of stay are important from a policy perspective because they represent one way of gauging the "investment" made by GAIN in human capital development. Table 1 presents the average number of months basic education participants attended their programs, according to their responses on the survey. AFDC-FG participants attended their activities for longer periods in Alameda, Los Angeles, and Tulare (ranging from 9 to 11 months) than in Riverside and San Diego (6 months). (Again, Butte was not included in the survey.) AFDC-U participants attended for slightly longer than did AFDC-FGs.

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<sup>5</sup>Completion data were not available in Alameda or Los Angeles.

**TABLE 1**  
**FOR BASIC EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS:**  
**NUMBER OF MONTHS ATTENDING AND AVERAGE WEEKLY SCHEDULED HOURS IN**  
**BASIC EDUCATION ACTIVITIES, WITHIN A TWO- TO THREE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP PERIOD**

Measure	AFDC-FGs					All Counties	AFDC-U All Counties
	Alameda	Los Angeles	Riverside	San Diego	Tulare		
Average number of months in basic education activities	8.7	11.3	5.5	5.6	9.1	8.0	8.8
Percentage distribution of number of months in basic education activities							
Less than 2 months	8.3	9.4	24.0	23.5	13.8	15.8	19.0
2-6 months	43.5	25.0	52.0	52.9	31.3	40.9	30.5
7-12 months	26.9	34.4	17.3	14.7	31.3	24.9	32.9
13-18 months	13.0	10.9	1.3	5.9	10.0	8.2	6.1
19-24 months	3.7	15.6	4.0	2.9	12.5	7.8	1.8
25 months or more	4.7	4.7	1.3	0.0	1.3	2.4	9.8
Average weekly scheduled hours in basic education activities	15.9	24.2	17.7	24.1	17.4	19.8	19.5
Sample size	108	64	75	68	80	395	44

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the GAIN registrant survey.

NOTES: Basic education activities include GED preparation, ABE, and ESL.  
 The AFDC-U sample does not include any registrants from Alameda.  
 The "all county" estimate is the average of the county estimates, with each county weighted equally.  
 Distributions may not add to 100.0 percent because of rounding.

Almost 60 percent of the AFDC-FG participants stayed less than 6 months, and 18 percent attended for a year or more. ABE/GED participants attended for an average of 8 months,<sup>6</sup> while ESL participants attended longer, averaging 10 months over the two- to three-year follow-up period (not shown in the table).

The county differences in length of stay reflect both program practices and the nature of the caseload each county served. Alameda and Los Angeles served long-term AFDC recipients exclusively. These recipients tended to stay on welfare for longer periods during the follow-up period and thus were available to participate in basic education longer. In addition, the programs in these counties, as well as in Tulare, placed more emphasis on maintaining participation in education activities. In contrast, Riverside's program urged registrants to enter the labor market quickly, which contributed to the shorter stays in education programs in this county.

- **More disadvantaged groups – those at lower literacy levels when they entered GAIN and long-term AFDC recipients – reported that they attended their basic education activities for a longer period of time than did less disadvantaged groups.**

Those who scored below 215 on both the reading and mathematics CASAS tests when they entered GAIN participated in ABE/GED for a significantly longer period than did those who scored higher (9 versus 6 months).<sup>7</sup> Those who had been on AFDC for two years or more also had longer stays in basic education than did short-term recipients or AFDC applicants. This indicates that stays will be particularly long for those at lower economic and education levels, because they require more education and also tend to stay on welfare, and thus in GAIN, longer.

- **Basic education participants reported that their classes were scheduled for 16 to 24 hours per week. Los Angeles and San Diego represented the top of that range.**

Basic education participants in Alameda, Riverside, and Tulare reported on the survey that their education classes were scheduled for 16 to 18 hours per week, whereas participants in San Diego and Los Angeles reported scheduled hours of 24 per week. It is important to note the intensity of the program in San Diego. As stated above, San Diego participants stayed in basic education activities for a shorter time than did those in three of the other counties. However, because the San Diego participants had more

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<sup>6</sup>The survey did not distinguish between ABE and GED activities.

<sup>7</sup>According to CASAS, those who function below 215 are at low literacy levels and have difficulty pursuing programs or jobs other than those that require only minimal literacy skills. Those at or above the 215 level are able to handle tasks requiring basic literacy and computational skills.

scheduled hours per week, they were enrolled for about as many total hours of education as were participants in most counties that averaged longer stays in basic education (not shown in the table). Los Angeles, with a relatively long length of stay and a relatively high number of scheduled hours per week, stands out as having provided the largest amount of basic education.

- **Basic education participants were in the classroom for 10 hours per week, on average – roughly 60 percent of their scheduled hours. Weekly attendance was higher (16 hours per week) in San Diego, where classes were scheduled for more hours per week and more intensive monitoring was provided.**

The investment in basic education can also be gauged by the regularity of school attendance. Actual weekly hours in the classroom ranged from 55 to 65 percent of scheduled hours across three of the study counties – Riverside, San Diego, and Tulare.<sup>8</sup> San Diego, which had intensive monitoring procedures, achieved the highest attendance rate of the three. In a mandatory basic education program for welfare recipients, such monitoring procedures may be required to achieve even these moderate rates of attendance. It also appears to be important to organize instruction so that it is beneficial even when attendance is inconsistent – i.e., so that students who miss some classes are still able to profit from the instruction.

#### **Findings on GAIN's Impacts on Participation in Basic Education and on Education Outcomes**

As discussed earlier, to determine GAIN's educational effects, the experience of registrants who were randomly assigned to the experimental group was compared to that of registrants who were randomly assigned to the control group. The *differences* between the two groups – in terms of participation in basic education, educational attainment, and educational achievement – represent the education impacts of the program.

- **Among those determined to need basic education, GAIN substantially increased the proportion of experimental group members who participated in such activities. Few control group members participated in basic education.**

Previous research on welfare-to-work programs has shown that some welfare recipients participate in education programs on their own initiative. Understanding how much GAIN increased participation beyond what registrants do on their own is important for interpreting the education impacts presented in this report. Across all five counties in the survey, GAIN was successful in producing large increases in the number of individuals who received basic education, above and beyond the number who received the

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<sup>8</sup>These calculations could not be made for Alameda, Butte, or Los Angeles because of data limitations.

service in the absence of the program. As shown in Table 2, 44 percent of the AFDC-FG experimentals reported that they participated in ABE/GED compared to 8 percent of the controls, for a difference of 35 percentage points.<sup>9</sup> Some members of the experimental group also participated in the job search and unpaid work experience activities offered through GAIN, which were not available to control group members. GAIN did not influence the degree to which post-secondary education or vocational training was used above and beyond what individuals did on their own (not shown in the table).

As noted above, those who attended a basic education program received a substantial amount of education. GAIN's impact on the amount received is measured by comparing the average length of stay in basic education for the experimental and control groups, including sample members who did not participate in those activities (they are counted as zero in the averages). This comparison shows that, over the course of the two- to three-year follow-up period, experimentals participated for an average of 2.4 months, while controls averaged only 0.4 months. These impacts were largest in Alameda, Los Angeles, and Tulare and smallest in Riverside and San Diego. GAIN's effects on the amount of basic education received were greater for the more disadvantaged segments of the caseload: those with lower initial literacy levels and longer AFDC histories.

- **GAIN produced statistically significant impacts on the receipt of a GED or a high school diploma in four of the five counties. Tulare produced particularly large impacts, and the results in Alameda were also substantial. Impacts in the other counties were modest or small.**

Table 2 shows the proportion of AFDC-FG experimentals and controls who received a GED or a high school diploma after random assignment.<sup>10</sup> Across the five counties in the survey, 9 percent of experimentals obtained one these credentials during the follow-up period compared to 2 percent of controls, for a difference (i.e., impact) produced by GAIN of 7 percentage points. Tulare achieved a striking impact: a 19 percentage point difference between experimentals and controls. This was followed by an 8 percentage point impact for Alameda and a 4 percentage point impact in San Diego. The impacts in the other counties were smaller. In all five counties, individuals generally acquired a GED rather than a high school diploma.

The varying impacts reflect differences in the counties' programs.<sup>11</sup> The programs in Alameda

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<sup>9</sup>The survey estimates of participation rates for experimentals and controls were adjusted slightly upward, based on data from GAIN casefiles, to reflect underreporting of education activities on the survey.

<sup>10</sup>About one-quarter of the AFDC-FG survey respondent sample already had a GED or a high school diploma before random assignment.

<sup>11</sup>The variation in impacts on receipt of a GED or a high school diploma across counties was statistically significant at the .01 level.

TABLE 2

**FOR AFDC--FGs DETERMINED TO NEED BASIC EDUCATION:  
GAIN's IMPACTS ON PARTICIPATION IN ABE/GED AND ON CREDENTIAL RECEIPT,  
WITHIN A TWO- TO THREE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP PERIOD**

Outcome and Subgroup	Sample Size	Experimentals (%)	Controls (%)	Difference
<b><u>Ever participated in ABE/GED</u></b>				
All counties	2,258	43.6	8.4	35.3 (a)
County				
Alameda	466	64.7	12.4	52.3 (a)
Los Angeles	389	33.8	6.5	27.3 (a)
Riverside	582	30.5	5.9	24.6 (a)
San Diego	380	33.6	6.5	27.2 (a)
Tulare	441	55.6	10.7	44.9 (a)
<b><u>Received a GED or high school diploma after GAIN orientation</u></b>				
All counties	2,258	9.1	2.0	7.1 ***
County				
Alameda	466	8.9	1.2	7.7 ***
Los Angeles	389	2.7	0.5	2.2 *
Riverside	582	6.2	3.6	2.6
San Diego	380	6.8	2.6	4.2 *
Tulare	441	20.8	1.8	19.0 ***
<b><u>Baseline score on CASAS reading and math tests</u></b>				
215 or above on both	505	25.2	5.4	19.7 ***
214 or below on one	966	6.3	1.2	5.1 ***
214 or below on both	326	1.5	0.0	1.5
No scores	461	1.0	0.5	0.5
Sample size (total = 2,258)		1,207	1,051	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the GAIN registrant survey.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used data for all survey responders, including those who did not participate in basic education.

The "all county" estimate is the average of the county estimates, with each county weighted equally.

Sample members are missing CASAS test scores primarily because they are not proficient in English.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the experimental and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

(a) Statistical tests were not performed for this measure.

and Tulare are notable for their emphasis on assigning registrants to basic education programs. Both counties also placed a high priority on the acquisition of a GED (even for students in ABE programs), and almost half of Tulare's GAIN participants attended a GED program. Tulare's exceptionally large impact, which could not be explained by differences in the demographic characteristics of its sample compared to the samples for the other counties, may also be attributable in part to its counseling services, its close monitoring of participants, and the particular education services offered by its providers.

- **Impacts on receipt of a GED or a high school diploma were concentrated among those at higher initial literacy levels.**

Table 2 shows the rate of credential receipt for sample members who were at different literacy levels at the time of random assignment. Those with a score of 215 or higher on both the reading and mathematics CASAS tests when they entered the research sample had a 20 percentage point impact on receipt of a GED or a high school diploma, whereas those who scored below this level on either test had a 5 percentage point impact. Sample members scoring below 215 on both CASAS tests and those having no CASAS test results (primarily because they could not read English) had no impacts on credential receipt. However, Tulare, in contrast to the other counties, produced substantial GED impacts for the large group that scored below 215 on one of the CASAS tests as well as very large impacts on the group that scored 215 or above on both tests. Interestingly, those at higher literacy levels spent less time in basic education than did those at lower literacy levels. Thus, impacts on educational attainment were achieved, for the most part, by the group with the smaller investment in education.

Those with higher initial literacy skills may have had (or were close to having) the academic skills needed to master the material for the GED test, despite having dropped out of school. For them, the GAIN program may have provided an accessible route for acquiring the specific knowledge they needed to pass the test. The program may have also provided the necessary support services (such as child care), moral support, or "push" these individuals needed to pass the GED test. Those at lower initial literacy levels were more likely to participate in ABE programs and generally did not make the transition to GED programs (except, to some extent, in Tulare and Alameda). There were several possible reasons for this: Obtaining a GED may not have been the GAIN program's educational goal for them (consistent with the GAIN regulations, some counties encouraged participation in job search after completion of ABE); or they may not have reached satisfactory basic skills levels in the program; or they may have left the program before they made sufficient gains to enter a GED program.

These findings suggest that the nature of the caseload served may affect the ability of a program to obtain GED impacts. For example, Los Angeles served a population with a relatively high proportion

of non-English speakers and individuals at low literacy levels. While its program had positive effects for those at higher literacy levels, this county served comparatively few such individuals. For many registrants in Los Angeles, GED preparation may not have been encouraged by the program, or obtaining a GED may take longer than the follow-up period.

- **For the five counties as a group, GAIN did not produce impacts on basic skills levels, as measured by the TALS literacy test. Estimates show positive impacts on basic skills levels in San Diego, however.**

To measure GAIN's impacts on educational achievement, two parts of the TALS, measuring somewhat different literacy skills, were administered to experimentals and controls who were determined to need basic education (including those who did not actually participate in basic education) two to three years after random assignment. (As noted above, those who were not proficient in English were not included in the testing.) The "document literacy" part of the test is designed to measure the ability to process information found in documents such as schedules, tables, and charts. For example, one item requires the test-taker to locate a building using a map and its legend. The "quantitative literacy" part of the test is designed to measure the ability to understand written materials and to apply the appropriate arithmetic operations to solve problems presented in those materials. For example, one item asks the test-taker to calculate a daily wage using a want ad that lists an hourly wage.

As discussed above, the size of the TALS sample was planned to be large enough to measure the achievement impact for all five counties as a group. The top row of Table 3 shows average TALS scores (document plus quantitative) for AFDC-FG experimentals and controls in all counties. Any difference between these averages is attributable to the GAIN program. However, the results show a difference of 1.8 points, implying that there was virtually no program impact on basic skills levels for all counties as a group.

The TALS sample was not expected to be large enough to give precise estimates of impacts for each county separately or for each subgroup. Estimates for counties and subgroups may, however, indicate the direction and approximate order of magnitude of their impacts. For San Diego, Table 3 shows a TALS score difference of 34 points, or 36 percent of a standard deviation. This indicates that the San Diego GAIN program had a large TALS score impact. However, the exact size of the impact remains uncertain because the San Diego sample was small (60 experimentals and 54 controls). In Riverside, the experimental-control difference was negative and statistically significant. This negative estimate may not fully reflect a real program effect but may, instead, have been magnified by an experimental-control difference in the percentage of each research group that took the TALS test and could therefore be included in the TALS analysis sample. A difference in test-taking between research

**TABLE 3**  
**FOR AFDC-FGs DETERMINED TO NEED BASIC EDUCATION:**  
**GAIN's IMPACTS ON TALS SCORES, WITHIN A TWO- TO THREE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP PERIOD**

Subgroup	Sample Size	TALS Score (Document Plus Quantitative)			Difference/ Standard Deviation
		Experimentals	Controls	Difference	
All counties	1,115	475	473	1.8	1.9%
County				x	
Alameda	334	482	480	2.3	2.5%
Los Angeles	186	449	445	3.7	3.9%
Riverside	233	488	507	-19.0 * (a)	-20.0%
San Diego	114	488	454	33.8 **	35.6%
Tulare	248	468	478	-10.2	-10.8%
Baseline score on CASAS reading and math tests				xxx	
215 or above on both	308	544	526	17.8 *	18.7%
214 or below on one	549	478	476	2.2	2.3%
214 or below on both	224	388	406	-17.1	-18.0%
Sample size (total = 1,115)		595	520		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using GAIN TALS data.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used data for all TALS test responders, including those who did not participate in basic education.

Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics of sample members. Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

The "all county" estimate is from a regression in which each county is weighted equally.

Sample sizes for the CASAS subgroups do not sum to the total sample size because a small proportion of individuals are missing CASAS scores, primarily because they were not proficient in English and could not take the CASAS tests. Thus, impacts for these individuals are not shown.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the experimental and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

An F test was applied to subgroup differences in "difference" estimates. Statistical significance levels are indicated as xxx = 1 percent; xx = 5 percent; x = 10 percent.

(a) The negative estimate in Riverside may have been affected by differences in the percentage of experimentals and controls who took the TALS and who therefore could be included in the TALS impact sample. Such differences in test-taking were statistically significant only in Riverside.

groups was large and statistically significant only in Riverside. The difference may have created unmeasured differences in the characteristics of experimentals and controls in the TALS sample in that county.<sup>12</sup> The all-county estimate of the TALS score impacts excluding Riverside (not shown in the table) is 6.9 points, not statistically significant.

Table 3 also shows that TALS score impacts accrued mainly to sample members who had scored highest on the CASAS tests (which were administered at the time of random assignment), and this group took less than the average time in basic education to achieve these basic skills gains (not shown in the table). In contrast, the group that started out at relatively low literacy levels did not achieve TALS score impacts, even though this group spent more time in basic education. This same concentration of TALS impacts among subgroups with higher initial literacy levels, found in the pooled sample across all counties, was also found in San Diego alone.

Although the data available for this study do not explain why those starting at lower literacy levels did not experience achievement gains, several possible explanations are worth considering: The educational gains for this group may not have been large enough to be measured by this analysis; this group may not have received a sufficient amount of education to improve substantially their skills levels; or the education services provided may not have been effective in producing gains for this group. It could also be that the sample members achieved gains that were not measured by the TALS test.

Some caution should be used when interpreting these impact estimates. Overall, the sample for the all-county average was large enough to rule out the possibility of generally large TALS score impacts *per experimental*; however, it was not large enough to rule out the possibility of modest impacts on education *participants*. In other words, while achievement gains could have been made by those who participated in basic education, they may have been too small or made by too few to appear in the experimental-control comparison. In addition, the fact that some counties increased GED receipt without producing measurable increases in basic skills levels (or vice versa) indicates the importance of distinguishing between educational attainment and achievement goals, since each can be realized independently of the other.

- **Over a two-year follow-up period, the education impacts did not translate into welfare and employment impacts. However, the results for an early-**

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<sup>12</sup>An experimental-control difference in the percentage of TALS test-takers does not necessarily imply that impact estimates will be biased. Moreover, using the characteristics of sample members in the regression adjustment procedure can correct for observed research group differences. Baseline CASAS scores, in particular, provided a powerful set of regression control variables in the TALS impact analysis.

**enrolling sample suggest the importance of further follow-up to determine the payoff of GAIN's investment in basic education.**

In the counties that produced impacts on educational achievement or attainment (Alameda, San Diego, and Tulare), the GAIN program did not result in earnings and employment impacts, for those determined to need basic education, within the two-year follow-up period that is available for the full sample at this time. For AFDC-FG sample members determined to need basic education, only two of the six counties studied in the evaluation of GAIN's earnings, employment, and welfare impacts -- Butte and Riverside -- produced statistically significant earnings impacts within a two-year period, although most of the six counties were successful in achieving welfare savings for this group.<sup>13</sup> Riverside's GAIN program, which uses both job search and basic education services and has a strong focus on quick employment, had a more immediate effect on employment and earnings, but little effect on education outcomes. Data on education outcomes were not collected in Butte, which was not part of the survey effort.

Results for a small group of individuals who became part of the research sample early on, and for whom three years of follow-up data are available, suggest, however, that the two-year impacts may not be indicative of the longer-term effects of basic education in GAIN. In Alameda, Los Angeles, and Tulare, the early sample shows a possible growth in earnings impacts beginning just after the second year of follow-up and increasing into the third. Thus, longer follow-up is needed to determine whether the investment in basic education will pay off in the labor market.<sup>14</sup>

### **Policy Implications**

This report presents results regarding the feasibility and effects of *mandatory* basic education provided through a JOBS program. (These findings do not apply to basic education provided in a voluntary context.) The results provide concrete evidence that such a program can increase the number of AFDC recipients who obtain a GED (or, in some cases, a high school diploma). It is possible for such increases to be large. However, the considerable county variation -- ranging from very large impacts

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<sup>13</sup>GAIN's two-year earnings, employment, and welfare impacts are presented in detail in Friedlander, Riccio, and Freedman, 1993.

<sup>14</sup>Preliminary estimates of third-year impacts for AFDC-FG sample members judged in need of basic education indicate statistically significant earnings gains appearing for the first time in Tulare, increasing earnings gains in Alameda (not statistically significant), and continuing earnings gains in San Diego (not statistically significant). These estimates were produced from data that became available after the completion of the research presented in this report. Further data collection and additional analysis of longer-term impacts on earnings and AFDC payments are planned for 1994.

in Tulare to no impacts in some other counties – suggests that aggressive efforts need to be made if this goal is to be attained. The GAIN program in Tulare placed a high priority on maintaining participation in basic education and on obtaining a GED, carried out intensive monitoring, and provided support while students were in school.

It is more difficult to answer definitively the question of whether, and to what extent, the GAIN program can increase educational achievement – i.e., literacy and mathematics skills. The size of the TALS sample was sufficient for measuring relatively large achievement gains, but small gains may have escaped detection. Despite this limitation, the results from San Diego suggest that it may be possible to tailor basic education services to the special needs and circumstances of AFDC recipients and to produce sizable impacts on educational achievement. However, producing these results may require comprehensive adaptations to the program structure and curricula. San Diego's approach merits further study, although widespread replication on the basis of empirical results from one sample of this size would not be warranted.

Overall, the findings point to at least three areas that merit the attention of policymakers and program operators.

*Adapting education services for welfare recipients.* The experience in San Diego, and to some extent in Tulare, suggests that adult education programs may require special adaptations when they are part of a mandatory, large-scale welfare-to-work program such as GAIN. First, if educational improvements are sought, then it is important to make the improvement of specific education outcomes – GED receipt and/or achievement gains – a high priority of the program. Both San Diego and Tulare focused on specific outcomes and adopted numerous strategies to attain them. Second, to foster regular attendance, it may be necessary to provide substantial counseling, monitoring, and support services for students, as both San Diego and Tulare systematically did. Third, at least for those individuals at relatively high levels of literacy when they entered the program, the San Diego experience suggests the value of providing basic education courses that are intensive (i.e., classes meet many hours a week) if students' attendance is also carefully monitored and supported. Fourth, the results suggest the importance of adapting the curriculum to the needs of GAIN students, many of whom have had negative experiences in school. In San Diego, this was done by hiring a specially selected teaching staff, integrating academic and life skills, and using up-to-date computerized instruction combined with classroom instruction. Finally, obtaining a high completion rate for basic education activities may be crucial, requiring well-defined completion standards.

*Encouraging GED acquisition for those at higher literacy levels.* This study provides evidence that GED certificates may be obtained relatively quickly for many program registrants who are already

at or near the literacy levels needed to master the specific knowledge required to pass the test. While the utility of the GED in the labor market needs further study, assigning people with higher literacy levels to GED instruction may yield substantial short-term education impacts.

*Providing effective services for those at lower literacy levels.* This study raises questions about how existing adult education programs, which normally serve a voluntary population, can be structured or adapted to produce educational gains for the less-skilled segments of the welfare population. Individuals with lower levels of basic skills stayed in basic education programs for relatively long periods of time, and those programs provided them with an "opportunity to learn," as judged by conventional standards. Although the analysis was limited in its ability to measure modest achievement gains for this group, the results do indicate that any education impacts GAIN had for them were not large. This may mean that the amount and type of education services received were not effective for those at low literacy levels, particularly given the inconsistent attendance patterns observed in this study. Different and perhaps more comprehensive services may be needed to produce results for this group.

The final report on the GAIN evaluation will measure the program's impacts over a longer follow-up period, providing further information on the relationship between basic education services and labor market outcomes. It will also explore new data on a number of outcomes (e.g., the characteristics of jobs obtained) and provide estimates of the program's benefits and costs.

## SELECTED MDRC PUBLICATIONS

### **WELFARE-TO-WORK PROGRAMS**

*From Welfare to Work* (Russell Sage Foundation). Book. 1991. Judith M. Gueron, Edward Pauly. A synthesis of research findings on the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programs. Chapter 1, which is the summary of the book, is also published separately by MDRC.

*Reforming Welfare with Work* (Ford Foundation). Monograph. 1987. Judith M. Gueron. A review of welfare-to-work initiatives in five states.

### **Working Papers**

*Child Support Enforcement: A Case Study*. 1993. Dan Bloom.

*Learning from the Voices of Mothers: Single Mothers' Perceptions of the Trade-offs Between Welfare and Work*. 1993. LaDonna Pavetti.

*Unpaid Work Experience for Welfare Recipients: Findings and Lessons from MDRC Research*. 1993. Thomas Brock, David Butler, David Long.

### **Papers for Practitioners**

*Assessing JOBS Participants: Issues and Trade-offs*. 1992. Patricia Auspos, Kay Sherwood.

*Linking Welfare and Education: A Study of New Programs in Five States*. 1992. Edward Pauly, David Long, Karin Martinson.

*Improving the Productivity of JOBS Programs*. 1993. Eugene Bardach.

### **The GAIN Evaluation**

An evaluation of California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program, which is currently operating as the state's JOBS program and features upfront basic education as well as job search and other activities.

*GAIN: Planning and Early Implementation*. 1987. John Wallace, David Long.

*GAIN: Child Care in a Welfare Employment Initiative*. 1989. Karin Martinson, James Riccio.

*GAIN: Early Implementation Experiences and Lessons*. 1989. James Riccio, Barbara Goldman, Gayle Hamilton, Karin Martinson, Alan Orenstein.

*GAIN: Participation Patterns in Four Counties*. 1991. Stephen Freedman, James Riccio.

*GAIN: Program Strategies, Participation Patterns, and First-Year Impacts in Six Counties*. 1992. James Riccio, Daniel Friedlander.

*GAIN: Two-Year Impacts in Six Counties*. 1993. Daniel Friedlander, James Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

### **The JOBS Evaluation**

An evaluation of welfare-to-work programs operating under the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) provisions of the Family Support Act of 1988.

*From Welfare to Work* (Russell Sage Foundation). Book. 1991. Judith M. Gueron, Edward Pauly. See description above.

### **The Evaluation of Florida's Project Independence**

An evaluation of Florida's JOBS program.

*Florida's Project Independence: Program Implementation, Participation Patterns, and First-Year Impacts*. 1994. James Kemple, Joshua Haimson.

### **The Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM)**

A test of the feasibility and effectiveness of an ongoing participation requirement in a welfare-to-work program.

*Interim Report on the Saturation Work Initiative Model in San Diego.* 1988. Gayle Hamilton.

*Final Report on the Saturation Work Initiative Model in San Diego.* 1989. Gayle Hamilton, Daniel Friedlander.

*The Saturation Work Initiative Model in San Diego: A Five-Year Follow-up Study.* 1993. Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton.

### **The Demonstration of State Work/Welfare Initiatives**

A test of the feasibility and effectiveness of various state employment initiatives for welfare recipients.

**Arizona:** *Preliminary Management Lessons from the WIN Demonstration Program.* 1984. Kay Sherwood.

**Arkansas:** *Interim Findings from the Arkansas WIN Demonstration Program.* 1984. Janet Quint.

*Final Report on the WORK Program in Two Counties.* 1985. Daniel Friedlander, Gregory Hoertz, Janet Quint, James Riccio.

**California:** *Preliminary Findings from the San Diego Job Search and Work Experience Demonstration.* 1984. Barbara Goldman, Judith Gueron, Joseph Ball, Marilyn Price.

*Findings from the San Diego Job Search and Work Experience Demonstration.* 1985. Barbara Goldman, Daniel Friedlander, Judith Gueron, David Long.

*Final Report on the San Diego Job Search and Work Experience Demonstration.* 1986. Barbara Goldman, Daniel Friedlander, David Long.

**Illinois:** *Interim Findings from the WIN Demonstration Program in Cook County.* 1986. Janet Quint, Cynthia Guy.

*Final Report on Job Search and Work Experience in Cook County.* 1987. Daniel Friedlander, Stephen Freedman, Gayle Hamilton, Janet Quint.

**Maine:** *Interim Findings from a Grant Diversion Program.* 1985. Patricia Auspos.

*Final Report on the Training Opportunities in the Private Sector Program.* 1988. Patricia Auspos, George Cave, David Long.

**Maryland:** *Interim Findings from the Maryland Employment Initiatives Programs.* 1984. Janet Quint.

*Final Report on the Employment Initiatives Evaluation.* 1985. Daniel Friedlander, Gregory Hoertz, David Long, Janet Quint.

*Supplemental Report on the Baltimore Options Program.* 1987. Daniel Friedlander.

**New Jersey:** *Final Report on the Grant Diversion Project.* 1988. Stephen Freedman, Jan Bryant, George Cave.

**Virginia:** *Interim Findings from the Virginia Employment Services Program.* 1985. Marilyn Price.

*Final Report on the Virginia Employment Services Program.* 1986. James Riccio, George Cave, Stephen Freedman, Marilyn Price.

**West Virginia:** *Interim Findings on the Community Work Experience Demonstrations.* 1984. Joseph Ball.

*Final Report on the Community Work Experience Demonstrations.* 1986. Daniel Friedlander, Marjorie Erickson, Gayle Hamilton, Virginia Knox.

### **Other Reports on the Demonstration of State Work/Welfare Initiatives**

*Documentation of the Data Sources and Analytical Methods Used in the Benefit-Cost Analysis of the EPP/EWEP Program in San Diego.* 1985. David Long, Virginia Knox.

*Relationship Between Earnings and Welfare Benefits for Working Recipients: Four Area Case Studies.* 1985. Barbara Goldman, Edward Cavin, Marjorie Erickson, Gayle Hamilton, Darlene Hasselbring, Sandra Reynolds.

*Welfare Grant Diversion: Early Observations from Programs in Six States.* 1985. Michael Bangser, James Healy, Robert Ivry.

*A Survey of Participants and Worksite Supervisors in the New York City Work Experience Program.* 1986. Gregory Hoerz, Karla Hanson.  
*Welfare Grant Diversion: Lessons and Prospects.* 1986. Michael Bangser, James Healy, Robert Ivry.  
*Work Initiatives for Welfare Recipients: Lessons from a Multi-State Experiment.* 1986. Judith Gueron.

#### **The Subgroup/Performance Indicator Study**

A study of the impacts of selected welfare-to-work programs on subgroups of the AFDC caseload.  
*A Study of Performance Measures and Subgroup Impacts in Three Welfare Employment Programs.* 1987. Daniel Friedlander, David Long.  
*Subgroup Impacts and Performance Indicators for Selected Welfare Employment Programs.* 1988. Daniel Friedlander.

#### **The Self-Employment Investment Demonstration (SEID)**

A test of the feasibility of operating a program to encourage self-employment among recipients of AFDC.  
*Self-Employment for Welfare Recipients: Implementation of the SEID Program.* 1991. Cynthia Guy, Fred Doolittle, Barbara Fink.

#### **The WIN Research Laboratory Project**

A test of innovative service delivery approaches in four Work Incentive Program (WIN) offices.  
*Immediate Job Search Assistance: Preliminary Results from the Louisville WIN Research Laboratory Project.* 1980. Barbara Goldman.  
*Preliminary Research Findings: WIN Research Laboratory Project.* 1980. MDRC.  
*Final Report on WIN Services to Volunteers: Denver WIN Research Laboratory Project.* 1981. Ellen Slaughter, Paulette Turshak, Gale Whiteneck, Edward Baumheier.  
*Impacts of the Immediate Job Search Assistance Experiment: Louisville WIN Research Laboratory Project.* 1981. Barbara Goldman.  
*The Workings of WIN: A Field Observation Study of Three Local Offices.* 1981. Sydelle Levy.  
*Welfare Women in a Group Job Search Program: Their Experiences in the Louisville WIN Research Laboratory Project.* 1982. Joanna Gould-Stuart.  
*The WIN Labs: A Federal/Local Partnership in Social Research.* 1982. Joan Leiman.  
*Job Search Strategies: Lessons from the Louisville WIN Laboratory.* 1983. Carl Wolfhagen, Barbara Goldman.

### **PROGRAMS FOR TEENAGE PARENTS ON WELFARE**

#### **The LEAP Evaluation**

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.  
*LEAP: Implementing a Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents.* 1991. Dan Bloom, Hilary Kopp, David Long, Denise Polit.  
*LEAP: Interim Findings on a Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents.* 1993. Dan Bloom, Veronica Fellerath, David Long, Robert Wood.

#### **The New Chance Demonstration**

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.  
*New Chance: Implementing a Comprehensive Program for Disadvantaged Young Mothers and Their Children.* 1991. Janet Quint, Barbara Fink, Sharon Rowser.  
*Lives of Promise, Lives of Pain: Young Mothers After New Chance.* Monograph. 1994. Janet Quint, Judith Musick, with Joyce Ladner.  
*New Chance: An Innovative Program for Young Mothers and Their Children.* Brochure. 1993.

### **Project Redirection**

A test of a comprehensive program of services for pregnant and parenting teenagers.

*The Challenge of Serving Teenage Mothers: Lessons from Project Redirection.* Monograph. 1988. Denise Polit, Janet Quint, James Riccio.

### **The Community Service Projects**

A test of a New York State teenage pregnancy prevention and services initiative.

*The Community Service Projects: A New York State Adolescent Pregnancy Initiative.* 1986. Cynthia Guy.  
*The Community Service Projects: Final Report on a New York State Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services Program.* 1988. Cynthia Guy, Lawrence Bailis, David Palasits, Kay Sherwood.

### **THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION PROJECT**

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work.

*The School-to-Work Transition and Youth Apprenticeship: Lessons from the U.S. Experience.* 1993. Thomas Bailey, Donna Merritt.

*Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking Work and High School.* 1994. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

*Learning Through Work: Designing and Implementing Quality Worksite Learning for High School Students.* 1994. Susan Goldberger, Richard Kazis, Mary Kathleen O'Flanagan (all of Jobs for the Future).

### **THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE DEMONSTRATION**

A demonstration aimed at reducing child poverty by increasing the job-holding, earnings, and child support payments of unemployed, noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children receiving public assistance.

*Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say About Child Support.* 1992. Frank Furstenberg, Jr., Kay Sherwood, Mercer Sullivan.

*Child Support Enforcement: A Case Study.* Working Paper. 1993. Dan Bloom.

*The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration: Report on the Pilot Phase.* Forthcoming. Dan Bloom, Kay Sherwood.

### **THE NATIONAL JTPA STUDY**

A study of 16 local programs under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the nation's job training system for low-income individuals.

*Implementing the National JTPA Study.* 1990. Fred Doolittle, Linda Traeger.

*The National JTPA Study: Site Characteristics and Participation Patterns.* 1993. James Kemple, Fred Doolittle, John Wallace.

*A Summary of the Design and Implementation of the National JTPA Study.* 1993. Fred Doolittle.

*GAIN: Basic Education in a Welfare-to-Work Program*, on which this Executive Summary is based, as well as other MDRC reports, may be obtained for \$12.00 each. To place an order, please write: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, Office of Publications, Three Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016. Phone: (212) 532-3200. Please include payment with your request.

## About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit social policy research organization founded in 1974 and located in New York City and San Francisco. Its mission is to design and rigorously field-test promising education and employment-related programs aimed at improving the well-being of disadvantaged adults and youth, and to provide policymakers and practitioners with reliable evidence on the effectiveness of social programs. Through this work, and its technical assistance to program administrators, MDRC seeks to enhance the quality of public policies and programs. MDRC actively disseminates the results of its research through its publications and through interchange with policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and the public.

Over the past two decades — working in partnership with more than forty states, the federal government, scores of communities, and numerous private philanthropies — MDRC has developed and studied more than three dozen promising social policy initiatives.