

RESEARCH REPORT

# Family-Centered Approaches to Workforce Program Services

**Findings from a Survey of Workforce Development Boards**

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The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.



## ABOUT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WORKFORCE BOARDS

The National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) represents approximately 550 Workforce Development Boards and their 12,000+ business members that coordinate and leverage workforce strategies with education and economic development stakeholders within their local communities, to ensure that state and local workforce development and job training programs meet the needs of employers. NAWB works closely with policy makers in Washington, DC to inform national strategy as it relates to Workforce Development Boards and its partners in education, economic development, labor and business.



## ABOUT INNOVATE+EDUCATE

Innovate+Educate is a nonprofit focused on shifting training, hiring, and advancement strategies to ensure the over 100 million low-income workers are provided access to learning and employment leading to lifelong economic success. Our work is *big system change* that will support economic mobility for workers and their families. We generate new ideas through research and development. We propel those ideas by aggregating teams, funding streams, and technology in order to pilot solutions. We design systems to be sustainable, flexible and able to evolve past our involvement. We advance technology that enables shift in business models for supply/demand. We pilot best practice leadership in competency-based demand-led employment and advancement solutions and we foster an employer community. We act through advocacy, implementation and technology to create lasting change.

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This report grew from two initiatives: Bridging the Gap, currently funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and aimed at exploring the intersection of child care and workforce development for low-income families, and the Family Centered Employment Initiative, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and designed to support workforce boards in implementing two generation projects.

Thanks to Don Baylor and Rosa Maria Castaneda for their continued support of the Bridging the Gap Project. The authors would also like to thank our partners in this effort: Jamai Blivin (Innovate+Educate), Josh Copus (National Association of Workforce Boards), Sarah Griffen (consultant), the advisory board of the Family Centered Employment Initiative, and Paula Sammons (W.K. Kellogg Foundation). We also appreciate the input of Urban Institute colleagues Gina Adams, codirector of Bridging the Gap, for her helpful insights throughout this research effort and Pamela Loprest, who reviewed the report.

# Family-Centered Approaches to Workforce Program Services

Access to stable employment with adequate pay is critical for families' stability and livelihood. Children who grow up in poverty tend to do worse in school, have poorer health outcomes, and do worse in the labor market as adults than children who do not (Sherman and Mitchell 2017). The absence of work is associated with high poverty rates for households, although nearly 20 percent of households in poverty in 2015 were working (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). These data demonstrate the importance of helping parents access good jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. Such jobs increasingly require education beyond high school, suggesting the need to help people access not only jobs but education and training as well. The public workforce system helps job seekers access training and jobs and can contribute to the economic stability of children, yet we know little about how the system meets families' needs.

This report provides a picture of workforce program services for parents under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the primary law authorizing programs under the public workforce system. WIOA was signed into law in 2014, replacing the Workforce Investment Act. WIOA, like its predecessor, provides federal funding to states and localities for workforce development services to meet the needs of job seekers and employers. For workers, these services include help with job searches, job placement, education, training, supportive services, and other services delivered through a network of career centers called American Job Centers (AJCs). State and local workforce development boards set system priorities and oversee the services delivered to job seekers and employers. Compared with the prior law, WIOA puts a greater emphasis on serving people with barriers to employment, such as low-income parents (Spaulding 2016). Parents face unique challenges accessing workforce programs and employment. Many have difficulty managing complex schedules or need supportive services such as child care to participate in training or work. They also need supports like transportation. Another barrier to parents accessing workforce program services is the system's emphasis on employment outcomes, which sometimes creates disincentives to serve parents who may have additional barriers to work (Adams, Spaulding, and Heller 2015).

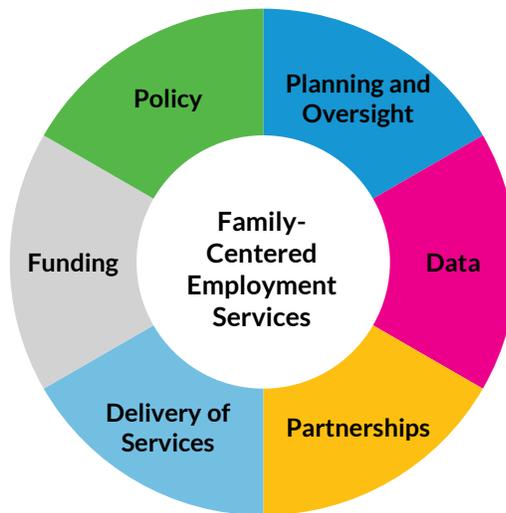
To explore these issues and increase understanding of the barriers facing low-income families and how the public workforce system under WIOA is working to meet their needs, the Urban Institute fielded a survey in 2017 of workforce development boards (WDBs) in partnership with the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) and Innovate+Educate, which are collaborating on the Family Centered Employment Initiative (box 1). The survey focused on six areas that can present

opportunities and challenges to local WDBs in meeting low-income families' needs: planning and oversight, data, partnerships, delivery of services, funding, and policy (figure 1). This report seeks to answer the following questions:

- How much of a priority are parents and families for local WDBs, as reflected in their local plans?
- What data and information do WDBs collect and analyze to design and refine services for families?
- What partnerships support the complex needs of families seeking services through the WIOA system?
- How are services to families delivered through American Job Centers or special initiatives that target this population?
- What funding is leveraged to support families, especially for supportive services such as child care?
- What federal and state policies encourage or are barriers to serving families?

Findings from the survey show how the WIOA system serves parents and provides important insights for the implementation of family-centered strategies.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Areas of Opportunity and Challenge for Workforce Development Boards Serving Families**



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## BOX 1

### **Bridging the Gap Project**

The Urban Institute, with the support of the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is examining how child care intersects with postsecondary education and workforce development for low-income parents. We are looking at the systems, policies, and practices that affect access to child care for low-income, low-skilled parents seeking education and training. Our work falls into the four areas below and has laid a framework for a broader conversation about the child care needs of low-income parents seeking economic security for themselves and their families by improving their education and skills.

- exploring and documenting challenges
- supporting the development of effective policies
- supporting the development of effective practices
- supporting collaboration and access to resources

A full description of the project and related reports can be found at [www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/building-americas-workforce/about](http://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/building-americas-workforce/about).

### **Family Centered Employment Initiative**

Innovate+Educate and the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) have partnered to create the Family Centered Employment Initiative, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The initiative aims to advance pathways to employment for parents and families of young children led by workforce development boards. Three workforce development boards (Workforce Solutions Borderplex in Texas; Arizona@Work in Maricopa County, Arizona; and WorkSource Montgomery in Maryland) were selected via a request for proposals to pilot the work. The initiative aims to pilot tools and techniques to assure parents have increased opportunity for employment while their families have access to high-quality services and child care. A national advisory and learning community are also part of the work.

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## Methodology

The survey was developed jointly by the Urban Institute, NAWB, and Innovate+Educate, with input from the Family Centered Employment Initiative advisory board. In June 2017, NAWB sent the survey to 457 local workforce board directors, including 280 NAWB members. An additional 45 directors did not receive the survey because of incorrect contact information. As of May 2017, there were 556 local boards in the WIOA system, which means the survey was sent to 82 percent of local workforce boards. The NAWB aims to update its mailing list annually with all local workforce board contacts using the US Department of Labor mailing list, but there are inconsistencies between the two lists, likely because of bad contact information and staff changes.

The directors were asked to participate in the survey by clicking on an anonymous survey link in an email. They were told the survey's purpose and, for participating, were offered the chance to enter a raffle to win free tickets to the 2017 Innovate+Educate Close It Summit and the National Association of Workforce Boards 2018 Forum. The survey, programmed using Qualtrics, was in the field from June to October 2017. Repeated emails and follow-up phone calls were made to increase the survey response, and NAWB members received reminders as part of member emails.

The survey had a 34 percent response rate (155 of 457 WDBs), with 61 percent of respondents completing the entire survey (94 of 155). Respondents came from 38 of the 56 US states and territories, with multiple local WDBs responding in many states. The percentages we present in this report are out of the number of respondents who answered each question. We indicate the *N* values and missing responses for each question. We recoded "other" responses into available categories as appropriate. We also include relevant quotes from open-ended questions asked at the end of the survey to illustrate key findings from the quantitative results.

Findings from the WDBs that responded to the survey may not be representative of all local WDBs. WDBs who were NAWB members might have been more likely to respond to the survey than nonmembers. NAWB staff said they believed member WDBs tend to be better resourced than nonmember WDBs, and well-resourced boards likely have the capacity to participate in a voluntary survey. Results could overestimate how much of a priority parents are because respondents are more likely to be those highly resourced member WDBs that have the capacity to take on an expansive role in prioritizing parents. Despite these limitations, the survey results allow us to explore how a substantial share of WDBs prioritize parents and families when designing and implementing programs and how federal and state barriers inhibit effective services.

# Survey Findings

Local areas prioritize parents in different ways. First, we discuss how much respondents prioritized parents in their local plans and through their collection and use of data and information on parents. Then, we examine the partnerships that WDBs have to address specific needs, such as child care, mental health, and transportation. Next, we examine the services available to parents by looking at requirements of American Job Centers, initiatives that target parents, and the provision of supportive services. We also discuss how supportive services are funded and how WDBs use philanthropic resources and partnerships to implement family-centered approaches to workforce services. Finally, we discuss state and federal policy barriers to providing employment and related services that meet families' needs through the WIOA system.

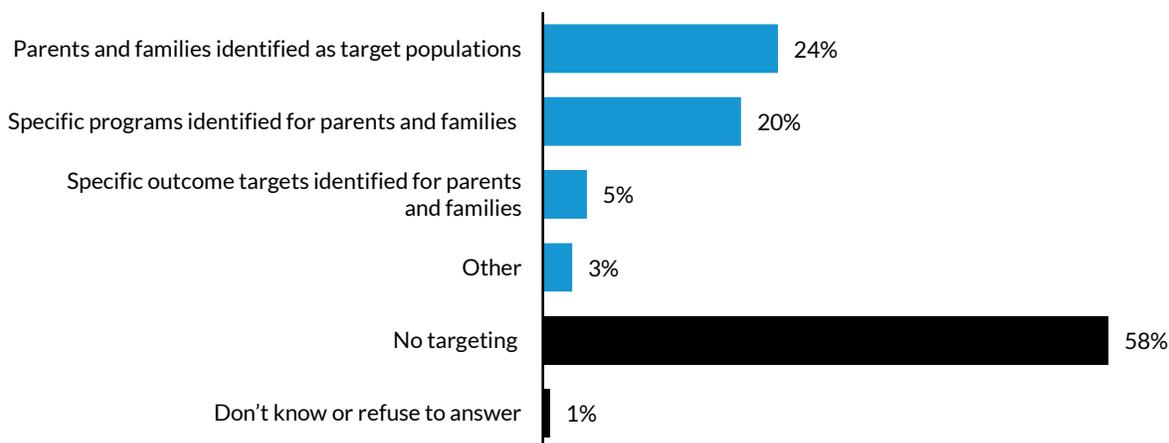
## Prioritizing Parents in WIOA Plans

Under WIOA, states develop plans to assess economic conditions and job seeker and employer needs and to lay out strategies for meeting both job seeker and employer customer needs. WDBs develop plans with key partners, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies and community colleges.

We asked WDBs whether their local plans target parents, thinking that plans might identify specific groups with barriers to employment as the focus of a regional strategy. Forty-one percent of respondents had local plans that target parents. Twenty-four percent identified parents as a target population, and 20 percent operated special programs for parents (figure 2). Five percent had plans that included outcomes targets for parents. Thirty-four percent of respondents targeted parents in just one way, and 8 percent targeted parents in multiple ways.

FIGURE 2

### Ways That Local Workforce Development Boards Target Parents in Local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Plans



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 133 (22 missing responses).

## Use of Data for Planning and Programs

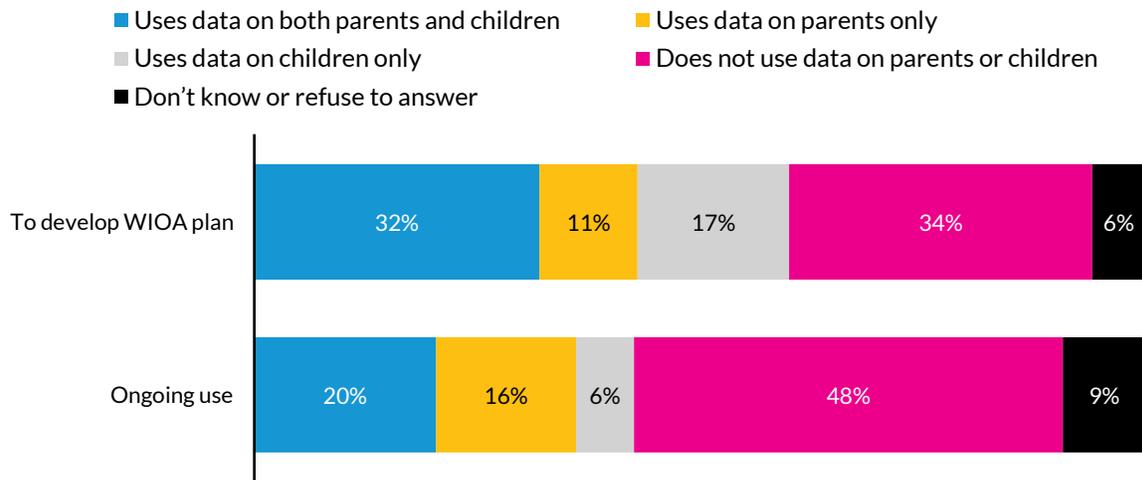
Stakeholders designing programs to meet parents' needs must understand parents' characteristics and needs by analyzing data or other information. This can include assessing how much parents need services in local communities, analyzing parents' characteristics, reviewing research on parents and their needs, and looking at information on parents being served and their outcomes. Data can be about parents only or can include children if systems are working to meet whole families' needs. To understand these dimensions of data collection and use, we asked respondents whether they looked at data on parents and children when developing their local WIOA plans and whether they looked at data on parents on an ongoing basis.

Thirty-two percent of respondents looked at data or other information on parents and children when developing their local plans, 11 percent looked at data on parents only, and 17 percent looked at data on children only (figure 3). Thirty-four percent did not look at data or information on parents or children.

We also asked how much WDBs looked at data on parents or children on an ongoing basis. Twenty percent looked at data or information on parents and children on an ongoing basis, 16 percent looked at data on parents only, and 6 percent looked at data on children only. Forty-eight percent did not look at data on parents or children on an ongoing basis.

FIGURE 3

Local Workforce Development Boards' Use of Data on Parents and Children



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: WIOA = Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. N = 108 (47 missing responses).

An important feature of data collection can be sharing data with other agencies that serve parents. This can include providing access to basic intake information so that parents do not have to repeatedly provide the same information to different organizations across a local workforce system. As one respondent put it, “Confidentiality may be the biggest hurdle. ...Agencies with tax-supported funding (education, economic development, housing, income assistance, emergency assistance) must be able to freely share information on common clients. Data sharing is probably the biggest barrier to coordinated service.” We asked respondents whether they had data sharing agreements with other local organizations serving parents, and 48 percent (46 of 95 respondents) said they did. Respondents reporting such agreements had an average of 2.6 agreements with organizations such as TANF agencies, child care agencies, vocational rehabilitation agencies, adult education providers, and community colleges.

## Partnerships

The public workforce system is structured to facilitate partnerships across many workforce development organizations, including agencies providing training directly, agencies providing supportive services, and agencies that work with special populations. Given limited resources, partners are essential for meeting the complex needs of families. As one respondent indicated, “There is no dedicated funding for serving

parents under WIOA. We rely on our employer and community partners to assist.” Another said, “We are a very rural region with limited resources. We must partner both formally and informally with various agencies and groups to help our clients become more successful.” Laws mandate some partnerships—for example, organizations that operate core programs under WIOA must have representation on local workforce development boards. For service delivery, TANF agencies and the state employment service agencies are required partners at AJCs. Other partnerships are voluntary.

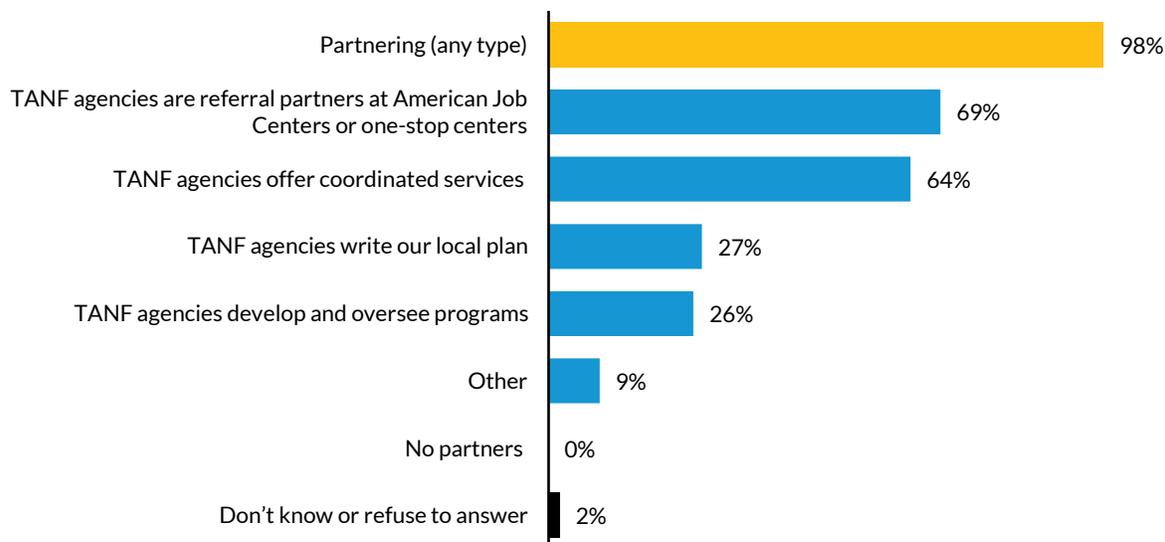
Survey respondents most commonly relied on partnerships for issues related to TANF, child care, financial assistance, and food and nutrition. Partnerships related to health and mental health and partnerships designed to address the needs of school-age children were least common, although more than half of WDBs had partnerships in these areas. For each type of partnership, most respondents reported having multiple partner organizations. In the following sections, we explore these areas and their significance to families and identify key partners.

### **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families**

TANF is a required American Job Center partner under WIOA. In the past, TANF recipients have lacked access to other workforce program services, including training, through career centers because of TANF work requirements, WIOA performance metrics, insufficient resources, and other factors (Hahn et al. 2016). Nearly all survey respondents partnered with TANF agencies to support parents’ needs. Sixty-nine percent said TANF agencies were referral partners at the American Job Centers, and 64 percent offered coordinated services (figure 4). More than a quarter reported that TANF agencies helped write the local plans (27 percent) or were involved in developing and overseeing programs (26 percent).

FIGURE 4

### Ways Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with Local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Agencies



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 133 (22 missing responses).

### Child Care

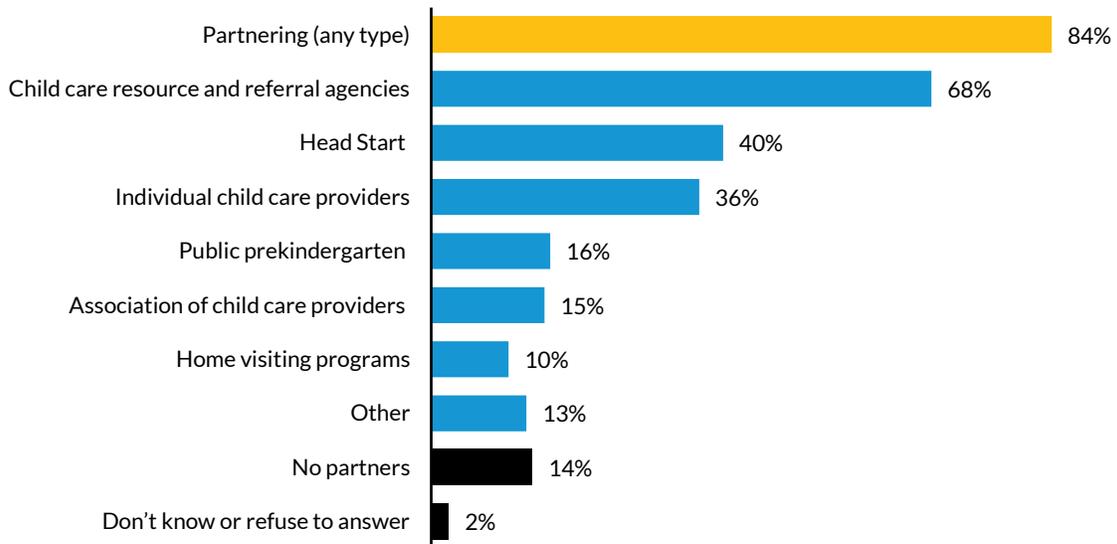
Parents need child care that is affordable, meets their children’s developmental needs, and meets their own needs (Adams, Spaulding, and Heller 2015). Eighty-four percent of respondents partnered with at least one of a variety of child care–related organizations (figures 5 and 6). These included child care resource and referral agencies (68 percent), Head Start (40 percent), and individual child care providers (36 percent).

### Meeting the Needs of School-Age Children

Seventy-eight percent of respondents had partnerships to meet the needs of school-age children, but about 20 percent did not (figure 6). The most common partners were public agencies overseeing K–12 or prekindergarten education (50 percent), followed by educational nonprofits (46 percent), schools (38 percent), and after-school programs (34 percent). Some of these partnerships can serve young people seeking employment services as customers of the public workforce system as opposed to serving the children of parent customers.

FIGURE 5

**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet Child Care Needs**



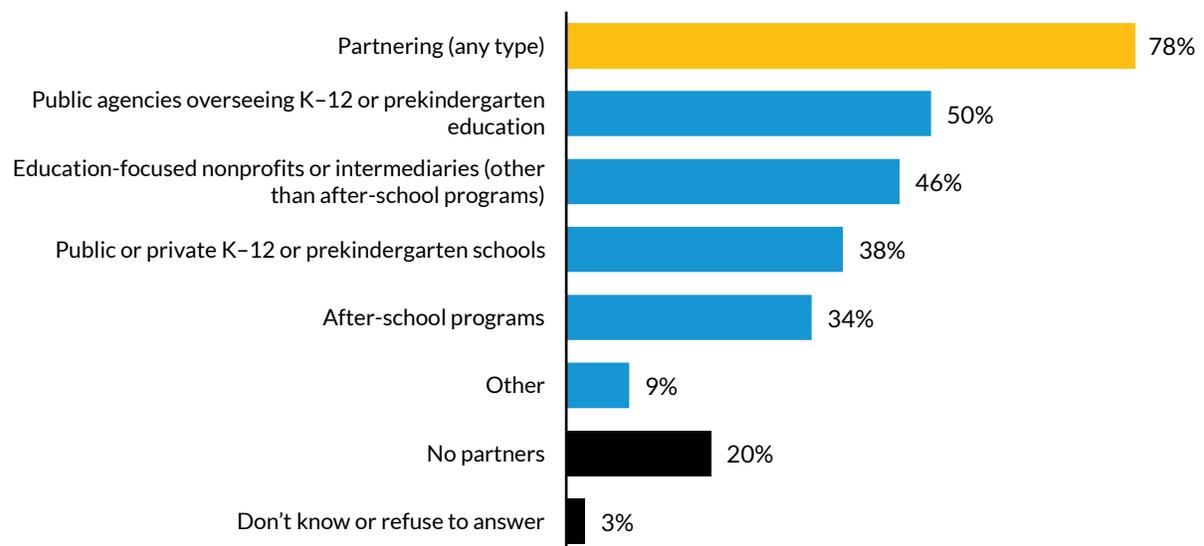
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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 124 (31 missing responses).

FIGURE 6

**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet the Needs of School-Age Children**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 116 (39 missing responses).

## Financial Assistance

Low-income parents must manage limited resources to support their families. Financial assistance can help people tap into available resources and benefits and get advice on financial planning and money management. Eighty-five percent of respondents helped parents by providing financial assistance, most often partnering with financial coaching and counseling organizations (65 percent) (figure 7). Local United Ways also provided financial counseling, with 45 percent of respondents indicating that they partnered with these organizations. Some WDBs provided parents with connections to tax assistance; 44 percent of respondents partnered with Voluntary Income Tax Assistance sites. Less commonly reported were partnerships with financial institutions or credit unions (30 percent) or community development financial institutions (14 percent).

**FIGURE 7**  
**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet Parents' Financial Needs**



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**Source:** Survey of workforce development boards.

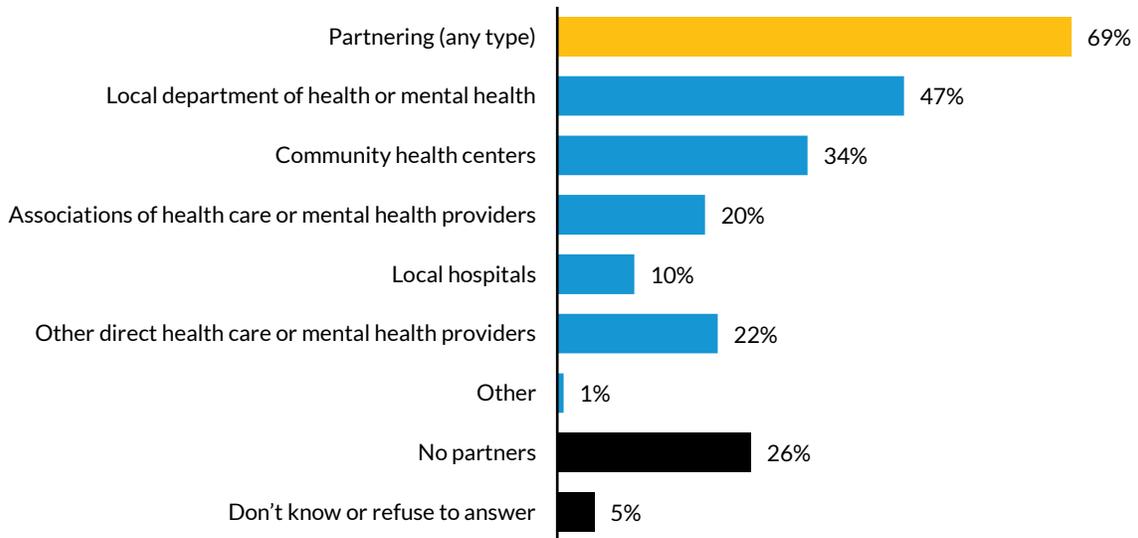
**Notes:** N = 117 (38 missing responses).

## Health and Mental Health

Physical and mental health issues among parents or their children can be a barrier to success. Sixty-nine percent of respondents had partnerships in place to help parents with physical or mental health issues (figure 8). Public agencies were the most commonly reported partners, with 47 percent of respondents

partnering with local departments of health or mental health. Thirty-four percent of respondents partnered with community health centers. Other direct care providers were less common. About 20 percent partnered with associations of health care providers.

**FIGURE 8**  
**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet Parents’ Health and Mental Health Needs**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

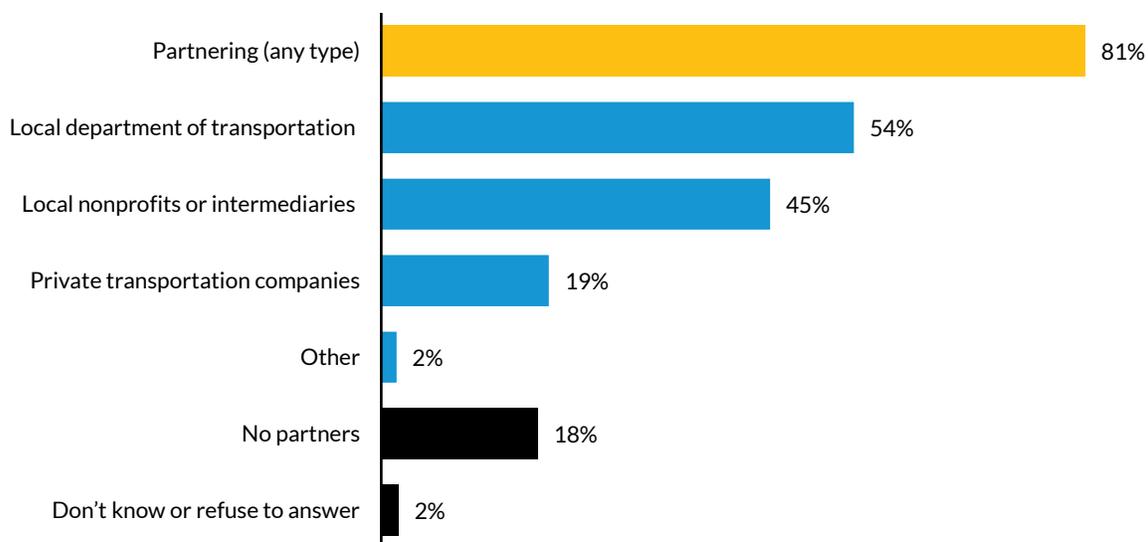
Notes: N = 116 (39 missing responses).

### Transportation

People enrolled in education or training often have trouble accessing or affording transportation. Parents need transportation to get their children to day care or school. Eighty-one percent of respondents had partnerships to address transportation (figure 9). Local departments of transportation were the most commonly reported partners (54 percent). Forty-five percent of respondents partnered with local nonprofits or intermediaries to meet parents’ transportation needs. Nineteen percent worked with private transportation companies.

FIGURE 9

**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet Parents' Transportation Needs**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 114 (41 missing responses).

### Housing

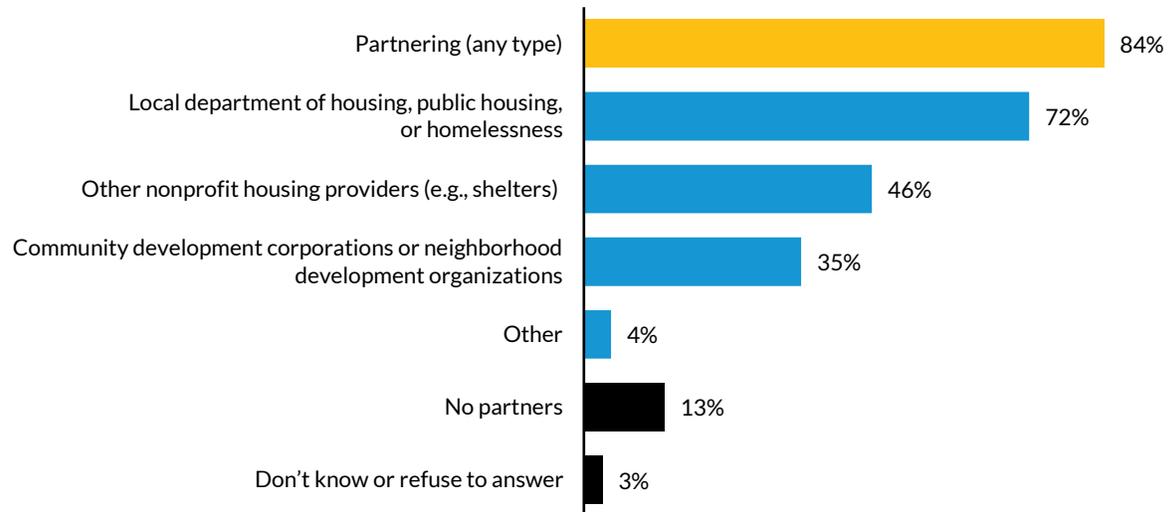
Ensuring that families have stable housing is essential for parents to succeed in education, training, or finding employment. High housing costs in many urban areas are a barrier to housing stability, and housing partners have a critical role to play. Eighty-four percent of respondents had partnerships to deal with housing needs (figure 10). The most commonly reported partners were public housing agencies (72 percent), followed by nonprofits (46 percent) and community and neighborhood development corporations (35 percent).

### Food and Nutrition

Eighty-seven percent of respondents had partnerships to meet parents' food and nutrition needs. Public agencies involved in running the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children were the most common partners (75 percent), and 53 percent partnered with food banks (figure 11).

FIGURE 10

**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet Parents' Housing Needs**



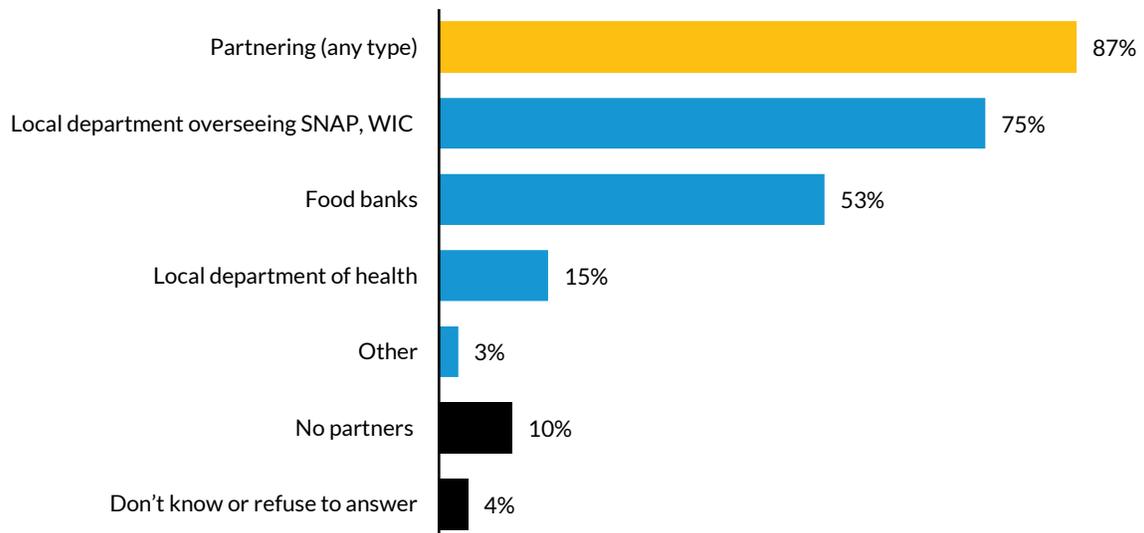
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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 114 (41 missing responses).

FIGURE 11

**Organizations and Agencies That Local Workforce Development Boards Partnered with to Meet Parents' Food and Nutrition Needs**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. N = 114 (41 missing responses).

# Service Delivery

Local workforce systems provide services to job seekers through American Job Centers (AJCs), through special initiatives targeting parents and families, and through contracted education and training and related supports. In this section, we describe what we learned about service delivery by local workforce development boards.

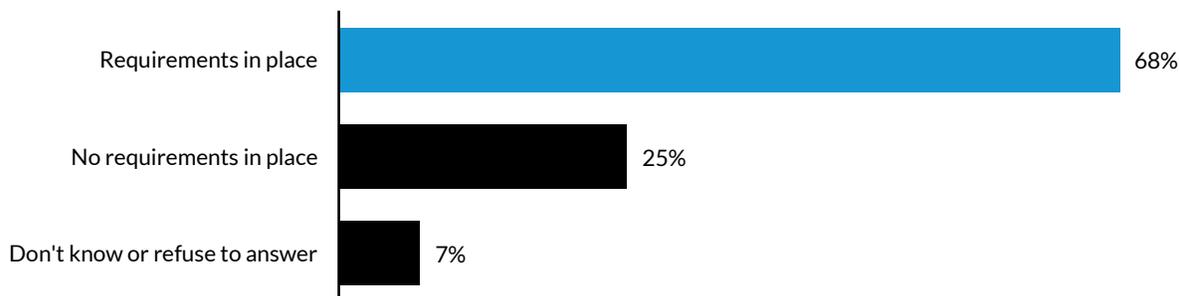
## Services Delivered through American Job Centers

Workforce development boards develop partnerships to provide services to people accessing programs through American Job Centers (AJCs). Job seekers can register for services, receive work readiness training, be assessed for skills training or adult education, and be referred to training or supportive services as part of AJC operations. Certain requirements regarding AJC service delivery can help structure family-friendly workforce development services. Some of these requirements are about making sure services are accessible to parents given the challenges that come with complex schedules and managing child care. Workforce development board requirements for AJCs include requiring more accessibility in terms of time (e.g., broader hours of operation and access to online services) and accommodating the presence of children. Centers can also be required to address child care needs.

Sixty-eight percent of respondents had requirements of job centers that reflected efforts to meet the needs of parents accessing services (figure 12). More than 50 percent of respondents offered the opportunity to access services online, and 20 percent required centers to be open during specific hours to accommodate different schedules (figure 13). Thirty-two percent required centers to allow parents to bring their children to centers, and 7 percent dedicated space for children. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said centers were required to assess child care needs, and more than a quarter required centers to help participants develop child care plans. The low percentage of WDBs with requirements for AJCs related to child care is alarming, given the centrality of child care in helping parents access education and training and be successful in work.

FIGURE 12

**Local Workforce Development Board Requirements of American Job Centers and One-Stop Centers Aimed at Meeting Parents' Needs**



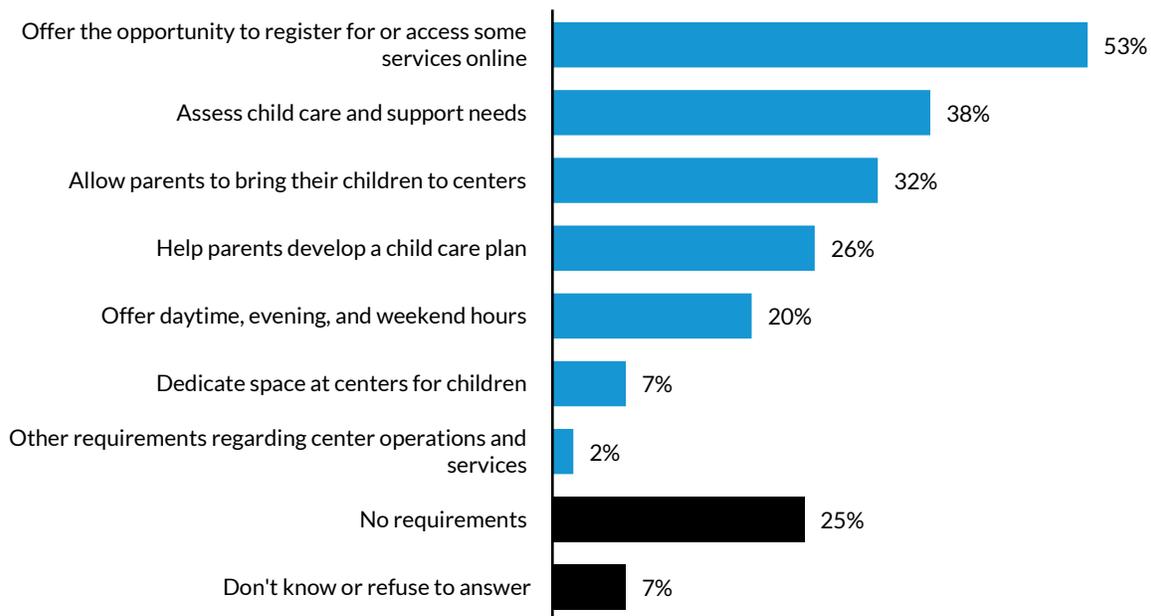
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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 96 (59 missing responses).

FIGURE 13

**Types of Local Workforce Development Board Requirements of American Job Centers and One-Stop Centers Aimed at Meeting Parents' Needs**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 96 (59 missing responses).

A barrier to accommodating children can be that facilities are open to everyone. One respondent said, “We do not allow children in our centers because they are open to the public, and we cannot know if some of our other job seekers have criminal records or should not be around children. This can be challenging for parents of young children with no child care options.”

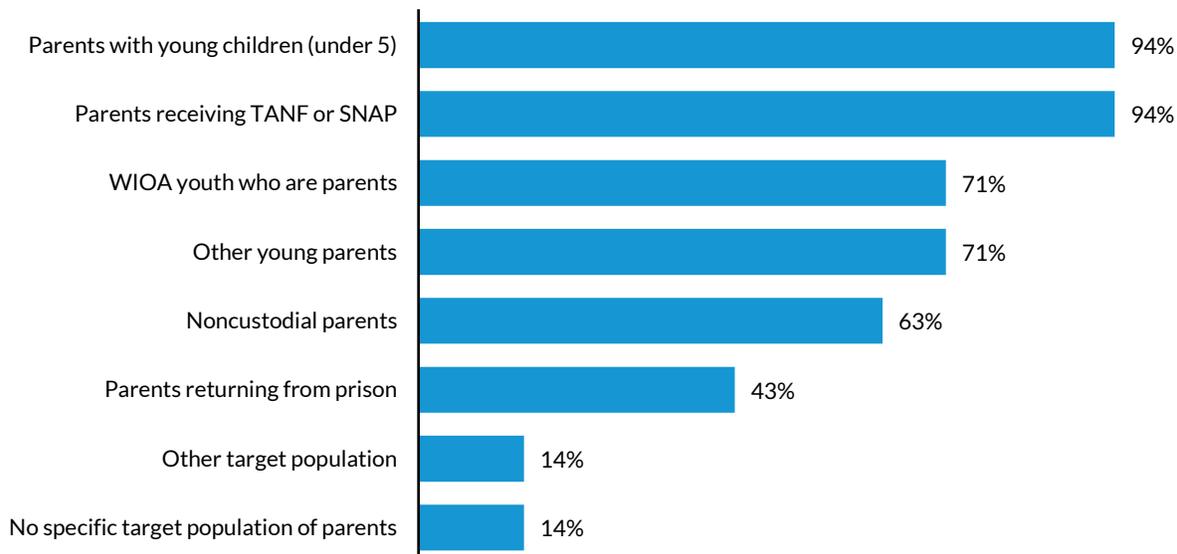
### **Special Initiatives Targeting Parents**

Workforce development boards can target services to particular groups by running special initiatives to meet their needs. Thirty-four percent of respondents operated special initiatives to meet parents’ needs (figure 14). On average, respondents that reported offering at least one parent-focused initiative had 1.6 initiatives targeting parents.

Respondents targeted efforts toward multiple populations. The most common target populations were parents with young children and parents receiving TANF or SNAP (60 percent for each). WIOA youth and other young parents were also a focus of special initiatives. WIOA puts greater emphasis on serving youth, especially out-of-school youth, who are often parents. Twenty-seven percent of parent-focused initiatives reported by WDBs were targeted to parents returning from prison, and 9 percent indicated that their programs did not specify a target population. Sixty-five percent of these initiatives were in place before WIOA, suggesting that parents were a focus of the public workforce system even before the WIOA’s renewed emphasis on serving populations with barriers to employment.

FIGURE 14

### Parent-Related Target Populations of Local Workforce Development Board Special Initiatives



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**Source:** Survey of workforce development boards.

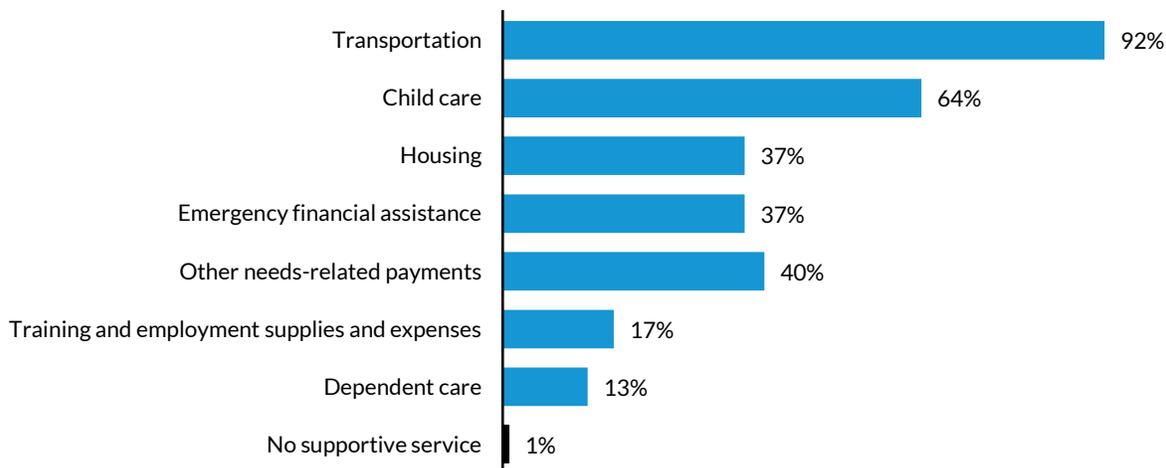
**Notes:** SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIOA = Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. *N* = 35 (no missing responses). This question was asked only of the 35 people who said they were operating special initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of parents. Respondents could choose more than one target population for each initiative. Respondents reporting more than one initiative or more than one target population are counted in multiple categories.

### Providing Supportive Services

WIOA allows funding to be used to provide supportive services to parents, and the partnerships and special initiatives local areas have in place can facilitate access to these services. WIOA defines supportive services as “services such as transportation, child care, dependent care, housing, and needs-related payments that are necessary to enable an individual to participate in activities authorized under WIOA.”<sup>1</sup> Local areas and states are required to track and report receipt of supportive services by WIOA customers but not details on the services received or the characteristics of people receiving services (beyond a limited set of categories).<sup>2</sup> The support service most commonly provided by WDBs was transportation, followed by child care, housing, and emergency financial assistance (figure 15).

FIGURE 15

**Share of Local Workforce Development Boards Providing Each Supportive Service to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Customers**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 103 (52 missing responses). Dependent care is typically defined as care for a child, spouse, or parent or other dependent family member.

Federal WIOA funding was often used to pay for these supportive services (table 1). Local areas also relied on other sources of federal funding, state or local funding, or private funding.

TABLE 1

**Local Workforce Development Boards Using Various Funding Sources for Supportive Services**

Supportive service <sup>a</sup>	Federal WIOA funding	Other federal funding	State public funding	Local public funding	Private funding (e.g., foundations and employers)
Transportation	87	25	25	11	11
Child care	47	26	22	9	5
Dependent care	11	6	4	0	0
Housing	29	15	17	7	3
Emergency financial assistance	27	13	11	5	7
Other needs-related payments	30	13	9	5	5
Other	34	4	5	6	8

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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: WIOA = Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. N = 102 (53 missing responses).

<sup>a</sup>Four respondents provided no support services to WIOA customers.

Child care helps parents participate in education and training and access and sustain employment. The 26 WDBs that leveraged other federal funding to pay for child care reported the specific sources of that funding (table 2).

TABLE 2

**Other Federal Funding Used to Pay for Child Care for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Customers**

Federal funding leveraged to pay for child care	Respondents
TANF funding	16
Child care development block funding	14
SNAP Employment and Training funding	11
Head Start funding	6
Other	3
Don't know or refuse to answer	3

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**Source:** Survey of workforce development boards.

**Notes:** SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. N = 26 (no missing responses). This question was asked only of the 26 people who said they used other federal funding to pay for child care.

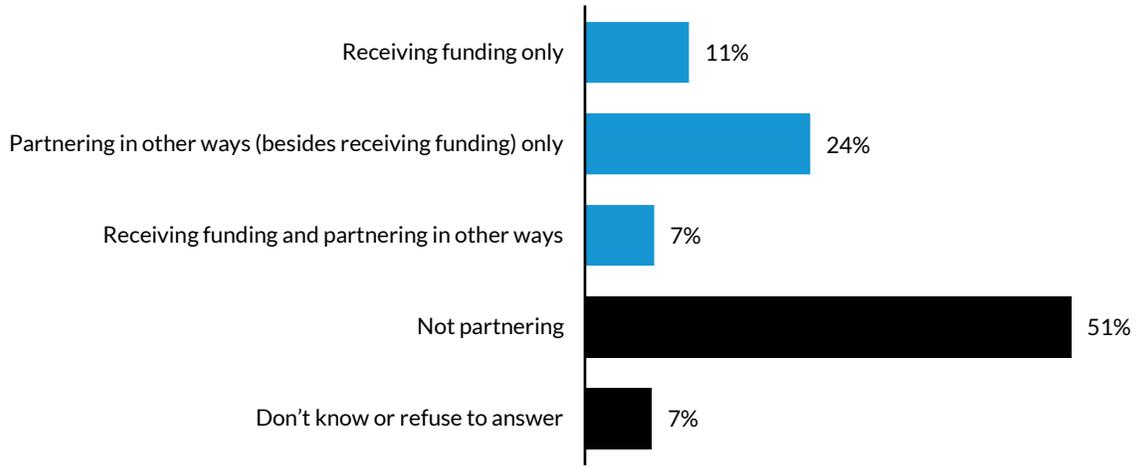
TANF and the Child Care and Development Block Grant are common funding sources for child care. SNAP might be an untapped resource because it can provide a flexible resource for meeting child care needs given the large number of low-income households receiving SNAP. In fiscal year 2016, SNAP delivered benefits to an average of 43.5 million people living in 21.5 million households each month. Children resided in 9.2 million of these households, making up 43 percent of all SNAP households (Lauffer 2017).

**Private Foundations Supporting Workforce System Services**

Philanthropic partners can provide parents financial support and leadership around service delivery in local communities. Philanthropic resources can be more flexible than government sources because they often have fewer restrictions and requirements. Philanthropic funding can be especially useful when piloting new strategies and can bolster resources in systems where public funding cannot meet the demand for services. Almost half of WDBs worked with private philanthropy. Of these respondents, 11 percent received funding, 24 percent partnered in other ways, and 7 percent did both (figure 16). One respondent noted, “Policies only recognize enrollments by funding category (youth, veterans, TANF), no combined categories, which means no relief from performance measures based on taking a chance on a (often dysfunctional) family. [The] only resort is to go to local foundations or philanthropic endeavors, where failure is not catastrophic (like resignation).” Another said, “We maintain a food bank in one of our counties with the assistance of a private foundation, as well as operate a summer program, which provides meals and activities for youth aged 5 to 18.”

FIGURE 16

**Local Workforce Development Boards Receiving Funding from or Partnering with a Philanthropic Organization**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

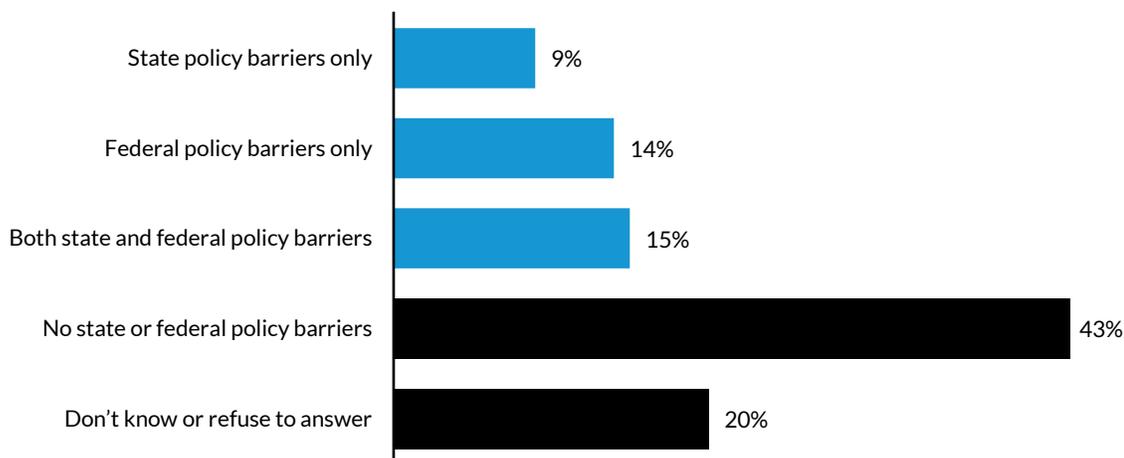
Notes: N = 110 (45 missing responses). Philanthropic organizations include private, community, family, and corporate foundations.

## Policy Barriers to Serving Parents

State and federal policies can make it more difficult for WDBs to serve parents. Respondents were asked whether such barriers existed and could provide open-ended answers describing those barriers. Forty-three percent reported no state or federal policy barriers (figure 17). About 15 percent reported both state and federal policy barriers, 14 percent reported only federal policy barriers, and 9 percent reported only state barriers. Table 3 reports on the federal- and state-level barriers participants cited.

FIGURE 17

**State and Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policies That Make It Challenging to Serve Parents or Families**



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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Notes: N = 94 (61 missing responses). Two respondents who responded “don’t know or refuse to answer” to the state policy barrier question and said there were no federal policy barriers, and three respondents who responded “don’t know or refuse to answer” to the federal policy barrier question and said there were no state policy barriers. These five respondents are included in the “don’t know or refuse to answer” category.

TABLE 3

**State and Federal Barriers That Make It Challenging to Serve Parents or Families**

Policy barrier	Respondents reporting state policy barriers	Respondents reporting federal policy barriers	Total reports of federal and state policy barriers
Requirements regarding target population	9	10	19
Requirements regarding how funds are spent or limited funding	7	6	13
Reporting or performance requirements	3	6	9
Offices not equipped or had space restrictions	2	0	2
Not enough state and local control	0	2	2
Other	1	3	4
No state or federal policy barriers	53	47	100
Don't know or refuse to answer	19	20	39

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Source: Survey of workforce development boards.

Funding was the biggest state and federal policy limitation, either because of limited resources or because of limits on how funding can be used to pay for services, especially supportive services. Survey respondents discussed these funding dynamics. “While the legislation may encourage serving parents and families,” one told us, “there is not enough funding allocated to regional boards that may have high

incidence rates of poverty median incomes.” Another said, “The requirement to spend 30 percent of our funding on training makes it difficult to provide supportive services, such as child care, due to the cost.”

One respondent illustrated the importance of partnerships and alternative funding:

In order to develop a high-function workforce system in areas of high poverty incidence rates, the federal government needs to get serious about making a significant investment in flexible education programs that will provide its users access to baseline skills to earn nationally recognized credentials. Not nearly enough funds to meet needs of our area. Formula funding is an outdated approach to allocations. In our area, we lost nearly 20 percent of federal funds to serve an extremely needy population that utilizes our career center. [We] will never increase the participation rate of workers without a rational approach to serving specific communities that have such a profile. We are working to improve our system through meaningful partnerships and braided funding sources as best as possible.

Beyond funding barriers, requirements related to specific populations, including TANF participants and out-of-school youth, were also mentioned as policy barriers. Under WIOA, the share of youth funding required to be targeted to out-of-school youth shifted from 30 percent to 75 percent. TANF became a mandatory partner in American Job Center services. Survey respondents also cited eligibility requirements as barriers. “Income eligibility for family size may disqualify a family in need of services to become self-sustaining,” one said. “This group [parents] must qualify for WIOA Adult, [Dislocated Worker], or Youth programs to be served with funding,” another told us. “Seventy-five percent of WIOA youth funding now focuses on out-of-school youth, rather than in-school youth. It is difficult to find youth parents once they have left the school system. Only when they sign up for TANF services do they have access to WIOA and TANF services.”

A few respondents said that performance requirements, especially federal reporting requirements, were barriers to serving parents because of the time and resources they took away from providing services and because they make it hard to implement programs that best serve this population. One participant summed up the state policy challenges as follows: “Federal requirements and performance measures can create challenges to implementing creative solutions to support parents and families. We understand why the measures are th[ere], but those are not the most adaptable or flexible options to serve those in need.” Another responded also noted concerns about documentation efforts taking away from provision of services. “More flexibility with participant costs and support services. Less focus on the documentation required for case files and all the monotonous follow up. Case managers should have more time to coach and work with their clients instead of all the rigorous documentation that really means nothing.”

Some respondents indicated that WIOA program goals to serve a spectrum of job seekers with limited resources did not point to targeting services to families. “Our pots of money and the

requirements of performance and eligibility make it very hard to target one specific subgroup of our population when all of them need help,” one said. “[Our workforce board] serves [a] sufficient number of parents,” said another. “Services such as child care are provided by programs. Other services required by families are coordinated with other service providers. Any mandate to serve parents...would complicate and add burdens to [al]ready underfunded programs.”

Others expressed a desire to take a more family-centered approach to service delivery and were exploring strategies for better meeting parents’ needs.

“Local boards such as [ours] have been proactive in identifying needs and concerns of employers,” said one respondent, “of which child care is a major concern. Having a more centralized system where child care and workforce issues can be funded and seamlessly delivered in the same location may be a policy issue that could be explored. We are taking steps to determine value-added strategies to address the lack of child care, which is a retention issue for the employer.”

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*The mission is changing from individual job seekers and employers (one-to-one match plus retention) to looking at the family unit. Therefore, everything in the law must be reviewed in that light. Types of services, performance measures, failure criteria, appropriate service[s], requirements in the law for community partners to coordinate (with consequences for not coordinating).*

*—Survey respondent*

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# Implications and Conclusions

Local workforce development boards are the front line in the public workforce system seeking to meet the needs of parents and families under WIOA. This report provides information from WDBs on how they are meeting these needs and the challenges they face. Key findings include the following:

- **WDBs are focusing on parents in various ways**, sometimes by targeting them in local plans and through partnerships, supportive services, American Job Center operations, and special initiatives. Plans might be an important mechanism for focusing a local area or region on parents as a priority but are not the only indicators that the local workforce system is targeting this population or putting services in place to meet their needs.
- **Few WDBs looked at data on children as part of state planning or in an ongoing way**, suggesting opportunities to use data on parents and children to design and implement services that meet their needs. Heavy data collection requirements under WIOA and a lack of resources and capacity sometimes discourage data collection beyond what is minimally required.
- **WDBs partnered with public agencies to meet parents' needs on many issues.** They also worked with other community partners, such as child care resource and referral agencies, the United Way, Voluntary Income Tax Assistance providers, and community health centers. Because United Ways and other community partners exist in many communities, other WDBs could also leverage these local stakeholders. Expanding nongovernmental partners could help meet the needs of parents and families because it allows WDBs to tap into additional resources and critical supports.
- **WDBs required AJCs to put certain policies in place to support the needs of parents and families.** These included requirements to facilitate access to services (e.g., scheduling, location, and accommodating children) and requirements regarding assessment and planning related to child care. Though some AJCs are already implementing these strategies, they can take additional steps to meet the needs of parents and families, although funding is clearly a barrier to implementing such strategies.
- **About a third of WDBs operated special initiatives to serve parents and included various target populations**, most commonly single parents and TANF parents. WIOA includes new requirements regarding the engagement of TANF agencies as partners and makes specific mention of both TANF and single parents as populations that programs could target. Special

initiatives offer the opportunity to explore and evaluate strategies for meeting the needs of these populations, which can be scaled up to reach more parents accessing the WIOA system.

- **The most common supportive services participants received (reported across special initiatives and AJCs) were transportation and child care assistance.** Transportation costs less than child care, which likely requires WDBs to leverage multiple funding sources to support child care needs and to limit the amount of child care assistance participants can receive.
- **Resources to pay for these services came from WIOA funding, but WDBs also drew on other federal, state, and local funding and private resources.** Other federal resources to pay for child care came from the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the SNAP Employment and Training program. Blending funds from multiple streams can be critical, especially in a system that does not have enough resources to serve everyone in need or provide the depth of services needed by people with significant barriers to employment. Local areas can draw more on foundation resources to support services for families.
- **Respondents reported some key federal and state policy barriers, including requirements for serving certain target populations, funding requirements and limitations, and performance metrics.** Although WIOA included changes that made it easier to serve parents, new requirements for target populations combined with a lack of resources means that local workforce systems have to make difficult choices about whether to serve parents, especially those with the greatest needs. New regression-adjusted performance measurement that accounts for differences in populations served and local economic conditions may increase incentives for serving parents, but additional research is needed to understand whether parents are still being left out as a service population.

This report provides a picture of services targeted to parents, including the oversight of these programs, the nature of partnerships, and funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. But we need more information about the services provided to parents and the outcomes of these efforts. Of particular interest, given funding limitations, is the nature of the partnerships WDBs have in place to meet the needs of parents accessing the workforce. Future research will explore these issues in more detail and examine how states create family-centered policies and programs.

# Notes

1. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, [Pub. L. No. 113-128](#), section 2, part 59.
2. People with barriers to employment are defined as being part of one of the following populations: displaced homemakers; low-income people; American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; people (including youth) with disabilities; older adults; people released from prison; homeless adults, children, and youth; youth who are in or have aged out of foster care; English language learners, people who have low levels of literacy, and people facing substantial cultural barriers; eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers; people within two years of exhausting TANF; single parents (including single pregnant women); long-term unemployed people; and other groups the state's governor determines to have barriers to employment. See Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, [Pub. L. No. 113-128](#), section 3, part 24.

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