"CWICstats: A Collaborative Model to Address the Research and Data Needs of Local Workforce Development Policymakers"

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Elizabeth Weigensberg is a senior researcher at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Her research interests include workforce development and child welfare, with expertise in performance measurement, program evaluation, and the use of administrative data to improve policy and practice. She currently serves as the principal investigator of Chapin Hall's CWICstats (Chicagoland Workforce Information Collaborative). She also leads the development of system requirements for the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership's new integrated data system. She is the principal investigator for the implementation study of Career and Technical Education in the Chicago Public Schools and is engaged in the U.S. Department of Labor Opportunities for Youth project. She also conducts child welfare research, including assessing performance contracting measures for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Weigensberg has a PhD from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

Summary and Findings: With the recent economic downturn, many policymakers want to know what works among the array of programs in the workforce development system. Data on program performance is often inconsistent, difficult to obtain, and fragmented given funding and program silos. In response, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago partnered with public agencies, local policymakers, and foundations to launch CWICstats. CWICstats researchers work with state and local public agencies to collect and analyze administrative data and disseminate research on the performance of Chicago-area workforce development programs. The CWICstats initiative serves as an innovative model of cross-system collaboration with the aim of addressing data and research gaps on workforce program outcomes to assist policymakers with data-informed decision making. CWICstats researchers analyze individual-level program administrative data for several research activities, including assessing program performance measures and producing a public website with WIA program outcomes. Several studies have also been conducted to inform local policymakers about the workforce system's structural and fiscal complexity and fragmentation, program participants' pathways and outcomes, and successful factors among local workforce development programs. The paper will describe the CWICstats model and provide a summary of these studies.

Implications for Policy and Practice: Since CWICstats started in 2009, these research efforts provided useful information to help policymakers and program managers make data-informed decisions about how to improve the workforce development system. Regular reporting of program performance measures informed both policymakers and consumers in their decision making regarding program investments. The report on the complexity of the workforce system helped convey the fragmentation and need for reform during the Chicago mayoral transition, when policymakers decided to consolidate Chicago's local Workforce Investment Area with two other local areas within Cook County. Findings from the study of successful workforce programs and the recommendations for improved data systems led to the creation of a new integrated workforce information system for Cook County. This report also provided a conceptual framework for identifying and measuring influential factors of workforce programs, allowing policymakers and program administrators to look beyond traditional measures of program outcomes. In addition to the research, the CWICstats model itself has served as an example to others seeking solutions to the problem of inconsistent and fragmented data on workforce programs.

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