

**learning
what
works** to
improve
the lives
of low-
income
people

40 YEARS OF

EXCELLENCE

mdrc

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY



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about mdrc

Created in 1974 by the Ford Foundation and a group of federal agencies, MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, education and social policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve programs and policies that affect the poor. MDRC is committed to finding solutions to some of the nation's most difficult social problems — from reducing poverty and bolstering economic self-sufficiency to improving public education and college graduation rates.

To that end, we design and pilot promising new interventions, evaluate existing programs using the highest research standards, and provide design and implementation assistance to build better programs that can be replicated and expanded. We helped pioneer the use of random assignment — the same highly reliable methodology used to test new medical treatments — in real-world agency and program settings and have developed new methods in implementation science and the study of variation in program impacts.

We also act as an intermediary, bringing together public and private funders to test new policy-relevant ideas and communicating what we learn to policymakers and service providers — all with the goal of changing public policy and mainstream practice to improve the lives of low-income individuals, families, and children.

From welfare policy to high school reform, MDRC's work has helped to shape legislation, program design, and operational practices across the country. Working in fields where emotion and ideology often dominate public debates, MDRC is a go-to source for objective, unbiased evidence about cost-effective solutions that can be scaled up and sustained.

Over the years, we have brought our unique strengths — fielding rigorous research designs together with in-depth program operations capacity — to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. We first gained widespread visibility for our pathbreaking studies of state welfare-to-work programs during the 1980s and 1990s. Today, we also evaluate child care and early education programs, public school reforms, efforts to help low-income people succeed in college, initiatives to raise the income of low-wage workers, interventions for at-risk teenagers and returning veterans, and employment programs for ex-prisoners and people with disabilities. We are known not only for the high quality, integrity, and rigor of our research but also for the work we do in partnership with school districts; community colleges; federal, state, and local governments; foundations; and community-based organizations.

Our studies have taken us to nearly every state and most major cities in this country, to Canada, and to the United Kingdom. Our funders include government agencies and private, family, and corporate foundations. With a staff of some 300 in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is engaged in approximately 60 projects clustered around key themes within each of our five policy areas: Family Well-Being and Children's Development, K-12 Education, Young Adults and Postsecondary Education, Low-Wage Workers and Communities, and Health and Barriers to Employment. In each of these areas, we strive to build a reliable body of evidence about what works and what doesn't and to select new projects because they offer the potential to answer the next important question in a given area.

For our research to make a difference, it must reach a broad audience. We complement clearly written reports with policy briefs, how-to guides, and videos that distill the results of our studies and review their implications. We share our findings with the media and public interest groups, in testimony before Congress and state legislatures, through news bulletins e-mailed to more than 12,000 people, on Twitter and Facebook, and on our Web site, which receives more than 100,000 visitors a month.

MDRC is a rare organization that matches its passion for rigorous analysis with an equally passionate commitment to improve the lives of low-income people.

— William Julius Wilson, Lewis P. and Linda L. Geysler University Professor, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University



from the president

Since our founding in 1974 by a consortium of public and private funders, MDRC has played a unique role in the design, testing, and expansion of effective solutions to some of the nation's most pressing problems. Forty years ago, skepticism abounded about the payoff of the Great Society's antipoverty programs. Public and private funders and policymakers were concerned that programs for low-income families were being shaped by hunches, anecdotes, and untested assumptions. Ineffective policies wasted precious resources and fed public cynicism about government.

Our goal always has been to apply what we learn to improve both policy and on-the-ground practice — and ultimately to find ways to use public and private resources to take effective programs to a larger scale.

MDRC was founded as an antidote to this skepticism — to develop and test promising new approaches rigorously before they become public policy and to evaluate existing programs to find out whether or not they are effective. Our goal always has been to apply what we learn to improve both policy and on-the-ground practice — and ultimately to find ways to use public and private resources to take effective programs to a larger scale.

This mission has taken on greater urgency following the Great Recession and the accompanying rise in the federal debt resulting from the use of fiscal stimulus to pull the country into recovery. With the current political gridlock and the coming wave of baby-boomer retirements, policymakers have less freedom to address these budget challenges. But even within straitened circumstances, global competitiveness, economic investment, and basic fairness dictate that we take steps to meet the nation's many pressing social needs.

In response, policymakers, funders, and service deliverers continue to turn to MDRC as a trusted, authoritative, and efficient source of information about what works and what doesn't in education and social policy. Our demonstration projects and evaluations have both identified cost-effective programs and illustrated where they fall short in a wide range of domains affecting low-income children, adults, and families — including welfare policy, high school reform, early childhood education, “make work pay” policies for low-wage workers, youth employment, community colleges, and prisoner reentry, to name just a few. Current projects are investigating home visiting programs for new parents, math and reading for pre-K and elementary school students, and initiatives to promote career advancement among low-wage workers.

MDRC was there at the beginning of the movement to evaluate social programs, where we pioneered the use of less expensive administrative data to conduct fast-turn-around studies of welfare and education reforms. Now we are part of the latest federally sponsored public-private efforts to identify and scale up effective solutions to social challenges: the Social Innovation Fund and the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund. As part of those efforts, MDRC and its partners are replicating 19 different evidence-based programs that address problems of economic opportunity, education reform, and youth development. We are also continuing to break ground through our design and oversight of the nation's first Social Impact Bond, a new way to harness private investment to fund promising new programs at no cost to taxpayers. In addition, we are extending our early work on incentives with a series of next-generation experiments drawing on the principles of behavioral economics.

This Corporate Report highlights some of the features that we believe make MDRC unique:

- We learn how and why programs work — or don't work.
- We form enduring partnerships with service providers.
- We design and develop new solutions to pressing social problems.
- We develop a body of evidence, so that one study builds upon another.
- We focus on strengthening policy systems and program practice.
- We are a leader in innovation in policy and in research methods.

As we mark MDRC's 40th anniversary in 2014, we are thankful for the many people who have helped us along the way — our funders and research partners, the programs that have opened their doors to our researchers, program participants themselves, the policymakers and service providers who have used what we've learned, and, of course, our staff and Board of Directors. I want to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to Robert Solow, a founding MDRC Board member who stepped down as Chairman in 2013 after serving in that capacity for 12 years, and to welcome Mary Jo Bane as the new Chair.

Bob is Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he had been a Professor of Statistics and Economics since 1949. He was awarded the Alfred Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1987 for his theory of economic growth and the National Medal of Science in 2000. Over some four decades, Bob has played a role in every major decision at MDRC. We have all benefited enormously from his brilliant mind, his good judgment, his extraordinary ability to frame issues clearly and concisely, his wit and humor, and his grace and patience. His steadfast dedication to the organization, its people, and its mission have made MDRC stronger. Fortunately, he will remain on the Board as Chairman Emeritus.

Mary Jo is the Thornton Bradshaw Professor of Public Policy and Management at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, where she has been on the faculty since 1981. She has brought to MDRC not only her experience as a pioneering academic researcher on issues of poverty, education, and the well-being of low-income families, but also her track record of service in public administration at both the federal and state levels. She has served as Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Commissioner of the New York State Department of Social Services, among other positions. Mary Jo has been a Board member since 1997 and was Vice Chair from 2009 to 2012. Her exceptional understanding of the link between research and policy has helped ratchet up the relevance of MDRC's work. And the breadth and depth of her knowledge and insight on the public policy issues we work on has made her a wonderful resource. We know that we will continue to thrive under her leadership.

On the occasion of our 40th anniversary, Bob and Mary Jo will write about their experiences in guiding MDRC through the formative years in our development as an organization and share their thoughts about the opportunities that lie before us.

Forty years after our founding, we believe that MDRC's mission — learning what works to improve the lives of low-income people — remains vital to the future of our nation. We look forward to continuing to make a difference in the decades to come.

Gordon L. Berlin
President

issues we focus on

Families with Children The best way to improve social conditions tomorrow is to **better the circumstances and life prospects of children** today. MDRC creates and evaluates **early childhood education programs**, strategies to improve family relationships and promote responsible fatherhood, and interventions that focus on both parents and their children. **KEY AREAS:** promoting children's social and emotional development; readiness for numeracy and mathematics; home visiting programs to support new parents; relationship and marriage skills programs for low-income parents.

K-12 Education The rising educational demands of the 21st-century workplace have heightened public and political pressure on schools to do **a better job preparing students**. MDRC is learning how best to **help students succeed** — as well as what it takes to put effective interventions into place and expand them. **KEY AREAS:** teaching reading and math in the elementary years; teacher training and curriculum improvement; extended learning after school and in the summer; high school reform; college readiness and access.

Engaging Disconnected Youth Only 68 of every 100 ninth-graders in public schools will graduate from high school on time. Some will drop out, and among those who do graduate, **many will leave high school without the skills they need** to succeed in college or the workplace. MDRC's projects test interventions for vulnerable young people that offer **the support and opportunities they need to become productive adults**. **KEY AREAS:** educational programs, job training, and leadership development for out-of-school youth; comprehensive services for young people who are leaving foster care or are at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system; raising academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students.

Higher Education Higher education is the **pathway to better jobs and higher earnings**. While college-going rates are at an all-time high, too few students earn credentials or degrees, particularly at community colleges, the entry point to higher education for most-low income students. MDRC is a leader in developing, evaluating, and expanding innovative programs to **help students enroll, progress, and graduate**. **KEY AREAS:** performance-based scholarships and other financial aid programs; academic and social supports to boost achievement; reform of developmental education.

Work and Income Security

Major trends are reshaping the nation's economy and labor markets, making jobs less secure, requiring that low-wage workers upgrade their skills, and increasing the need for new policies to **promote and support self-sufficiency and help reduce poverty**. MDRC is experimenting with new ways to **raise the economic prospects of low-wage workers**, people who are jobless, and communities where poverty is concentrated. **KEY AREAS:** antipoverty programs using conditional cash transfers; increasing employment among public housing residents and recipients of housing subsidies; job training geared to the new labor market; savings mechanisms for low-wage workers; expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit to single adults.

Health and Disabilities

Mental and physical health problems and disabilities are among the most common **obstacles to steady employment**. MDRC has built a portfolio of projects to test new ways to **enhance health care services and health outcomes** for low-income people, especially for individuals with health- and disability-related barriers to employment. **KEY AREAS:** coordinating the health care of high-needs patients who have disabilities; the intersection of the welfare and Social Security systems for people with disabilities; helping disabled veterans resolve the psychosocial problems that may prevent them from returning to work.

Criminal Justice

Former prisoners have **a hard time finding work** and successfully reintegrating into their communities, and many return to prison. MDRC is testing a variety of prisoner reentry **programs aimed at reducing recidivism**. **KEY AREAS:** transitional employment programs and support services for recently released prisoners; cognitive behavioral therapy for incarcerated teenagers.

finding out what works

Thanks to MDRC, we now have a deeper sense of new ways to help urban youth. I hope the people who did this research have a lot of imitators.

— Jay Mathews, *Washington Post*, on MDRC's study of Career Academies



Career Academies: Increasing Earnings Through Education

A student at Southeast Career and Technical Academy in Henderson, Nevada, works on a 1957 Chevrolet pick-up truck during an auto repair class. Photo: Steve Marcus/Las Vegas Sun

First developed some 35 years ago, Career Academies aim to create better pathways among high school, higher education, and the workplace. They restructure large high schools into small learning communities with career themes, follow rigorous curricula that include academic and career-oriented courses, and offer opportunities to participate in work-based learning activities. The Career Academy approach has taken root in an estimated 8,000 high schools across the country.

The proliferation of Career Academies, along with their continuing relevance to high school reform policy initiatives, has been fueled by MDRC's random assignment evaluation of the model. We tracked students who participated in our study for 12 years and found that Career Academies students had better employment outcomes and, most notably, higher earnings than students enrolled in traditional high school curricula. These positive results occurred without any detrimental effects on high school graduation or college enrollment. The Obama Administration has called for a substantial investment in the "highly effective" Career Academy model.

MDRC continues to help refine and improve this model. Our Career Academies Project: Linking Education and Careers, funded by the federal Institute of Education Sciences, seeks to strengthen academies' work-based learning component. We are piloting a cohesive program in 18 academies in five areas: Atlanta, Miami-Dade, Hillsborough County (Florida), Los Angeles, and Oakland. Materials from the pilot — including curricula, guides, resources, and evaluation tools — are available to the field via ConnectED.

working in partnership



MDRC is one of our closest partners in our efforts to lift the life trajectories of disadvantaged youth. We rely on MDRC, a prominent developer and evaluator of interventions seeking to improve the lives of low-income Americans, to provide our grantees with best-in-class expertise on evaluation and program replication.

— Nancy Roob, President,
The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

The Social Innovation Fund: Expanding the Reach of Effective Programs

MDRC has long been known for its partnership with public and private funders, nonprofits, and community organizations to find and test solutions to problems related to poverty — and to strengthen and expand the programs that work best. A good example is our participation in the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a federal initiative administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The SIF awards grants to private intermediaries, which match the government's monies. The pooled funds go to outstanding nonprofits and public entities that are already running evidence-based programs and are making a difference in their communities. The aim of the SIF is to expand the organizational capacity and reach of these promising programs and identify ways to improve their effectiveness as they grow.

In one SIF project, MDRC is partnering with New York City's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) to transplant five anti-poverty programs incubated in New York to six additional cities: Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, Memphis, Newark, Kansas City, San Antonio, and Tulsa. The models encompass a range of training, employment, asset-building, and financial incentive services. MDRC is working with CEO, their co-investors, and local organizations to adapt these models to local contexts and evaluate their impacts as they are implemented on a larger scale.

In a second initiative, MDRC is working closely with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) through its True North Fund. This SIF project aims to increase by 74,000 the number of vulnerable and economically disadvantaged young people served by organizations that can help them improve their educational skills, prepare for and find employment, prevent teen pregnancy, and avoid criminal activity. MDRC worked with EMCF to select 12 organizations across the country through a competitive process and is evaluating seven of the programs to find out how well they work and whether they can be improved.

creating solutions

Jobs-Plus: Increasing Earnings for Public Housing Residents

For many public housing residents, low-wage work simply does not pay. Under traditional public housing rules, increases in income lead to higher rents that can consume a substantial part of what low-wage workers earn. The Jobs-Plus demonstration, which MDRC designed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Rockefeller Foundation, tested whether a program that combined employment and training services, new rent rules to “make work pay,” and neighbor-to-neighbor outreach centering on work could make a difference in the economic prospects of public housing residents. Launched in 1998 in six cities, it was one of the most ambitious employment projects ever attempted inside some of the nation’s poorest inner-city housing projects

MDRC’s evaluation found that, in the sites where the model was fully implemented, Jobs-Plus increased participants’ annual earnings by 16 percent as long as seven years after they had entered the program, including three years after the demonstration ended. These robust, long-term findings suggest that Jobs-Plus offers a feasible and effective way for the nation’s public housing system to move beyond its core function of providing housing subsidies and to take on another important role — serving as a platform for work.

MDRC is working with the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity to replicate Jobs-Plus in New York City and San Antonio, Texas, as part of a federal Social Innovation Fund initiative to scale up effective programs and build better evidence. In addition, the City of New York is planning to expand Jobs-Plus to additional public housing developments. Finally, President Obama has called for an investment of \$50 million in a competitive grants program to develop Jobs-Plus sites around the country.

The program has made a difference in the way people view themselves, because they see they have potential and opportunity.

— Lourdes Castro-Ramirez, formerly of the Los Angeles Housing Department, on MDRC’s Jobs-Plus initiative, *Los Angeles Times*



informing policy & practice

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation

Created in the early 1990s, National Guard Youth ChalleNGe is an intensive residential program for high school dropouts. ChalleNGe has served more than 100,000 at-risk young people through a program model that includes an unusual and promising mix of features: a five-month residential phase with military-style discipline, a focus on promoting positive youth development, and a postresidential mentoring phase. ChalleNGe now operates in 34 sites in 27 states and Puerto Rico.

MDRC's random assignment evaluation in 10 ChalleNGe sites during 2005-2006 found that, after three years, participants were more likely



Photo: Courtesy, National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program

Youth ChalleNGe may be the most successful large-scale program yet evaluated to help dropouts.

— Erik Eckholm, *New York Times*

than their control group counterparts to have obtained a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or a high school diploma, to have earned college credits, and to be working. Their earnings were also 20 percent higher. These findings have led the U.S. Office of Management and Budget to increase the federal share in this federally and state-financed program and have encouraged new private investment in it. Longer-term follow-up of the study's results is planned.

building a body of knowledge

Using Earnings Supplements to Reward Work

The long-term secular decline in wages and earnings lies at the heart of the nation's poverty-related problems. In order to further reduce poverty, there is a pressing need to devise new labor-market-oriented policies. Beginning in the 1990s, MDRC's "make work pay" experiments tested whether offering earnings supplements would increase employment and income and improve the lives of welfare recipients and their families. Low-wage jobs often leave families barely better off than subsistence-level welfare benefits. Programs that offer earnings supplements seek to augment the earnings of individuals whose wages are too low to support a family.

MDRC conducted a series of evaluations of different earnings supplementation strategies in the United States and Canada. The studies examined the cost of supplements as well as their effects on work, welfare receipt, and the well-being of families and children. The results were promising: The programs increased employment, earnings, and income among parents, which, in turn, produced modest but important benefits for young children in school achievement. These gains for children led MDRC to develop a rich body of work on additional strategies to better

[A] wonderful set of studies...have shown that an intervention to give earnings supplements to families, in exchange for getting the household heads...to work steadily, has a positive effect...on family well-being and marriage stability...even on how the kids did in school.

— Cynthia M. Duncan, author of *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*, "Frontline," PBS



the lives of children growing up in poverty, including improving the quality of preschool education and increasing parents' capacities to provide healthy environments for their children.

Ultimately, earning supplements were incorporated into welfare policies in more than 40 states. MDRC's work on financial incentives has continued in studies of performance-based scholarships for community college students and an evaluation of a conditional cash transfer program in New York, which provided monetary rewards to families for meeting specific health, education, and employment-related benchmarks. MDRC is also overseeing and evaluating a pilot program to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit in New York City to low-income single workers without dependent children, with the goal of increasing their employment and income.

Leading in Innovation

The Nation's First Social Impact Bond

MDRC designed and is overseeing the nation's first Social Impact Bond program, a new way to leverage private dollars to fund innovative programs in the public sector, at no cost to taxpayers. In a Social Impact Bond, private investors finance an intervention and receive a return on their investment only if the program meets its goals. Working with the New York City Mayor's office and the Department of Correction, MDRC is implementing a cognitive behavioral therapy program for 16- to 18-year-olds detained at New York City's Rikers Island jail. Currently, about half of the adolescents who are released from Rikers return within a year. The goal of the program is to reduce recidivism rates by helping young people improve their decision-making and self-control and build their sense of personal responsibility. Some 3,000 inmates will participate in the program.

Goldman Sachs has put up \$9.6 million to finance the program, of which \$7.2 million is guaranteed by Bloomberg Philanthropies. If the project reduces recidivism by 10 percent, the city will pay back Goldman Sachs. If the program reduces recidivism by more than that amount, the city will pay an additional return on a capped, sliding scale.



Social impact bonds are the latest illustration of two new and welcome trends in social services. One is measuring outcomes, not inputs....The other trend is paying only for success: if the program doesn't work, the taxpayers can tear up the bill.

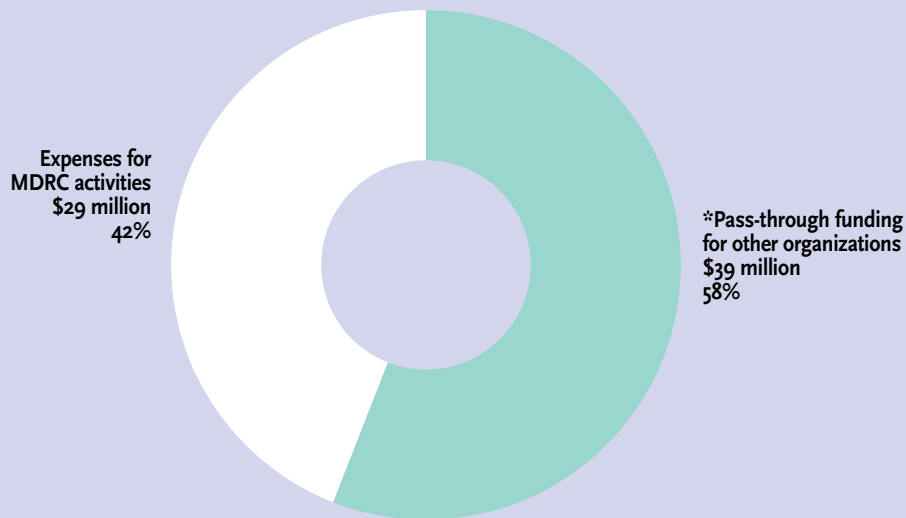
— Tina Rosenberg, *New York Times*

Adolescent inmates at the Robert N. Davoren Center on New York City's Rikers Island participating in the counseling and education program funded by the Social Impact Bond. Photo: New York City Department of Correction

Because incarceration is so expensive, the city could save a great deal of money if fewer young people go back to jail. If the program succeeds, it could also reduce crime, improve the lives of young people, and lessen jail's corrosive effect on them, their families, and their communities. MDRC has contracted with the Osborne Association and Friends of Island Academy to run the program. Vera Institute of Justice will conduct an independent evaluation.

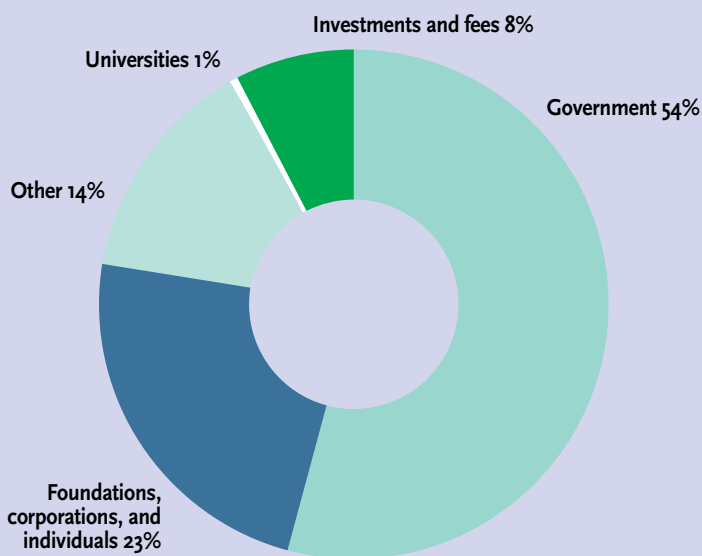
financial highlights

2013 BUDGET

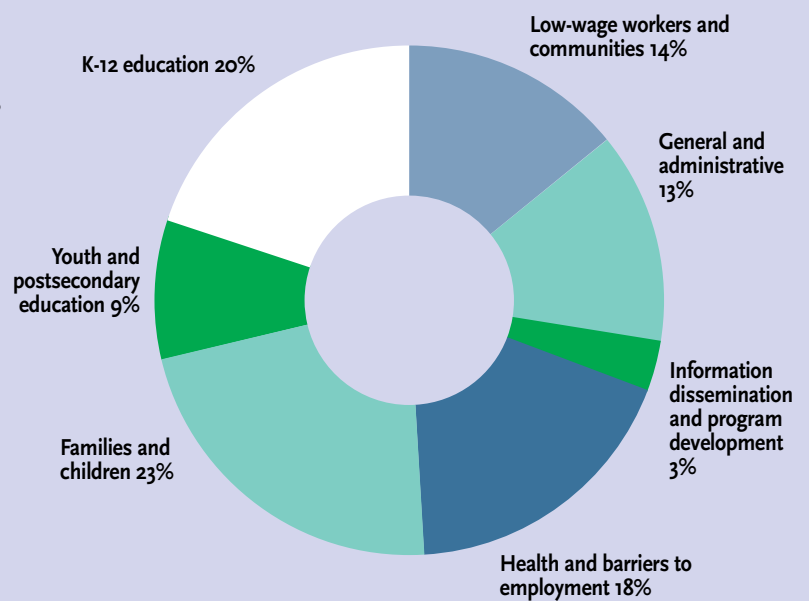


*Pass-through expenses include payments to program sites for program expenses, to subcontractors for services, and to survey firms.

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