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**TO:** Ramsey County MFIP-Employment ES Providers

**FROM:** Kate Probert Fagundes - MFIP/DWP Employment Services Division Manager

**SUBJECT:** Education and Training Activity

**PURPOSE:** To outline changed procedures (compatible with the Ramsey County Workforce Solutions' vision of engagement, education and employment) for assisting participants in their education/training/experiential choices and pursuits.

**BACKGROUND:** The revised DHS policy no longer places the employment counselor in a role of approving participant education plans. Participant personal agency dictates their control over their education choices. Employment counselors provide an important service to participants through an informed objective view regarding the challenges and barriers inherent in such educational pursuits. Research and consideration have a place in education planning. Employment counselors can aid the participant in their fact gathering, fact weighing, and decision-making. Risks of non-completion, both financially and as a disruption to the participant's life plan, require careful attention to unique factors, and unique potential solutions, in each participant's situation.

New DHS policy requires a new approach when considering education and training as an MFIP activity. The employment counselor's contribution to a participant not yet enrolled in an education activity differs slightly from the contribution with a participant enrolled in a school program before a conversation with the counselor. The employment counselor as coach will listen to the participant's needs and choices, and write an employment plan that reflects those choices while also providing structure and accountability for the participant to achieve his or her goal. Our challenge is to help the participant get the education that leads to employment currently available in the Twin Cities metropolitan market.

**DHS MFIP EDUCATION AND TRAINING CHANGES (From the DHS Bulletin #14-11-02 Policy Changes to Education and Training Activities in Minnesota Family Investment Program):**

*The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) encourages counties, tribes/nations, and employment service providers to focus on developing employment plans that include long term economic outcomes for MFIP families – including consideration of how education and training can increase family income both in the short term and in the long term.*

*In the 2014 legislative session, the Minnesota State Legislature changed state policies for the MFIP regarding education and training. Changes included new*

*directions on how education and training activities are to be treated as work activities in employment plans.*

*These changes create more opportunities for adults receiving assistance through MFIP to pursue education and training. Participants must be given the opportunity to pursue education and training, whether or not those activities count toward the Work Participation Rate.*

*Under these changes in law, employment counselors are counselors and advisors regarding education and its role in an employment plan. They no longer approve or deny education plans. But they are expected to play an active role helping participants to gather the information necessary for a well-considered education plan.*

*In addition to the existing requirement that the MFIP overview inform adults who have turned to MFIP about the options they have for education and training, DHS now requires counties, tribes and employment services agencies to inform MFIP participants that they have the options to pursue Adult Basic Education, English language learning options and post-secondary education. This information should be included in conversations between employment counselors and participants about employment plans.*

*If someone meets the basic eligibility requirements for pursuing education or training, MFIP employment counselors can no longer deny the option for education and training.*

*Employment counselors are expected to play an important counseling and advising role in helping participants sort out their own goals, the most promising paths available to help them realize those goals, and the implications of different choices. This means employment counselors' professional expertise about labor market opportunities and counselors' abilities to engage participants successfully become even more important.*

***GED coursework, high school completion for adults 20 or older, and Adult Basic Education:***

- Anyone who lacks a high school diploma, GED credential or an adult high school diploma may choose to participate in Adult Basic Education to pursue those credentials as an approved work activity. That means these activities are no longer available only to those adults with a reading or mathematics proficiency below the 9th grade level.*
- A cap on the portion of hours in these activities that can be used in the employment plan no longer exists. This means that someone pursuing a high school diploma, a GED credential or an adult high school diploma no longer needs to supplement time in these activities with core activities. The participant may choose to meet all their required hours in these education activities.*
- Participants still have the option to combine Adult Basic Education activities with other activities that will advance their efforts to become self-sufficient.*

- *Participants must make satisfactory progress in order to continue in these activities as part of their employment plans.*

***Education as a second language or functional work literacy:***

- *Any adult whose spoken English language proficiency scores SPL6 or lower, as measured by a national recognized test, must be allowed to pursue English as a Second Language or Functional Work Literacy for employment plan activities. Participants may continue in these activities until their spoken language proficiency scores at SPL6. A 24-month limit to pursuing those activities no longer exists.*
- *A cap on the portion of hours that those activities can be used in the employment plan no longer exists. This means that someone pursuing English language training no longer needs to supplement time in these activities with core activities. The participant may choose to meet all required hours in these education activities.*
- *Participants still have the option to combine the English learning activities with other activities that will advance their ability to become self-sufficient.*
- *Participants must make satisfactory progress in order to continue this activity as part of their MFIP employment plans.*

***Post-Secondary Education:***

- *Participants may enroll in post-secondary education programs that require up to 48 months to complete.*
- *Participants no longer must include core activities in their employment plans to complement post-secondary education that is beyond the 12 months recognized in the Work Participation Rate.*
- *The employment counselor no longer has a role of approving or denying postsecondary education plans, and the law no longer requires the participant to provide documentation justifying the post-secondary education plan.*
- *Pursuing post-secondary education no longer requires having to:*
  - *Establish that the employment goal can only be met with additional training or education.*
  - *Establish that the education or training will result in significantly higher wages*
  - *Assess the participant's current motivation or changes in previous circumstances.*
- *But employment counselors still have an important role that focuses on their counseling expertise. The law says employment counselors should help participants gather the information necessary to inform a thoughtful education plan and should:*
  - *work with participants to evaluate their options;*
  - *advise them on whether there are suitable employment opportunities where they live or are willing to live;*
  - *assist participants in exploring whether they can meet requirements for admission into the programs;*
  - *discuss the participant's strengths and challenges based on MFIP assessments, previous education, training and work history.*
- *Participants now have 12 weeks – instead of just six weeks – to search for a job consistent with the education after completing a post-secondary program*

*before they are required to accept job offers unrelated to their field of education.*

- *Students pursuing some very specific post-secondary education may enter into those activities without having to share their plan with their employment counselor in order to start those activities. Those activities include:*
  - *Recognized career pathway programs (such as FastTRAC) that lead to stackable education credentials;*
  - *A training program that lasts 12 weeks or fewer; or*
  - *The final year of a multiyear postsecondary education or training program.*

## ***UNCHANGED DHS EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY***

### ***Hourly requirements:***

*All adults receiving MFIP must have employment plans that meet the following hourly requirements for activities (unless they qualify for an exemption):*

- *87 hours a month if there is a child in a single parent family younger than six*
- *130 hours a month if the youngest child in a single-parent family is six or older*
- *130 hours a month if the household is only a pregnant woman with no children*
- *130 hours a month If two parents are in the household, but one is not active on the MFIP case*
- *55 hours a week for two-parent families households*

**(WFS Note: An employment plan with reduced hours is an option. Refer to EP – Reduced Hours Due To Good Cause in Section 7.15 of the DHS Employment Services Manual.)**

### ***Documentation:***

*Adults pursuing training and education activities must still submit the documentation necessary to:*

- *secure child care assistance if they want that assistance;*
- *confirm they are making adequate progress; and*
- *meet the requirements of the state's Work Verification Plan. (These are the verification requirements that demonstrate attendance, etc.)*

### ***The Coding of Workforce One:***

*These changes in state policy do not require any changes in how employment counselors should code activities in Workforce One.*

## **PROCEDURES:**

1. Each agency must include education information in the ES Overview. Each agency must have educational learning workshops where the participant can gather information and tools to be able to better make decisions regarding his or her future.
2. The employment counselor should become familiar with the new guidance in Section 9.21 (Training and Education); Section 9.24 (Adult Basic Education

or GED), 9.27 (Post-Secondary Training and Education), 9.30 (ESL and Functional Work Literacy FWL), and 9.33 (Education/Training Daily Supervision, Documentation and Verification) in the DHS Employment Services Manual.

3. In collaboration with the participant, the counselor will use the *Ramsey County MFIP Education and Training Guide* to complete a collaborative, guided conversation between the counselor and participant. The completed *Guide* is then kept in the participant's file. The counselor no longer uses the Occupational Research Packet. The time invested in this collaborative conversation can be coded as coaching and, as relevant, labor market information hours.
4. In collaboration, the employment counselor and participant discuss education related topics including but not limited to, the following points:
  - a. the participant's understanding of the fit of the additional education or training to their employment goal;
  - b. the participant's awareness/knowledge and the employment counselor's labor market information regarding suitable local and/or regional employment opportunities that result from the additional education or training;
  - c. the increased wage potential resulting from completion of the education or training;
  - d. the education institute admission requirements, including discussion about private and public institutions;
  - e. the potential for (and costs of) remedial coursework before enrollment in core courses, sequencing of those activities and the necessary time commitment;
  - f. the support network available to the participant as assistance in completing the education/training program
  - g. past successes and educational challenges, and the development of a strengths based approach for completing the education/training program;
  - h. the participant's and the employment counselor's agreed upon definition of "satisfactory progress" and the required documentation;
  - i. the potential necessity of resolving past educational debt;
  - j. the prospective of, and participant's strategy for, a probationary period.
5. In collaboration, the employment counselor and participant develop a client driven, strengths based employment plan.
6. The employment counselor case notes the conversation and employment plan creation.
7. The employment counselor monitors, supports and case manages the participant's progress.

**EFFECTIVE:** September 24, 2014

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