

To: Director of the Department of Family & Children's Services (DFCS)
From: Maria Jose Moraga
Subject: Educational Assistance Policy
Date: November 5, 2008

Introduction and Background

In order for social workers to meet the needs of children and families, the Human Resource Division recommends the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) to adopt an Educational Assistance Policy. Over the past decade, there has been increase in interest in job training due in part to "heightened awareness that workplace knowledge and skills contribute to enterprise and national competitiveness" (Smith, 2003, p.53). The Human Resource Division understands the challenges that social workers face when they have to make decisions in child abuse and neglect cases. Many times, it is unclear if all social workers have the training, tools, and resources needed to be able to readily identify and address these types of complex cases. Therefore, the Human Resource Division feels that it is important to adopt and implement a policy that will address this problem.

The Educational Assistance Program will help support social workers to be better prepared to handle cases of child abuse and neglect and improve their opportunities for advancement within the agency. Ultimately, the goal is to have well trained social workers that will protect children from abuse and neglect, promote their healthy development and provide services to families. The next sections of this memo will provide more specific information about the proposed policy, policy rationale and limitations, and take into account policy language and implementation procedures for DFCS.

Definition and Benefits

Educational Assistance Programs is defined as ongoing education that is related

to the current job being performed. According to the U.S. Code, Educational Assistance Program is a separate written plan of an employer for the exclusive benefit of his employees to provide such employees with educational assistance (U.S. Code, Sec. 127 Educational Assistance Programs). In general, agencies offer Educational Assistance Programs to eligible employees who are interested in enrolling in work related courses either on site or off site. Literature on the effectiveness of public sector job training mentions that “most lines of business require specific skills which cannot be provided by general-purpose education (Acemoglu & Pischke, 1999, p.F112). For many employers, hiring an individual with only a college degree or certificate is not enough because “new technologies and organizations require continuous learning, best accomplished by workplace training” (Acemoglu & Pischke, 1999, p.F112).

Investing in Educational Assistance Programs will benefit the whole organization, employees, and the community at large. In DFCS, there is a need for more skilled workers and there is evidence that Educational Assistance Programs will help them increase productivity, reduce errors in the workplace, and attract new employees and retain current ones. In addition, many economists find that “on the job training has a positive and significant effect on wages and reduces voluntary turnover” (Krueger & Rouse, 1998, p.62). In general, establishing an Educational Assistance Program will economically help the department to reduce their cost in recruiting new employees, decrease liability responsibilities, and retain current workforce.

As far as employee benefits, social workers will learn specific skills for their job, possibly earn higher wages, and potentially advance to higher positions within the agency. Furthermore, one study reports that Educational Assistance Programs have positive effects on employees because they have “improved self-esteem, improvements in their family lives, greater confidence in doing their work, more satisfaction with both the firm and their work, and more

optimism about their ability to advance within the firm” (Bassi, 1994, p. 69). For the community, the benefits of having trained social workers with high morale means that there will be fewer children involved in the system because social workers will be better prepared to handle child abuse and neglect cases and they will provide families with consistent and appropriate services.

Rationale and Limitations

DFCS has in place guidelines that support the decision-making and actions taken by professionals working with families involved in their system. However, in some cases the professional does not know these guidelines or is unable to follow them. There are some gaps in guidelines that result in decisions being left to the discretion of individual professionals. To insure the safety of children and families, it is important for the department to standardized practices, tools, protocols, and resources. For that reason, it makes sense for the department to implement an Educational Assistance Program so that all of their employees receive the same training and are up to date with child abuse and neglect guidelines.

Studies of public sector job training generally find positive returns for workers; however, there are some limitations when it comes to implementing such a program. In the literature, there were a few employers who had issues in adopting and implementing an Educational Assistance Program and some of these issues were: training programs are too expensive to implement, requires a personnel infrastructure to deal with training programs, and turnover can be too high. In addition, some employers were concerned that they would “not have efficient incentives to invest in their workers' skills because trained workers can quit to work for other employers who can use these skills (Acemoglu & Pischke, 1999, p.F112). One study of workplace education reports that “little will be accomplished if workers learn new skills, and go back to the same jobs that they held before” (Bossis, 1995, p.37). In other words, employees could feel undervalue and

underpaid after learning new skills so the employer needs to take into consideration all of these factors when they adopt and implement an Educational Assistance Program in their agency.

Proposed Policy and Language

The Human Resource Division has drafted an Educational Assistance Policy that will help meet the current and future needs of the agency and employees, as well as the clients they serve. DFCS Educational Assistance Policy is the following:

The Department of Family and Children Services support employees' pursuit of educational opportunities that will benefit the agency, enhance employees' current job performance, and improve their opportunities for advancement in the agency. In the U.S Code, educational assistance program "shall benefit employees who qualify under a classification set up by the employer and found by the Secretary not to be discriminatory in favor of employees who are highly compensated employees (within the meaning of section 414(q) or their dependents" (U.S. Code, Sec. 127 Educational Assistance Programs). Classifications are below:

- The Educational Assistance Program is designed to meet the professional development needs of social workers.
- Eligible employees will have the opportunity to enroll in an on-site training program and be required to complete 180 hours of professional development courses in two years. The program will be taught by regional experts and trainers who are familiar with specific regional needs and issues.
- Eligible employees who are interested must enroll in the training program three weeks in advance and request to get approval from the Human Resource Division and their managers.
- Educational assistance provided under this policy may include: work schedule options, adjustment of work hours, use of personal leave, and educational leave.
- Eligible employees will be required to take a standardized test after training program is over to obtain professional certifications or renewal of licenses.
- Training program alumnus will be asked to mentor new employees for 3 months since skills are best learned and practiced by on the job training.

Implementation Procedures and Conclusion

In order to successfully implement DFCS Educational Assistance Policy, the Human

Resource Division recommends that all social workers attend an informational session to learn more about the training program. To be more specific, the informational session will provide an overview of the training program, background information about the trainers, explain requirements and eligibility, and the benefits of participating in the program. After the informational session, employees will be reminded through e-mails and staff meetings to enroll in the training program and request to get approval from the Human Resource Division and their managers. As soon as employees enroll, they will receive a schedule of the training courses in advance and be asked to adjust their work hours. For the future, the Human Resource Division will continue coordinating these trainings and will work on obtaining “grants that greatly reduce or eliminate a firm's out of pocket costs” (Bassi, 1994, p.71). The goal is to establish an inexpensive and sustainable training program that will support the mission of DFCS and improve employees’ job performance and their opportunities for advancement in the agency.

The Human Resource Division believes that the proposed policy will meet the current and future needs of DFCS. For an organization to survive and prosper, one study reports that it must “ identify and implement the most effective, ‘best’ policies and practices” and that’s exactly what DFCS will be doing once the policy is established (Ackroyd, Batt, & Thompson, 2005, p.228). By training social workers, the current demands and problems of the agency will be addressed since there is evidence that workplace education teaches employees “specific skills and increases the productivity of the worker only in his current job” (Acemoglu & Pischke, 1999, p.F113). In addition, this policy may have the most impact at improving the outcomes for children and families involved in the system. As a final point, the agency, employees, and the community at large will benefit from this policy, but most importantly it will protect children from abuse and neglect in the future.

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