



# COLLEGE COUNTS\$

— EVIDENCE OF IMPACT —

# Background



- For generations Arkansas has had one of the highest levels of poverty and lowest levels of education in nation.
- In 2005, a small group of policymakers and educators got together and determined something needed to change.
- They proposed an education and training program that would lift Arkansans out of poverty.

# Background



- Using TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) dollars, they created the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) that is designed to provide education and training to low income parents that would lead to high demand/high wage jobs across the state.

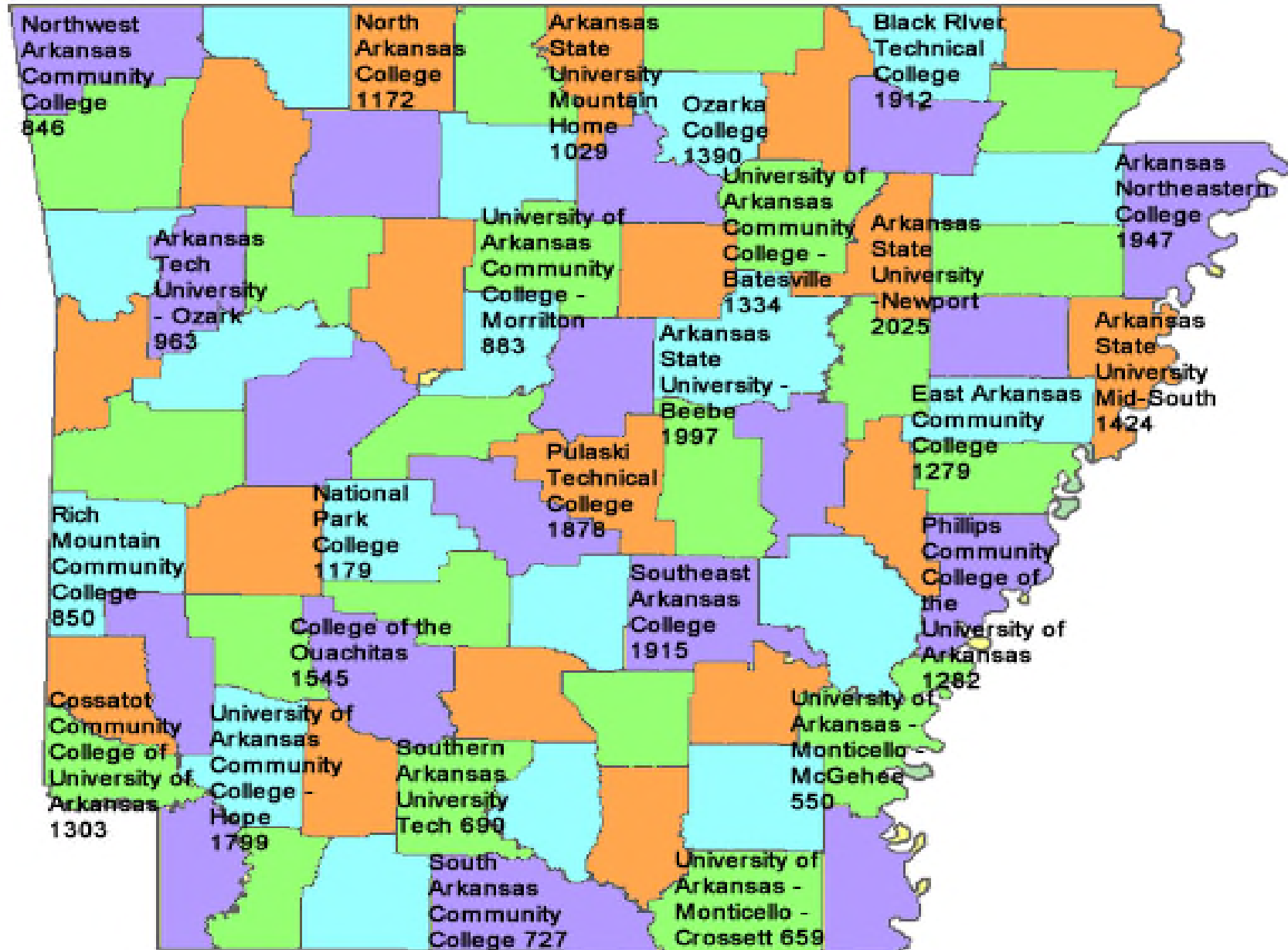
# Background



- With support from the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, the Arkansas Department of Higher education set up CPI programs at 25 sites over three years at community colleges across the state.
- Eligibility requirements were that the participants be custodial parents, receive cash assistance or food stamps or Medicaid, or be at 250% or less of the Federal Poverty level.

# CPI Serves Students Statewide

(# of CPI students served per site)



# Background



- CPI students enroll in community college certificate and degree programs leading to high demand jobs.
- Students are assessed upon enrollment, and receive case management support, mentoring, and financial assistance as needed to cover child care assistance, transportation vouchers, books, or supplies to overcome whatever barriers might keep them from being successful.

# Background

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- In turn for receiving a significant portion of the Federal TANF block grant to the state, the legislature required that the Department of Higher Ed. track completion rates, job placement and retention, and wages using state UI (Unemployment Insurance) wage data.

# Background

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- Since 2005 more than 30,000 low income Arkansans have enrolled in more than 450 approved career pathway programs statewide at an average cost of \$1500 per student.



# Background

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Hope and Joy



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## ***The College Count\$ Study***

With support from the Winthrop Rockefeller, Annie E. Casey and Ford Foundations



**COLLEGE COUNTS**  
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# Research Questions

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- What are the social impacts and economic return to the state and community as a result of this investment in education and training for the TANF-eligible population?

(e.g. reduced need for public assistance; improved educational or health outcomes for the children of CPI participants; reduced incarceration rates, etc.)

# Research Questions

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- Is there evidence that the CPI is making a contribution to breaking the poverty cycle in Arkansas by reducing the number of Arkansas families living below the federal poverty line and by increasing postsecondary attainment, completion and improving economic mobility across the state?

# Research Questions

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- What are the income and educational attainment outcomes generated for individual participants and for different sub-groups by career cluster within CPI programs, relative to comparison groups of non-participants?

# Research Questions

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- To what degree does participation in CPI result in positive progression of low-income individuals through various tiers of an educational career pathway and into employment?

# Research Questions

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- What types of student support systems used as part of the CPI have the greatest impact on improved educational outcomes and student success?

# Overview



- **Phase 1** – focused on the economic and educational returns to the participants against comparison groups
- **Phase 2** – will focus on such questions as:
  - What is the ROI to the state and broader community such as lowering need for Medicaid or other public assistance
  - What is the correlation between case management and financial supports and student success? What is the “secret sauce”?



# Overview



- **Phase 3** – will focus on reporting project outcomes and making policy recommendations to federal, state and local policymakers and college leaders and will include an advocacy campaign to a national and statewide audience including a policy summit inviting other teams of educators and state policymakers to Arkansas to learn more about the Career Pathways Initiative.

# Phase One Methodology



- CPI students were matched against comparison pools of state TANF recipients and CC students
- Matched on age, gender, college or locale, income etc.
- Measured degrees and credentials earned by career cluster
- Compared income after completion using UI wage data

# Results

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**A stunning 52% of CPI students completed at least one Higher Ed degree or certificate, compared to only 24% of the general AR community college population between 2005 and 2013**



# Results

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**The CPI graduation rate is even more impressive when compared to completion rates nationwide.**

- **62% of CPI students who began in 2008 graduated with a degree or credential by 2013.**
- **39% of students who entered a U.S. public two-year college in 2008 completed a degree or certificate by 2014**



# Results By Race/Ethnicity



**45.2% of African-American CPI students have completed an academic credential versus 16.9% of their non-CPI African-American peers!**

**55.6% of Hispanic CPI students have completed an academic credential versus 14.2% of their non-CPI Hispanic peers!**

# Phase One Findings



Since '06 more than 30,000 CPI participants

Successful rates of program graduation and completion have **continued to improve over time.**



**Three times** more CPI participants earned Certificates of Proficiency or Technical Certificates when compared with their community college peers.



**Six times** as many CPI participants earned Associate Degrees by 2013, compared to non-CPI college students who enrolled in an Arkansas community college in 2011.

# Phase One Findings



- In 2011, in the first year after leaving college, CPI participants earned \$3,100 more per year than a matched pool of TANF participants.
- In that same year, CPI TEA clients earned \$731 more than their TANF counterparts in the first year after completion.



# Phase One Findings



- The general community college population earns more than CPI completers, but the wage gap is dramatically narrowing each year.



By 2011 CPI students narrowed the average annual wage gap to **\$1,584**, eliminating it entirely in some career fields.



# Return on Investment



*Note: Unlike many ROI studies that employ multiplier effects to assume financial returns, the College Counts\$ ROI framework compares actual program costs with actual financial benefits generated by individual students.*

**The Formula:** The Return on Investment **EQUALS:**

- 1) **Increases in tax payments** to state government because of earning gains  
*PLUS*
- 2) **Decreases in public assistance** spending *DIVIDED* by
- 3) **Program costs.**

For every dollar Arkansas invests in CPI, the state gets a return of \$1.79 over five years, **for an ROI of 179%.**

# Next Steps



- What is the correlation between case management and financial supports and student success?
- What is the “secret sauce”?
- In-depth interviews with CPI participants to elicit factors that shape their experience

# Why This Matters:



- This is not a boutique, short-term experiment. It is already at scale statewide, and has operated for more than 11 years serving 30,000+ students
- It has been supported by both Democratic and Republican Administrations in the Governor's Office and Legislature.



# Why This Matters:



- The source of support. TANF funds from the state block grant to the Department of Workforce Services has made this work possible.
- An ROI study suggests a \$1.79 in reduced public assistance dollars and increased tax revenues to the state for every dollar invested in the program.



# Why This Matters:



- The CPI database of more than 30,000+ student records is a unique resource for researching impact
- The College Count\$ evaluation has been independent, rigorous and meets the guidelines of the “What Works Clearinghouse” evidence based design.



# Why This Matters:



- CPI is the embodiment of principles of WIOA. For a decade the AR Departments of Higher Education, Workforce Services, Human Services, Community Colleges, Education and the Governor’s Workforce Cabinet have collaborated across the normal silos to ensure the success of CPI.

# Why This Matters:



- One remaining policy challenge relates to an interpretation of the Work Participation Rate that seems to serve as a disincentive for DWS to continue to refer clients to the CPI.
- In addition, recent concerns about data sharing have complicated research efforts. Sharing UI wage data across state lines would be invaluable, and getting appropriate access to the school records of the children of TANF and CPI participants has been challenging because of FERPA concerns.

# Conclusions:



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- Data matters. Without good data and rigorous research it is nearly impossible to make an effective argument for why a program matters.
  - Unfortunately in today's environment of federal privacy concerns and data security, it is becoming very difficult to conduct this kind of research.



# Conclusions:



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- Good Public Policy Matters!



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