

MFIP & Education

World Café Discussion: May 18, 2016

Event Description

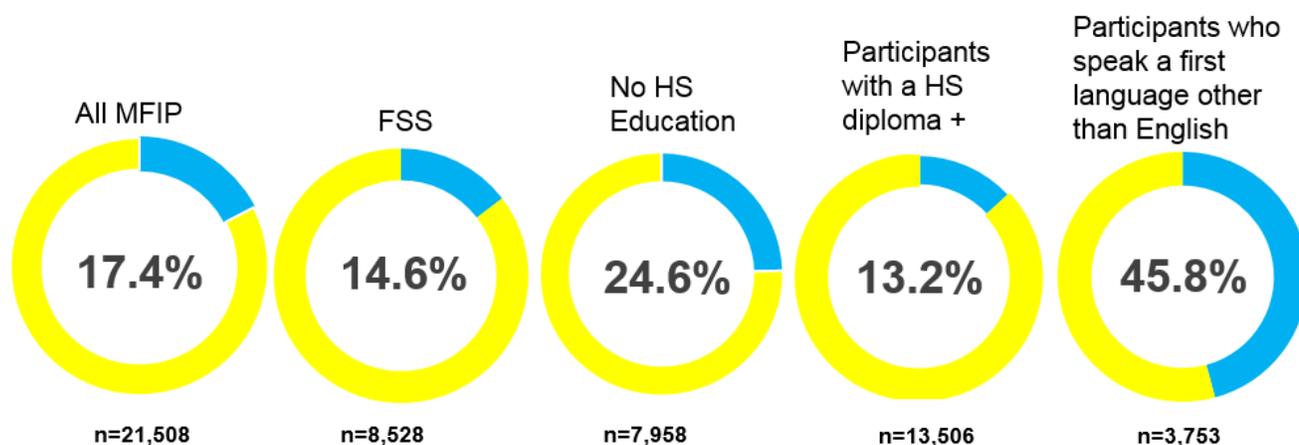
On May 18, 2016, approximately fifty individuals came together at the Minnesota Joint Counselor Training to learn more about how participants are benefitting from MFIP-approved educational activities. We are grateful for their questions and honest feedback.

Presentation Summary

 **17.4% of all MFIP Participants (3,753/21,511) were enrolled in Educational Activities in December 2015.**

- The most common educational activity was ESL (42% of all educational activities), followed by post-secondary education (31%), General Equivalency Diploma training (12%), Job skills directly related to employment training (12%), and Adult Basic Education (3%).
- MFIP Participants who spoke a first language other than English had the highest rate of participation in MFIP-approved educational activities.
- Less than two percent of adults with less than a high school education were enrolled in ABE, GED, or high school completion activities.

Characteristics of MFIP Participants Engaged in Educational Activities (Figure 1)



Session Feedback

How can MFIP counselors help participants achieve their educational goals?

Session participants envisioned a future scenario in which one of their participants had successfully attained their education goals. The following list of ideas is a summary of the steps, resources, and things they imagined that they may have done to help this participant achieve this success.

Provide Wrap-around Supports

- Remove barriers and first help the participant to stabilize. Provide referrals to additional supportive programs such as WIOA.
- Know the MFIP system well; help participants navigate documentation requirements.
- Connect participants with support services including childcare and transportation, making sure to also secure back-up options.
- Assist with financial navigation: provide financial literacy training, guidance on budgeting, and assist participants with figuring out a way to pay for school.



Work with Educational Institutions to Prepare and Support MFIP Participants

- Provide access and interpretation of assessments such as the ACCUPLACER
- Offer career counseling, support with college preparation, and guidance to keep MFIP students on track.
- Help participants make connections at college and engage with support groups (through schools and or other communities).

Support Education by Reducing Program Barriers and Providing Incentives

- Encourage relationships with school enrollment and/or advising staff - bypass professors for documentation regarding study time, recommendations and attendance.
- Help the student find a way to participate in structured study time.
- Ease documentation requirements: when possible request a syllabus, D2L online tracking, and/or an instructor email in place of an instructor's signature.
- Incentivize participation (tickets, children's items, diapers, chocolate, etc.).

Session participants also listed additional resources which would have been helpful.

- Housing Assistance
- Funding for educational opportunities
- More tools to assist in "convincing" participants to pursue and educational path.
- Change requirements to remove the shame factor. Focus on outcomes not participation.

How does Education affect MFIP Participants?

Other staff were asked to list an example of how education had affected an MFIP participant. Answers are summarized in the following list.

- Post- secondary education teaches additional life skills that help clients move toward self-sufficiency.
- Education supports the family foundation: it is important as a value for future generations.
- Education helps provide guidance, better self-esteem, and increases participant confidence.
- Education helps participants become self-supporting.

What can DHS change to better support the work counselors do with their clients around education?

All staff members were asked to provide suggestions regarding how DHS can support the work they do with their participants around education.

Increase Participant Opportunities

- DHS and the Department of Higher Education should meet and discuss strategies for making education accessible and appealing to MFIP participants.
- Work with the U.S. Department of Education to create strategies for assisting those with deferred loans.
- Provide additional funding for short and longer-term training opportunities.
- Allow participants in school to meet the 87-hour requirement, regardless of their children's age.
- Provide financial incentives for participants to engage in educational activities (e.g. increase their housing grant).

Help Case Management Staff to Better Support Participants

- Allow counselors to work with smaller caseloads.
- Make career pathways more of a conversation. Reduce but do not get rid of the educational opportunity packet.
- Provide more professional development for staff so that they know which opportunities could be available and beneficial to participants.
- Make education a tangible MFIP outcome – participation should be reflected positively in the state's Self-Support Index measure.
- Provide guidance on career/ educational opportunities for individuals with criminal backgrounds.
- Create additional certificates or credentials for the participants with lower skills.
- Work with employers to help determine which educational paths will most benefit participants.



Focus on Outcomes Instead of Compliance

- Reduce or ease documentation requirements. Make it easier for students to verify attendance, focus on grades and adequate progress.
- Study time is study time: allow for unsupervised study time or don't distinguish between the two.
- Going to school full time should fulfill all participant activity requirements.
- Require regular progress for students enrolled in English as a Second Language programs.

"Wouldn't it be great if we could collect quarterly grades instead of monthly attendance? We need to focus on outcomes, not participation."

- MFIP Counselor, May 2016

"Increased collaboration between DHS and the Minnesota Office of Higher Education could allow us to automatically get compliance-related documentation. This could help us take some of the paperwork burden off of our participants"

- MFIP Counselor, May 2016

Feedback and Next Steps

Questions and feedback generated from this discussions will be shared with the Director of Economic Assistance and Employment Supports as well as the Department of Human Services MFIP Policy team. We welcome any and all feedback on the policy or process. Please email Cheryl Vanacora, cheryl.vanacora@state.mn.us with questions about the educational data or this summary, or Brandon Riley (Brandon.Riley@state.mn.us) and Jeanne McGovern-Acuna (Jeanne.mcgovern-acuna@state.mn.us) with policy questions or suggestions.

Thank you!

