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**In this issue . . .**



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*Timothy J. Bartik*

# Why Investing in Kids Makes Sense for Local Economies

My recent book, *Investing in Kids: Early Childhood Programs and Local Economic Development* (Bartik [2011], published by the Upjohn Institute), makes the case for why an investment in high-quality early childhood programs will pay off in improved local economic development. State and local governments must take the lead for this expanded public investment; the federal government has other pressing concerns.

**High-quality early childhood programs will result in a local economy with more skilled labor, which will attract more and better jobs to the local economy.**

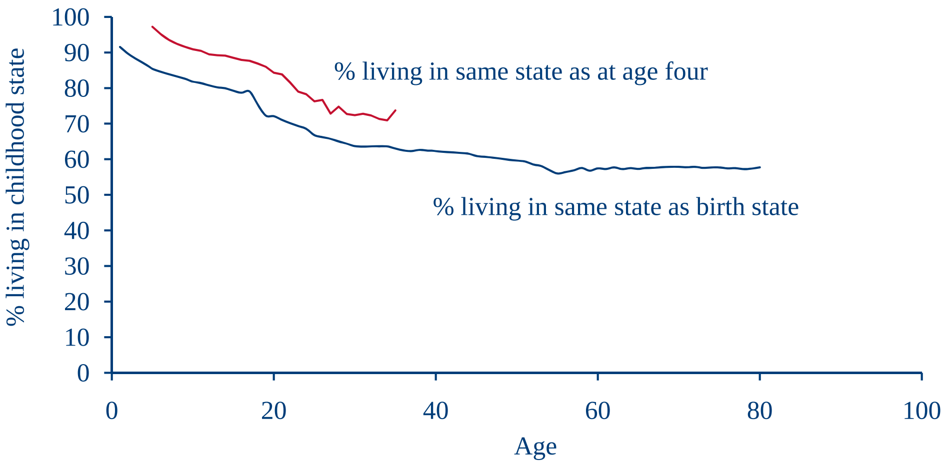
Why is there a local payoff from early childhood programs? Many child participants in these programs will remain in their home states or metro areas for most of their working careers. High-quality early childhood programs will enhance the skills of these former child participants. As a result, the local economy will have more skilled labor, which will attract more and better jobs to the local economy. An increase in the number and quality of jobs will raise local per capita earnings, the most important benefit of local economic development. Although many policies affect job skills, early childhood programs deserve emphasis because of good evidence for cost-effectiveness.

Investing in skills through early childhood programs is an alternative to traditional local economic development policies. These traditional policies have emphasized business tax incentives such as property tax abatements. If successful, such incentives boost labor demand. The most important benefit of increased labor demand is higher per capita local earnings.

In contrast, early childhood programs mainly work on the labor supply side of the local economy. These programs can increase local labor supply quality because Americans are less mobile than sometimes thought. About two-thirds of Americans spend most of their working careers in their childhood states (see Figure 1). Over half spend most of their working careers in their home metro areas. These percentages do not decline much for smaller or slower-growing metro areas (Bartik 2009).

In an era of declining relative communication and transportation costs, businesses are increasingly free to locate far from raw materials or markets. But businesses need to be close to a supply of skilled labor. "Business climate" is as much affected by local labor force quality as by business taxes.

**Figure 1 Percentage of U.S. Adults Living in Same State as at Birth or in Early Childhood**




NOTE: Data on percentages living in birth state are calculated by the author from the Public Use Microdata Samples, 2000 census. Note that these figures are biased downward, probably about 6 percent, because of households listing location of hospital as state of birth, not residential location of mother at time of birth. Data on percentages living in same state as at age 4 are calculated by the author from the Panel Survey of Income Dynamics, Geocode version.

But why emphasize early childhood programs when local labor supply quality can be affected by K-12 education, job training, or by attracting the "creative class" (Florida 2002)? Early childhood programs should be emphasized because they have rigorous evidence of effectiveness. A random assignment experiment, the Perry Preschool Program, shows that preschool can have large effects on educational attainment and adult earnings through age 40. A large-scale preschool program, the Chicago Child-Parent Center program, also provides good evidence on preschool's long-term effectiveness in increasing high school graduation rates. Shorter-term studies in at least seven states use a rigorous "regression-discontinuity" evaluation design to show that large-scale state-funded pre-K programs can improve kindergarten readiness.

Other early childhood programs also have rigorous positive evaluations. The Nurse-Family Partnership is a nurse home visitation program that provides services to first-time disadvantaged mothers from the prenatal period to age two, and seeks to improve prenatal care, parenting, and the mom's life course. Experimental evidence shows that the program reduces juvenile crime. The Abecedarian program, a full-time child care and preschool program from birth to age five, has evidence from a random assignment experiment that it increases employment of mothers and educational attainment of former child participants.

We know more about the long-term effects of early childhood programs than about the long-term effects of 3rd grade. It is impossible to randomly deny 3rd grade to a child, whereas many random assignment and other rigorous studies have been done for early childhood programs.

**Early childhood programs should be emphasized because they have rigorous evidence of effectiveness.**

A reasonable question is how it is possible for such limited-time interventions in early childhood to have large effects on adult outcomes. As suggested by Nobel Prize–winning economist James Heckman and others, the answer seems to be effects of early childhood programs on "soft skills" (Heckman et al. 2010). Sometimes the effects of early childhood programs on "hard skills," such as those measured by reading and math tests, seem to fade as students progress through the K-12 system. However, soft skill effects of early childhood programs seem to become more profound over time. Soft skills include how the child interacts with peers and teachers, the child's ability to plan, and the child's self-confidence. A more confident child with better peer and teacher relationships will find such skills rewarded during kindergarten, which encourages further development of these skills, and so on as the child continues through school.

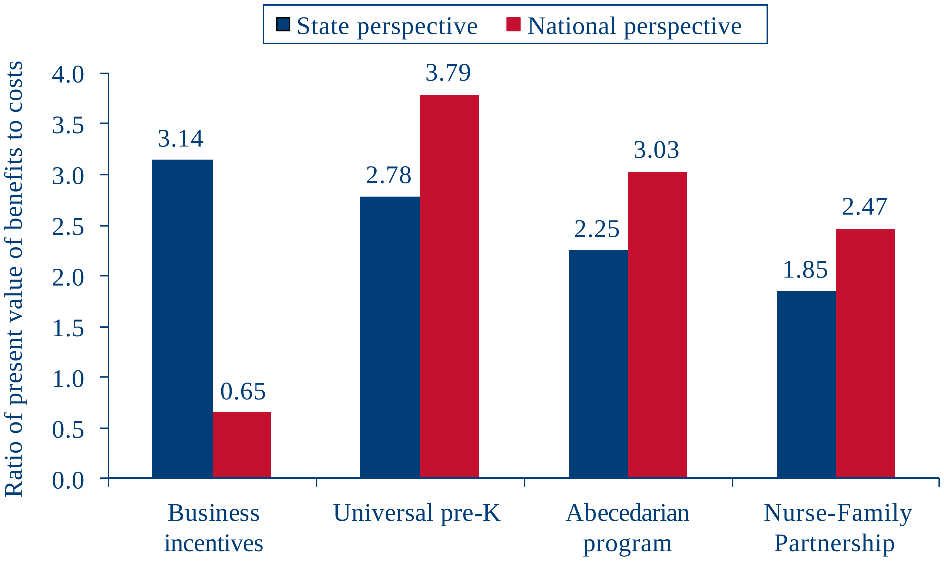
For early childhood programs to be effective, these programs must be high quality. But we know something about how to create quality programs. For preschool, class sizes must be reasonable, the curriculum must engage the child in active learning, and teachers must know how to encourage learning without being overly directive. For the Nurse-Family Partnership program, we know that it works better with nurse home visitors than with paraprofessionals.

Based on studies of early childhood programs, as well as estimates of how many former child participants will remain in the state, and based on the effects of state labor quality on job growth, I provide estimates in my book for the ratio of state economic development benefits to costs for three early childhood programs. These state economic development benefits are the increased present value of state residents' per capita earnings. The three early childhood programs are universal pre-K for four-year-olds, the Nurse-Family Partnership program, and the Abecedarian program. Figure 2 shows these estimates.

For comparison, the figure also shows the ratio of economic development benefits to costs for well-designed business tax incentives. Ratios are similar across all four programs: all these programs increase state residents' per capita earnings by two to three times their costs.

From a national perspective, early childhood programs have larger economic development benefits. These

**Figure 2 Ratio of Economic Development Benefits to Cost, State versus National Perspective**




national benefits include the increased earnings of former child participants who move to other states. In contrast, business tax incentives have smaller benefits from a national perspective. Most of the state benefits of business tax incentives are due to state business activity that would have otherwise occurred elsewhere in the United States.

Furthermore, federal policy should discourage states' indiscriminate use of business tax incentives. It should encourage states' investments in high-quality early childhood programs.

However, the federal government currently has a lot on its plate, with budget deficit problems and challenges from rising health care costs. Major federal interventions with business tax incentives or early childhood programs seem politically unlikely. States are on their own.

One political impediment to state investment in early childhood programs is the long-term nature of these economic development benefits. Most of the increased earnings per capita due to early childhood programs only occur 20 or so years later, when the former child participants enter the labor force.

However, some of these programs' benefits for children may be increasingly valued by parents. This parental valuation may make it easier for businesses to attract parents to a state offering high-quality early childhood programs, and it may also increase property values. For example, we know that home values are increased by higher elementary school test scores. In the book, I calculate that universal pre-K, due to its effects in increasing elementary school test scores, should raise local property values by about 13 times the annual program costs of providing universal pre-K.

There are historical precedents for state initiatives to invest in expanded education. The common school movement of the nineteenth century, along with the high school movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were grassroots initiatives at the state and local levels. These state and local investments in expanded education were in part motivated by the potential short- and long-run economic benefits for local communities. For example, in 1914, the Iowa Department of Public Instruction made the following argument: "The landlord who lives in town . . . may well be reminded that when he offers his farm for sale it will be to his advantage to advertise, 'free transportation to a good graded school'" (quoted in Goldin and Katz [2008], p. 193).

The idea of early childhood programs as a spur to state and local economic development is a powerful concept. The empirical evidence supports this idea, but will it become accepted by the public, the business community, and political leaders? If so, this new way of thinking about economic development may encourage the political support needed to make early childhood programs more broadly available.

## Note

This article contains many statements that are not referenced due to space constraints. For a complete bibliography, please see the book, *Investing in Kids.*

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*Carolyn J. Heinrich*

# The Performance of Performance Standards

Incentives and accountability for government performance have become so central to contemporary government reform agendas across the globe that public management scholars have proclaimed a new era of "government by performance management" (Moynihan and Pandey 2005, p. 422). Elements of these recent reforms include establishing performance measures and standards to facilitate increased accountability to the public, pay for performance, organization-wide performance bonuses, and competitive performance-based contracting; reducing "red tape" and promoting more transparent management; and devolving government functions and incentivizing innovation. A core objective of incorporating performance measures and standards into public sector incentive systems is to create clear expectations for government performance (while loosening the reins of bureaucratic control) and allow for overt assessment of results. If they are to be more than data collection exercises, however, performance management systems also need to incorporate a means for incentivizing or rewarding individuals, teams, or entire organizations for their achievements relative to performance goals.

In the United States, performance standards systems and bonuses are (or have been) used in Food Stamps and welfare-to-work programs, employment and training programs, child welfare agencies and child support enforcement programs, Medicaid and SCHIP programs, and other social programs. Performance incentive systems in public bureaucracies are also advancing in Europe and other parts of the world, with some governments such as Australia and the Netherlands now implementing incentive systems with fully (100 percent) performance-contingent pay and contracting arrangements (Finn 2008; Struyven and Steurs 2005) As the use of performance measures and incentive systems has expanded in the public sector, so has the number of studies calling attention to their challenges and unintended effects, although there is relatively little rigorous empirical evidence of their implications for government outcomes.

Among the earliest introductions of incentive systems in government agencies was the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) performance standards system in 1982, described by Klerman (2005, p. 347) as one of the "most mature implementations of performance-based management." It is also one of the most studied systems, in part because of the randomized experimental evaluation of the JTPA program that produced important information for assessing the performance of this performance standards system. Policymakers have looked to the results of these studies to inform and guide changes in the design and operation of performance standards systems in other government programs, as well as to improve these systems in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs that replaced JTPA.

At the same time, one of the motivations for assembling the research presented in our new book, *The Performance of Performance Standards* (published by the Upjohn Institute), is that despite decades of study and practice, some of the important lessons that have been learned do not appear to be reflected in the current design and implementation of performance standards systems. Bevan and Hood (2006, p. 7), for example, describe the development and use of performance targets in the English public health care system, along with the perverse incentives they generated, as "hitting the target and missing the point."

It may be that some of the empirical evidence from past studies has not been effectively communicated or penetrated policymaking and public management circles deeply enough. Or it may be that some of the fundamental lessons have been ignored or deferred in pursuit of other objectives (political or otherwise). Or, as James Heckman and Jeffrey Smith comment, it may be that policymakers who have mandated such systems (and administrators involved in their implementation) have not fully appreciated the challenges of designing a performance management system that generates incentives for improving performance and impacts. For example, even if a government designed a performance management system that initially suggested a strong correlation between performance measures and desired outcomes, over time, its effectiveness may decline as program managers learn how to game the measures and other limitations of the measures and system design become known.

The essays we present use U.S. employment and training programs as a "laboratory" for investigation. Drawing on a variety of data sources on these incentives systems, we explore how performance standards and incentives affect the behavior of public managers and agency employees, their approaches to service delivery, and ultimately, the outcomes for participants. Both the JTPA and WIA programs have allowed state and local administrators and their governing boards substantial discretion, within broad limits, to determine performance goals, standards, and bonus systems. This administrative flexibility is reflected in the range of incentive systems that states have implemented over time. It is this variation in incentive systems among states that serves as the grist for our empirical mill and is used to extract general lessons that can be applied on a wider scale to both existing and newly developing performance incentive systems.

In our investigation of formal incentive structures and organizational behavior within U.S. employment and training programs, we focus on the following questions that are broadly applicable to any public sector performance management and incentive system:

- How do performance standards and measures operate to include or exclude individuals with different characteristics in public programs?
- How do performance standards and measures affect the types of public services offered and received?
- How do the processes for setting standards and weights for performance goals and for recognizing and rewarding performance affect system incentives and bureaucratic responses?
- Are the performance standards, measures, and incentives effective in motivating bureaucratic behavior toward the achievement of program goals?
- Do short-term outcome measures used in performance standards systems predict long-term impacts of programs on participants?
- What problems or unintended effects are associated with the design and implementation of performance standards systems in the public sector?
- What other lessons do we learn from the implementation of performance standards systems and the variation in rules and guidelines governing their administration over time?

In undertaking research to address the questions above, we were fortunate to have access to data superior in scope and detail to much of the data used in the existing literature or available on a regular basis for assessing program performance. Our research benefitted from detailed longitudinal, microlevel data that were collected in the National JTPA Study (NJS) and through other administrative data sources. In addition, we collected and analyzed complete information about state-level variation in the JTPA and WIA performance standards systems. We show that state incentive systems are highly complex and differ widely across states and over time within states, and are not easily characterized by small dimensional summary measures as used in previous studies. This wealth of data, to which we applied a variety of analytical/empirical strategies, is essential in assessing the implications of features and changes in performance standards and incentive systems in different contexts and across time.

The broad findings and lessons that we draw from this research are as follows. First, individuals and organizations respond to incentives, but sometimes the responses are perverse. In the first iteration of a performance standards system's design, well-meaning designers of the system are unlikely to fully anticipate the responses of program administrators and frontline workers to system incentives, or the many possible ways they might influence measured performance without necessarily adding to (or possibly even detracting from) program value or impact. Incentive system designers will have to expect to regularly review and revise the rules and incentives they create if they want to avoid inefficient and unintended responses.

Second, the short-term outcome measures that are commonly used in performance standards systems are only weakly related to the true long-run impacts of the programs. Researchers and policymakers have yet to identify performance measures that will promote key, long-term program objectives while simultaneously generating more readily available performance information for ongoing program management. This will continue to be one of the most vexing challenges for performance standards system designers for some time to come.

Third, the "cream-skimming" issue, or concern about the trade-off between efficiency and equity in access to programs, has been overstated. While there is some evidence of a trade-off between serving the most disadvantaged and allocating program resources most efficiently, it appears to be modest at best. Personal choices and informational constraints play a more important role in accounting for demographic differences in program participation than administrative discretion, and thus, program administrators should consider investing more in increasing awareness among the eligible population.

Clearly, demand on the part of policymakers or the public for greater accountability and a results-oriented government is not diminishing. The design and implementation of performance standards and incentive systems in the public sector will continue to be a dynamic pursuit, and it is our hope that the lessons distilled in this volume will have a role in shaping and speeding their evolution, as well as in ultimately improving government performance.

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*Carolyn J. Heinrich is the director of the La Follette School of Public Affairs and a professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.*

*Randall W. Eberts*

# When Will the Labor Market Recover?

Although it has been nearly two years since the Great Recession of 2007 was officially declared over, we are still waiting for jobs to recover. More than 9.0 million people joined the ranks of the unemployed during the 18-month recession—the worst since the Great Depression, bringing the total number of unemployed to nearly 16 million. While real GDP is currently within one percent of its prerecession peak, total private employment is still nearly 6 percent below the employment peak of December 2007.

Productivity gains drove the early stages of the recovery, which did little to increase employment and reduce unemployment. Productivity gains have slowed recently, and have even turned negative, so it could be that the rest of the expansion may be driven by increases in hours and hiring. If so, the relative strength of the employment recovery is determined by two factors: the number of new job openings created and how quickly the unemployed can move into these new positions. During the first 16 months of the recovery, job openings increased 39 percent, which is nearly double the increase in job openings during the previous expansion after the 2001 recession. Job openings increased from 2.3 million per month to 3.3 million per month. However, hiring has remained flat, increasing by only 3.6 percent. (See Figure 1.)

How can job openings be increasing so much faster than new hires? Obviously, new openings are going unfilled, but why? First, workers may not qualify for the new positions because their skills don't match the job requirements. This is referred to as an increase in structural unemployment. Workers displaced from a declining industry may have to search in another industry that has job opportunities yet their skills may not easily transfer to that industry. This view is somewhat controversial, however, with several studies pointing to less structural and more cyclical change. The restructuring and downsizing of the auto industry and the real estate slump and its effect on construction are two examples of regionally concentrated restructuring. Typically, workers would respond to these conditions by moving to areas with better job prospects, but decline in housing values, leading to negative home equity and foreclosures for many households, reduces their ability to do so. An additional factor is the increasing duration of unemployment, with studies showing that the longer duration of unemployment the harder it is to get a job.

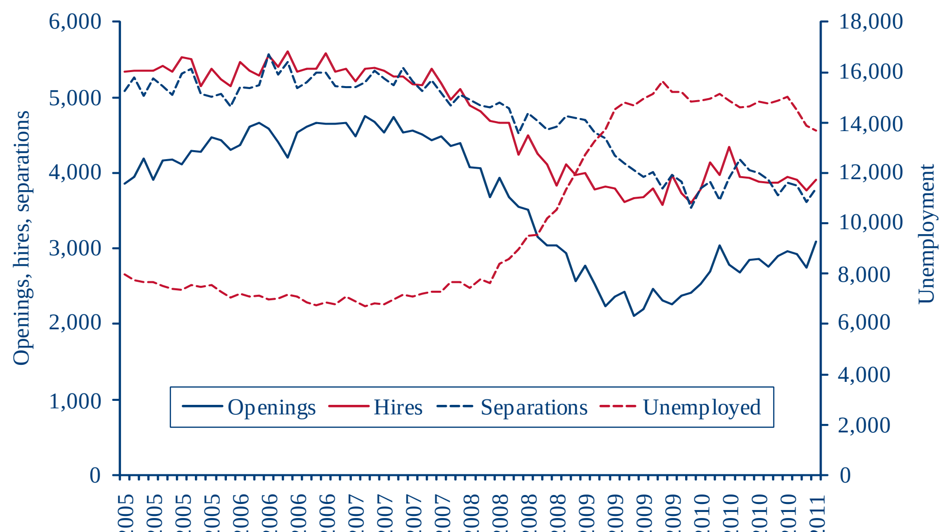
Several organizations offer various scenarios for the recovery of the labor market. For instance, the Congressional Budget Office expects the unemployment rate to decline to 7.96 percent in 2012 and the participation rate to increase to 64.8 percent. This requires an average job growth of 227,000 per month over the next two years—about twice the current rate and slightly under the 2006 average rate 268,000 per month. Using the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia's recent forecast of employment growth in 2011 of 170,000 jobs per month and extending that rate forward paints a bleaker picture. The Upjohn Institute calculates that at that pace the unemployment rate would not come down to 8 percent until the end of 2015. In order to return to the prerecession average unemployment rate of 4.8 percent by 2014, the economy would have to generate 338,000 jobs each month. It's not impossible, but monthly growth rates of this magnitude have occurred only in short spurts, and these estimates require sustained growth rates at this level.

Some economists believe that returning to the days of unemployment rates below 5 percent may not be in our future, at least not in the short run. They believe that the recession has caused the long-run natural unemployment rate to be higher than in the past, for the reasons just discussed.

The recession has left the United States with a weak employment situation. Job openings are picking up, but hires are flat, and the labor market is less dynamic than before, with fewer job openings and separations—a measure of labor market churning and flexibility. If job openings continue to increase and the structural changes are minimal, then the rest of 2011 may see a more substantial rebound in employment than many expected a few months ago, when the unemployment was hovering above 10 percent. Yet, it may take at least several more years beyond 2011 before the labor market situation resembles what it was before the recession.

*Randall W. Eberts is president of the Upjohn Institute.*

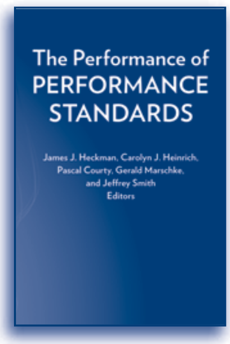
**Figure 1 Job Openings, New Hires, Separations, and Unemployed (in 000s)**



# New and Recent Books

## The Performance of Performance Standards

James J. Heckman, Carolyn J. Heinrich, Pascal Courty, Gerald Marschke, and Jeffrey Smith, editors




Incentives and accountability for government performance are central to contemporary government reform agendas across the globe. Still, the lessons on intended and unintended effects of incentive and performance management systems from several decades of research and practice do not appear to be reflected in the current design and implementation of these systems in the public sector.

This conundrum serves as motivation for the contributors to this new volume. Led by Nobel laureate James J. Heckman, they use U.S. employment and training programs as their laboratory for investigation into the performance of performance standards. Drawing on a variety of superior data sources, they explore how performance standards and incentives influence the behavior of public managers and agency employees, their approaches to service delivery, and ultimately, the outcomes for participants.

As demand for greater accountability and a results-oriented government continues to grow, the design and implementation of performance standards and incentive systems in the public sector will continue to be a dynamic pursuit. The lessons contained in this volume provide direction for policymakers seeking to shape and speed their evolution, as well as in ultimately improving government performance.

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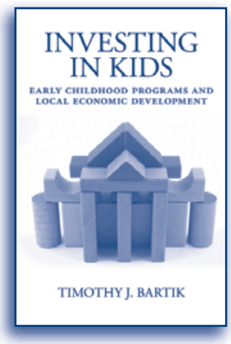
## Investing in Kids

### Early Childhood Programs and Local Economic Development

Timothy J. Bartik




"State and local economic development officials need new strategies, ones backed by fact and evidence. Tim Bartik provides exactly this in his powerfully researched book that documents the link between economic development and investing in your children in ways never done before. Now business leaders and development officials have a sober, fact-based framework for increasing personal incomes, local and state workforce competitiveness, and national fiscal strength. This is a framework for getting our country back on its feet and keeping it there."
*–Robert Dugger, founder and managing partner of Hanover Investment Group; chairman of the advisory board, Partnership for America's Economic Success*

"Tim Bartik has written a thoughtful book on the value of a local approach to financing and creating early interventions to foster child development. The economic case for supplementing the early environments of disadvantaged children is compelling. Annual rates of return of 7–10 percent per annum have been estimated—higher than return on stocks over the period 1945–2008 . . . In an era of stringent federal budgets, Bartik offers a plan for raising the support needed to put effective programs into place."
*–James Heckman, Nobel Prize–winning economist, University of Chicago*

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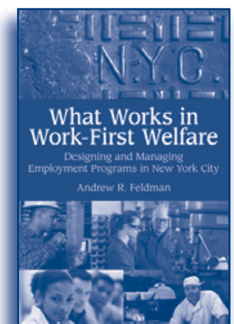
## What Works in Work-First Welfare

### Designing and Managing Employment Programs in New York City

Andrew R. Feldman




"The most important contributions of this book . . . are its insights into what distinguishes the most successful work-first programs from those that have less-good placement and retention rates. Increasing the effectiveness of employment programs is important beyond the narrow confines of the welfare system. Even after the economy recovers . . . many will remain unemployed and out of the labor force, in need of whatever help the employment services system can provide . . . The findings and insights in this book should be taken seriously by both designers and managers of employment programs, whether or not they are in New York City or are connected to a welfare system . . . It is crucial that we continue to learn from ongoing comparative evaluations as well as from studies of specific strategies and approaches. This book, I believe, is a fine example of the kind of learning that we need to be engaged in."
*–Mary Jo Bane, Harvard University*

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