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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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From July 1995 through September 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the Ford Foundation (Ford) operated a demonstration of the Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP). QOP offered intensive and comprehensive services to help at-risk youth graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education or training. The QOP demonstration included several features of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth programs, and findings from the demonstration might provide some insight about the implementation challenges that such WIA programs will encounter and the potential effectiveness of those programs.

The QOP demonstration targeted youth with low grades entering high schools with high dropout rates. Randomly selected eligible youth were enrolled in QOP and served even if they transferred to other schools, dropped out of school, became incarcerated, or became inactive in QOP for a long time. QOP's primary goals were to increase the rates of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education or training. Its secondary goals were to improve high school grades and achievement test scores and to reduce risky behaviors, such as substance abuse, crime, and teen parenting.

QOP was mainly an after-school program providing case management and mentoring, supplemental education, developmental activities, community service activities, supportive services, and financial incentives. These services were provided year-round for five years to enrollees who had not graduated from high school, and were designed to be comprehensive enough to address all barriers to success and to be intensive. The program model specified roughly 15 to 25 enrollees per case manager, and it prescribed an annual participation goal of 750 hours for each enrollee who had not graduated. From graduation to the end of the demonstration, enrollees who had graduated received limited services—some mentoring and assistance with enrolling in postsecondary education or training.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) in seven sites operated QOP demonstration programs. Five sites (Cleveland, Fort Worth, Houston, Memphis, and Washington, D.C.) were funded by DOL. Four of the five served 100 youth each, and the Washington, D.C., site served 80 youth. The other two sites (Philadelphia and Yakima) served 50 youth each with funding from Ford, which also funded the technical assistance provided to sites throughout the demonstration. DOL has funded the evaluation of the QOP demonstration.

### Evaluation Design

To estimate QOP's impacts on high school performance and graduation, postsecondary education or training, and risky behaviors, we have conducted three surveys, administered achievement tests in reading and mathematics, and collected high school transcripts for a group of youth who were enrolled in QOP and a group of statistically identical youth—the control group—who were not allowed to participate in QOP. We formed the QOP and

control groups at the start of the demonstration by randomly assigning each of the nearly 1,100 youth eligible for the program to one group or the other.

In this report, we present QOP's impacts on outcomes measured using data from the third survey conducted to date. The survey was administered by telephone and began approximately two years after the end of the demonstration when most sample members were 21 or 22 years old (one year after the end of the demonstration when most sample members were 20 or 21 years old in the Washington, D.C., site, where program operations began one year later than in the other sites).

Findings based on data from the first two evaluation surveys—which were conducted in-person and by telephone, respectively—were presented in previous reports. Those surveys were administered during the four and fifth years of the demonstration, that is, before the demonstration was over and when many sample members were still attending high school. The impacts presented in this report are the first post-intervention impacts from the evaluation of the QOP demonstration. A future report will present additional post-intervention impacts estimated from data collected in the final evaluation survey, which will be conducted in fall 2004, a little more than five years after sample members were scheduled to graduate from high school (a little more than four years after scheduled graduation for sample members in the Washington, D.C., site).

### **The Context for Interpreting the Impacts of the QOP Demonstration**

The impacts of the QOP demonstration are not determined entirely by the features of the QOP model. The impacts are also influenced—probably heavily—by how well the demonstration sites implemented the QOP model, how much they spent on the program, and the extent to which QOP enrollees participated in the program. Because the quality of implementation, the amount of spending, and the extent of participation were not varied by design, it is not strictly valid to conclude, for example, that better impacts in one site relative to other sites were caused by closer fidelity to the QOP model in that site. However, understanding the patterns of implementation, costs, and participation provides a context for assessing the impacts presented in this report and understanding the potential sources of variation in impacts.

Through annual site visits, annual QOP conferences, and conference calls with QOP staff, we assessed how well the CBOs in the QOP demonstration implemented the program model. From information provided by QOP staff, we also measured QOP costs and the extent to which enrollees participated in QOP's educational, developmental, and community service activities. Because financial incentives were provided for participation in these three activities only, the participation data do not include time spent being mentored if the mentoring was not part of an educational, developmental, or community service activity.

Neither DOL nor, to a lesser degree, Ford required sites to implement fully all of the elements of the QOP model, in part to allow some flexibility for adjusting implementation to local or changing circumstances. Our analysis of program implementation revealed that two sites implemented a version of QOP that deviated substantially from the program model and that the other five sites implemented versions that deviated moderately from the model.

With the exception of the Philadelphia site—where the program was operated by the CBO that helped to design the QOP model and oversaw a small-scale pilot of QOP from 1989 through 1993—local CBOs found implementing QOP difficult, primarily because QOP was substantially more comprehensive, intensive, and complex than their traditional programs. Although sites implemented the mentoring and developmental components relatively well, no site fully and effectively implemented the education component, and sites generally did not meet their enrollees’ needs for some supportive services, including child care, health and mental health services, and substance abuse treatment.

In addition to the deviations from the program model, we found that most enrollees attended relatively few program activities. Enrollees spent an average of 174 hours per year on QOP’s educational, developmental, and community service activities—23 percent of the annual goal of 750 hours—through the first four years of the demonstration. The average fell steadily from 247 hours in the first year to 89 hours in the fourth year, while the fraction of enrollees spending no time at all on these activities rose steadily from 1 percent to 36 percent. We also found that participation varied substantially from site to site, ranging from a low of 68 hours per year to a high of 345 hours.

The total cost of QOP per enrollee over the full five-year demonstration period was \$18,000 to \$22,000 for DOL-funded sites; \$23,000 for the Yakima site; and \$49,000 for the Philadelphia site. These figures do not include the cost of the technical assistance that was provided to sites.

## What Were QOP’s Impacts?

### Impacts on Primary Outcomes

- **QOP did not achieve its first primary objective.** That is, it did not increase the likelihood of graduating from high school with a diploma. It also did not increase the likelihood of completing high school by earning either a diploma or a GED. These findings are based on all of the available data, including data from the survey that was conducted a little more than three years after scheduled graduation (two years in the Washington, D.C., site). As discussed in detail in this report, the finding that there was no impact on the likelihood of high school graduation differs from the previous finding that there was an increased likelihood of graduation based on data collected during the first year after scheduled graduation when many sample members were still attending high school (Maxfield et al. 2003b). That short-term impact no longer pertains.
- **QOP is achieving its second primary objective.** By a little more than three years after sample members were scheduled to graduate from high school (two years in the Washington, D.C., site), QOP had increased by 9 percentage points the likelihood of ever engaging in postsecondary education or training, including college attendance, vocational or technical school attendance, apprenticeship enrollment, and armed forces enlistment. QOP had also increased by 7 percentage points the likelihood of ever attending college and by 6 percentage points the likelihood of completing at least one quarter at college, although

impacts decline and become insignificant at higher levels of educational attainment (e.g., completing at least one year at college). Data collected in the next survey will reveal whether QOP prepared enrollees to persist in and complete their education and training activities so that the gains in attendance translate into substantial gains in attainment, as indicated by, for example, receipt of a college degree.

### Impacts on Secondary Outcomes

- **QOP did not achieve its secondary objective of improving high school grades and achievement test scores.** This finding, presented in previous reports, is based on data from transcripts and reading and mathematics tests administered for the evaluation.
- **QOP has not generally achieved its secondary objective of reducing the broad range of risky behaviors targeted by the program.** It did not decrease the likelihood of teen parenting. Moreover, in the period shortly before the most recent survey, when most sample members were 21 or 22 years old (20 or 21 in the Washington, D.C., site), QOP did not decrease the likelihood of binge drinking, committing a crime, or being arrested or charged with a crime. However, QOP enrollees were less likely than control group members to have used an illegal drug.

### Subgroup and Site Impacts

- **QOP did not increase the likelihood of high school completion for any site or for any of the subgroups defined by the observed baseline characteristics of sex, age at entry into ninth grade, or grade point average in the eighth grade.**
- **QOP might be more effective for some subgroups of enrollees than for others.** In particular, QOP increased postsecondary attainment among younger enrollees (the two-thirds of enrollees who were age 14 or younger when they entered the ninth grade), but it had no impact on the postsecondary attainment of older enrollees (those who were over age 14 when they entered the ninth grade). QOP also seems to have been more beneficial for enrollees in the bottom two-thirds of the eligible grade distribution than for enrollees in the top third of the distribution, although few differences in impacts are significant. (The eligible grade distribution excludes youth who were ineligible for QOP because their grades were too high.)
- **QOP's impacts varied by site.** Both the Cleveland and Philadelphia sites had beneficial impacts—mainly on postsecondary attainment—and neither had detrimental impacts. The Cleveland site increased by 18 percentage points the likelihood of ever attending college and by 14 percentage points the likelihood of completing at least one year of college. The Philadelphia site increased by 19 percentage points the likelihood of ever attending a four-year college and by 15

percentage points the likelihood of completing at least one year at a four-year college. Except for a reduction in illegal drug use in the Washington, D.C., site, none of the other five sites had beneficial impacts, while some had detrimental impacts.

These findings are based largely on data collected a little more than three years after sample members were scheduled to graduate from high school (two years in the Washington, D.C., site). The findings raise several important questions: Will the impacts on engagement in postsecondary education and training be sustained? More specifically, will QOP enrollees persist in and complete college or other forms of training? Will members of the control group catch up to QOP enrollees in both attendance and attainment? Data from the next survey—which will begin in fall 2004, a little more than five years after scheduled high school graduation (four years in the Washington, D.C., site) and two years after the previous survey—will shed light on these questions. The survey will also provide additional data for estimating the impacts of QOP on both the work experiences of enrollees and their engagement in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse and crime.