

# Education Alert

Legislation of Vital Concern to Miami-Dade County's Students

**Date:** June 18, 2002  
**To:** Florida Congressional Delegation  
**From:** Merrett Stierheim, Superintendent of Schools  
**Re:** **PRESERVE TANF TRAINING OPTIONS AND EXPAND STATE FLEXIBILITY**

The House plan to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, HR 4737, undermines successful welfare reform programs by placing new, severe limits on vocational training for both full-time and part-time trainees. Miami-Dade County Public Schools strongly urges that training options be preserved and that states be given increased flexibility to combine work and training strategies.

**BACKGROUND:** Research shows that a combination of work and training is the most effective strategy to end welfare dependence and strengthen families. A General Accounting Office (GAO) survey, reinforced by more recent studies, concludes that training is an essential part of the welfare-to-work solution:

- GAO finding: combined work and study is best for employment and earnings: “programs with a combined approach – including both job search assistance and some education and training – tend to be more effective than either approach alone in increasing employment and earnings while reducing welfare payments.”
- GAO finding: combined work and study is best for children: “a body of research that focuses on the effects of poverty on children's educational attainment suggests a significant positive relationship between the educational attainment of parents and their children among both the welfare and the nonwelfare populations.”

In passing HR 4737, the House unfortunately rejected an amendment by 198 - 222 that would expand state flexibility to provide welfare recipients with training and education within a “work-first” framework. **Instead of providing states with incentives to follow best practices, HR 4737 actually prevents local programs from following proven strategies** such as the Portland, OR model. With no basis in practice, the bill would impose a narrow, “one-size-fits-all” approach that no state has yet chosen to follow:

- HR 4737 eliminates access to most training programs: the bill drastically reduces the option of full-time education and training to only three or four months, instead of the current 12 months.
- HR 4737 sharply reduces opportunities to combine work and part-time training: the bill mandates 24 hours per week in direct work, leaving 16 hours or less for all other authorized activities, including counseling, treatment, job search, or skills upgrading.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Miami-Dade County Public Schools respectfully requests your **advocacy for TANF rules that reinforce, and not hinder, Florida's ability to provide training for welfare recipients.** Congress should support existing proposals that:

- make it easier to combine part-time work and school,
- expand time limits for full-time training that takes longer than 12 months, and
- enable states to let more recipients gain occupational credentials to achieve better-paying jobs.

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