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EDITORIAL

Smarter Welfare-to-Work Plans

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It is a good idea to require able-bodied welfare recipients to work in exchange for benefits. But research has discredited inflexible workfare programs that shunt people into dead-end jobs instead of giving them education and training that could improve their long-term prospects.

Several cities have adopted a more sensible approach under which people who are ready to work are pushed to find jobs right away and those who lack the most basic skills are given education and training. This mixed-strategy approach has helped raise employment rates and increase earnings for former welfare recipients.

New York City is striving to follow this model but appears to be falling short. The city must do more to connect young adults on public assistance with educational programs that could help them succeed in the labor market.

[A new report](#) by the Community Service Society, an advocacy group that focuses on poverty, surveyed scores of impoverished and distressed young people when they applied for welfare benefits between 2009 and 2011.

Those who lacked diplomas, some as young as 18, almost universally said they wanted to attend G.E.D. programs, which are a particularly good investment for young people who have never held jobs. But, according to the study, nearly all were sent to a chaotic and ineffective back-to-work program that consists mainly of job-search activities. Worse still, according to the study, some were told that they would have to quit a highly regarded G.E.D. and training program to receive public assistance.

This is alarming given that a fifth of nearly 900,000 New Yorkers between the ages of 17 and 24 are both unemployed and out of school. Christine Quinn, the speaker of the City Council, has promised legislation to require the city to better screen young welfare applicants and direct them to appropriate services. That would be a good start.