



LIVING ON LITTLE:

CASE STUDIES OF IOWA FAMILIES WITH VERY LOW INCOMES



MATHEMATICA
Policy Research, Inc.

Activities like collecting and returning cans and pawning belongings are a quick way for some families to fill the gas tank or pick up additional groceries

Some case study participants were particularly resourceful. When the money they were able to obtain through other means still could not cover expenses, they found more creative ways to bring in extra cash. Some made money from can and bottle deposits and by pawning belongings that were relatively valuable, but not vital to the family's well-being. Others purchased items at thrift shops and garage sales and sold them for a small profit. While one participant collected cans and bottles on a regular basis, all others who engaged in these money-making strategies reported doing it only when there was a specific and immediate need. Most case study participants did not make very much through these strategies but were able to buy things that they otherwise would have had to do without. Most often, they used the money for gas and extra groceries. As two participants described:

“Sometimes we’ll take things to the pawn shop to get a little extra, maybe \$30 here and there. [We do that] maybe once every couple of months, if that. It’s one of those things—you’re thinking we need gas, we need this, we need that, how are we going to get it? Right now unfortunately my stereo is in [the pawn shop]. Another thing we do is go can hunting and we find cans and that helps sometimes, too. [We do that] maybe once a week. A lot of times you’d be surprised. We’ve found like \$30 or \$40. We get cans and bottles from my dad’s, too. He saves them all month and then we go out and get them at the end of the month.”

“There’s the occasional pop can deposit when we’re low on gas, but nothing that would make a CPA get all excited. [Also], if I find something at a garage sale or a thrift store, if you hunt [for] those things sometimes you find an old piece of crockery and you can sell that and you can mark it up. I’ve never done it in a big, big way. ...If I find an item for \$3 and I could turn around at an antique store for \$10.”

Survey Insights

The case study interviews suggest that income gained through money-making strategies may not be consistent or substantial. Given this, survey questions that ask respondents about the receipt of income sources in a given month may not provide an accurate description of the regularity with which families use these strategies. Also, questions about income may not effectively capture information about money-making strategies if families do not view money gained by way of these strategies as genuine sources of income. For example, some surveys ask respondents about income from informal or under-the-table work. A parent whose livelihood is a regular job that pays in cash may respond to this question by reporting her earnings, but a parent who occasionally does odd jobs for small amounts of extra cash may not.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Statistical Analysis Report

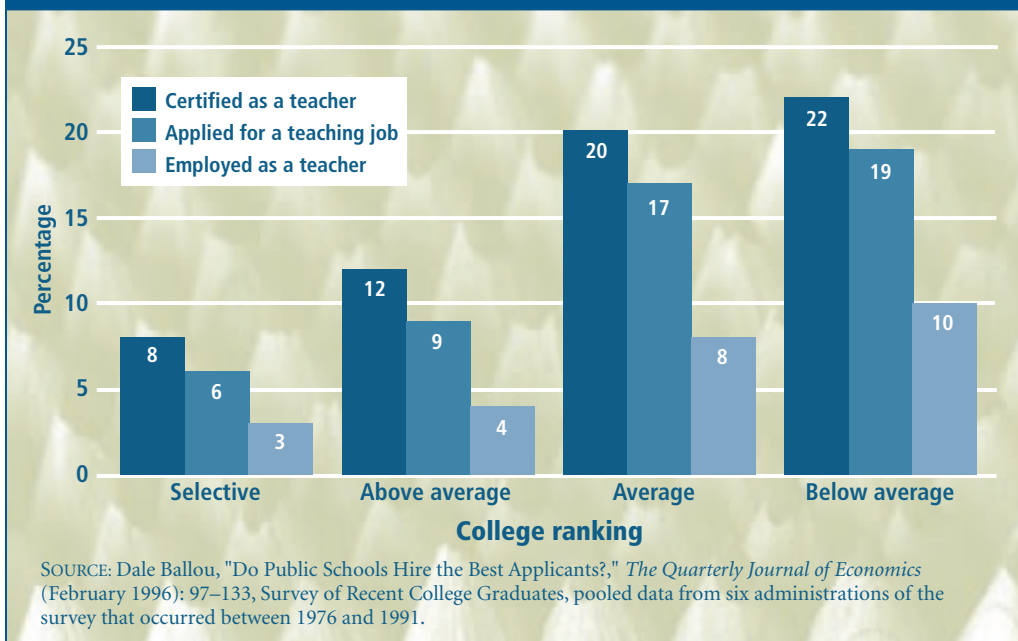
December 2000

MONITORING SCHOOL QUALITY: An Indicators Report



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement NCES 2001-030

Figure 2.1—Percentage of teachers at various stages of new teacher recruitment, by college ranking: 1976–1991



the Barron’s admissions selectivity scale, the *less* likely a student is to prepare to become a teacher and enter the teaching profession. Ballou used the Surveys of Recent College Graduates to sort students by the selectivity of their undergraduate institutions (the ratings range from selective to below average) and then examined the rate at which students at these different types of institutions took the courses necessary to become certified teachers, applied for a teaching job, and actually became teachers. Figure 2.1 shows that the less selective the college, the more likely that students at that college will prepare for and enter the teaching profession.⁹ Ballou concluded, “Thus, certification, application, and employment levels all rise monotonically as college quality declines” (1996, p. 103).

Ballou’s study was not the only study to use 1990s data to suggest that the teaching profession attracts those with lower academic skills. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) found that this was true for most of the prospective teachers taking the Praxis II exam between 1994 and 1997 (Gitomer, Latham, and Ziomek 1999). When comparing the average SAT scores for teacher candidates passing the Praxis II exam with the average SAT score for all college graduates, ETS concluded that elementary education candidates, the largest single group of prospective teachers, have much lower math and verbal scores. The pattern in other content areas for teacher candidates was less consistent. The average math SAT score for those passing the Praxis II exam and seeking licensure in physical education, special education, art and music, social studies, English, or foreign language was lower than the average math score for all college graduates. Those seeking to teach science and math, however, had higher average math

⁹This figure includes pooled data from the six administrations of the Surveys of Recent College Graduates that occurred between 1976 and 1991.

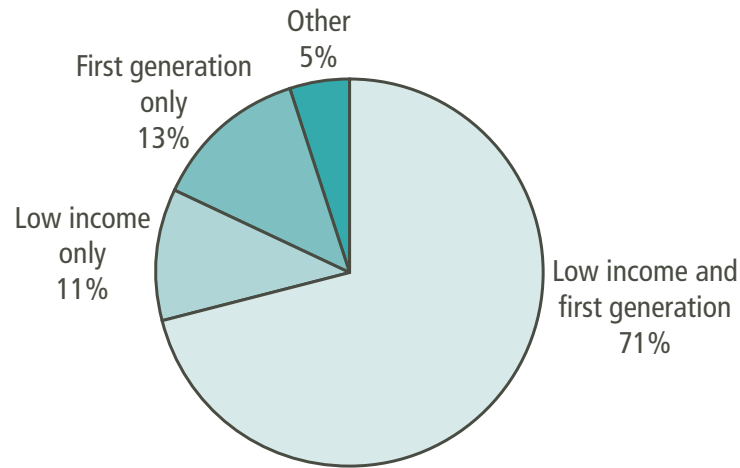


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF FEDERAL TRIO PROGRAMS

February 2002

A Profile of the Educational Opportunity Centers Program: 1998-99

Figure 4. Participant distribution by eligibility



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs, EOC Performance Reports, 1998-99.

As Table 5 shows, there is very little variation across the sectors in the distribution of participants by eligibility status.

Table 5. Participant distribution by eligibility and type of host institution

Sector	Low income and first generation	Low income only	First generation only	Other
4-year colleges	73%	10%	13%	4%
2-year colleges	70%	12%	13%	5%
Community orgs.	72%	11%	12%	5%
All projects	72%	11%	13%	5%

Percentages do not total to 100 due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs, EOC Performance Reports, 1998-99.

C. Participant distribution by ethnic background

Figure 5 below shows that whites made up the largest ethnic group among EOC participants (41 percent). African Americans were the next largest group, representing 36 percent of the participants. Hispanic or Latino students were 14 percent of the participants, American Indians/Alaska Natives were 4 percent, Asians and multi-racial participants were 2 percent each, and Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were 1 percent.