

Gender parity is about ensuring every individual the opportunity for education and training that leads to high-demand, high-skill careers regardless of one's gender. Since its inception, the New Jersey Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education has worked to recommend programs and policies to break down gender-based barriers and encourage equal participation of students and workers in education, training, and employment. While a Gender Parity Task Force was first established by the State Employment and Training Commission in 1993, the Council became permanent by means of legislation in 1999 (P.L. 1999, c.223). The Council is the only one of its kind in the nation established by legislation and brings together representatives from business, education, and government to address barriers to full and gender-equitable participation in the workforce.

Research and Reports

The New Jersey Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education continues to organize research, support state and national initiatives to achieve equity for women and minorities, host formal and informal events, and establish itself as a leader in gender equity issues. The Council holds annual retreats to continue to identify a strong research and policy agenda, building on its existing agenda.

The Council continues to sponsor, with its partner agencies, new and ongoing research on issues related to gender equity in the workforce in an ever-changing economy. A summary of this work follows.

The Council published a report entitled *Women at Work: Achieving Parity on the Job*. The study, conducted in partnership with the Center for Women and Work (CWW) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, examined issues surrounding the experiences of women in five growing occupational areas in New Jersey—building trades, financial services, healthcare, law, and technology. The report found substantial labor shortages in each of these occupational areas, and perhaps more importantly, that these shortages, could be addressed through greater efforts to support gender parity. So far, the Council has pursued assertive initiatives in three of these areas: building trades, engineering (technology) and healthcare. These same issues were explored further in a one-day conference, *The Trust Company: Parity, Profits, and Partnerships*, sponsored by the Council.

A report was prepared on *Choosing a Career: Labor Market Inequalities in the New Jersey Labor Market*. The report presented findings from a study which examined and measured factors (e.g., education, influence of family and peers, job characteristics) in occupational decisions and how they varied by gender.

The Council sponsored research on women currently in the building trades to determine (1) why they choose a career in this nontraditional arena, (2) what their experiences were as women in the trades, and (3) what best practices and recommendations they could offer to enhance the work environment in the building trades, particularly for women. This research has been extended to explore the perspective and experiences of men working side-by-side with women in the building trades. A DVD entitled *Dream Builders: Women on the Job* was created to highlight the working lives of several women in the construction trades.

The Council published a report on women in engineering called *Engineering Their Futures: The Educational and Workplace Experiences of Female Engineers*. This report conveyed that only 19% of science, engineering, and technology careers are held by women and that they leave these careers twice as frequently as men. The report concluded that gender harassment, pay inequities, and feelings of isolation steer women away from choosing these career fields and hinder their retention if they do enter the fields. Also highlighted in the study were a number of strategies to address these challenges for women.

The *Gender Equity and Technology in the New Jersey Workplace: Setting the Agenda* mini-conference roundtable discussions provided information for two Council-sponsored reports that followed: *Bridging the Gap: Gender Equity in Science, Engineering and Technology* and *Women and Work: Prospects for Parity in the New Economy*. Both reports explored the issues surrounding the exclusion of women from science, math and technology programs and jobs, and also investigated the changing labor force needs in these professions.

The Council convened an Advisory Committee and engaged the CWW to research, in the healthcare field, the growing nursing shortage both nationally and in New Jersey. Nursing is a heavily female-dominated field. Consequently, the shortage has implications for women's experiences in the healthcare labor force and for exploring the feasibility of attracting more men to this field. The Council issued a report of its findings and recommendations in *Healthcare Workforce Outlook: The Nursing Shortage in New Jersey and the United States: Suggestions for Future Research and Policy*. The report offered policy recommendations and proposed a broad research agenda.

A follow-up to the Council's *Healthcare Workforce Outlook*, is a report, entitled *Finding a Healthy Balance: A Study of Gender Equity in New Jersey's Healthcare Workforce*. The report suggests strategies to increase recruitment and retention of men and other underrepresented groups in the nursing profession, and recommends healthcare and labor policies to address the nursing shortage.

The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) awarded a competitive grant to the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOLE) for the *Women in the 21st Century Distance Learning Pilot Project*. The unique presence in New Jersey of

the Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education was instrumental in the State's winning this grant. The objective of this project was to examine whether online learning, which has proven effective in increasing the skills and education of college educated individuals, also could be an effective skills delivery mechanism for single working mothers. The workforce goal was to use online learning to raise women's skills sufficiently so that they could be placed in higher-level occupations and command higher wages. The pilot was implemented through the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development One-Stop Career Centers and was evaluated by the CWW. An evaluation report entitled: *Findings from the Field: Early Findings of the New Jersey On-line Learning Project for Single Working-Poor Mothers* was prepared by CWW. The report provides a guide of effective strategies for designing distance learning projects. A supplemental report, *Online Learning as Training Policy: Increasing Access to Education and Skills Training for Low-Income Workers* was released in 2004 outlining the policy implications of the successes of the program.

The Council continues in its oversight role, as the New Jersey distance learning model is being expanded not only throughout the State, but also throughout the nation. As of 2008, over twenty states have adopted the model to fit the needs of their workforces.

In keeping with one of the sectors highlighted in *Women at Work: Achieving Parity on the Job*, the Council launched a research initiative on New Jersey women lawyers. The research components included over 500 responses to a survey of women's experiences in the law, as well as in-depth personal interviews with women lawyers who have made it to the top of law firms, and their managing partners. In compliment to the research, the Council also formed the *Forum on Workplace Practices in the Law*, with ten partner law firms interested in diversifying their leadership. The results of the research study are set to be released in the summer of 2008.

Conferences

The New Jersey Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education and its partner agencies have hosted, sponsored workshops, and participated in numerous conferences including the following:

A mini-conference was held at Douglass College to set the agenda for the Council, entitled *Gender Equity and Technology in the New Jersey Workplace: Setting the Agenda*. This conference focused on issues of equity for women in education, technology and the workplace. More than 90 experts in education and business attended the invitational mini-conference. New Jersey Senator Diane Allen, who introduced the Legislative Bill establishing the Council, provided opening remarks. Roundtable discussions included: strategies to motivate girls to take math, science and technology courses on K-12 level; educational policy to ensure gender equity in science and technology programs; college programs to

attract and retain female science and technology majors, school/business partnerships; recruitment and retention of women in technology positions; corporate programs to develop technological training of certified and non-college educated workers; and, women entrepreneurs.

A workshop was held at the SETC's annual conference—*Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers*—entitled *Working Women: Building for the Trades*, in which women who had achieved journeyman status discussed the benefits to working in the construction trades, the barriers they overcame, and the opportunities for women to gain valuable skills that would lead to rewarding careers.

A conference was convened as part of the Governor's Conference Series on Women's Issues, entitled *A Woman's Place: Her Role in the New Economy*. The conference provided the opportunity to hear from women in science and technology jobs and educational programs. Workshops were presented on issues that affect women's progress in the new economy.

A panel discussion presented on women in the field of engineering. The Council, in partnership with CWW, presented the findings reported in *Engineering Their Futures: The Educational and Workplace Experiences of Female Engineers*. In addition, featured guests from Rowan University's School of Engineering and the Society for Women Engineers of New Jersey shared strategies and accomplishments of women in the engineering fields.

Building on its work in the science and technology fields, the Council has hosted an annual Summit on *Women in New Jersey's Science and Technology Workforce*. The summits bring together participants from industry, education, government and research to discuss women's participation in this important sector of New Jersey's economy. To date, summits have included plenary panel sessions featuring recent policies or research, followed by facilitated discussion groups. Recommendations of the discussion groups have been published in a report, and used to guide the Council's agenda on the issue in the following year.