



# Job Corps for the Future

## The Road to Self-Sufficiency

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## Executive Summary

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In 1964, the Job Corps program was created to provide the nation’s most disadvantaged, low-income youth with intensive academic, technical, and social skills they would need to obtain meaningful employment, enter the military, or enroll in higher education. The goal was to train and develop future taxpaying citizens. Today, at centers in every state across the country, Job Corps has become America’s premier residential job training program, providing students with holistic education, technical training, and essential life skills to be successful in their lives and in the workforce.

The economic and employment landscape has seen significant changes since Job Corps was first founded. Whether it was the rise of the service sector that began in the mid-1970s or the construction and technology booms of the 1990s and early 2000s, Job Corps has continuously adapted to ensure its students are prepared for the demands of the workforce. The economy is now experiencing another significant shift as baby boomers retire in unprecedented numbers. The demand for highly skilled workers in many industries has never been greater. This new economy presents a paradox: while employers in many industries are clamoring for more highly skilled workers to fill jobs, new workers are having difficulty entering the workforce and millions of youth are both out of work and out of school.

In response to this growing demand for a highly skilled workforce, Congress has recently enacted the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Part of Job Corps’ purpose in this new legislation is to prepare youth for “successful careers with in-demand industry sectors or occupations...that will result in economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement.”<sup>1</sup> The language emphasizing “in-demand” jobs and “economic self-sufficiency” replaces language in the previous legislation, in which the purpose of Job Corps was simply to help youth “become more responsible, employable, and productive citizens.”<sup>2</sup>

To ensure Job Corps graduates achieve higher levels of economic self-sufficiency, WIOA raises the bar for program performance and accountability. When WIOA is fully enacted, Job Corps’ success will be compared with that of other youth programs by measuring these primary indicators of performance:

- Percent of students placed in unsubsidized employment
- Average earnings of those placed in unsubsidized employment
- Percent of students who obtain a postsecondary credential
- Percent of students who obtain a high school diploma or equivalency leading to employment or postsecondary opportunities
- Percent of students showing measurable skills gains toward a postsecondary credential or employment
- Program’s effectiveness in serving employers

Meeting these higher standards of performance and accountability will require Job Corps to once again adapt its policies and practices for success. To this end, Job Corps' National Director has outlined five priorities:

- Modernizing and reforming policies
- Ensuring program and data quality
- Providing safe and secure learning environments
- Providing standards-based education, training, and employment programs
- Increasing opportunities for students to obtain nationally recognized credentials

Throughout its history, Job Corps has been successful in adapting to changing labor market needs and responding to new legislation and workforce initiatives. This paper highlights some of those successes, discusses the current labor market outlook and emerging opportunities, and sets forth a plan for how Job Corps can improve student academic outcomes, improve technical training and placement outcomes, improve 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, and cultivate a safe living and learning environment.

## **Job Corps for the Future Plan**

### **Improving Academic Outcomes**

- Personalize learning for each student by using engaging digital tools
- Hire, train, and develop teachers skilled at connecting with students, and in using engaging learning resources
- Fully integrate career technical and academic curricula to engage students in their learning and improve math and reading proficiency
- Expand and strengthen partnerships with postsecondary institutions to share resources, develop articulation agreements, and encourage postsecondary education

### **Improving Technical Training and Placement Outcomes**

- Develop internships and apprenticeships in all high-demand industries to create a pipeline of talent between Job Corps and employers
- Develop a rapid-response system to change career technical training offerings quickly to meet employer demands
- Expand nationally recognized credential attainment to improve connectivity to the workforce
- Significantly enhance employer involvement to provide employer-driven recruitment, training, and placement services

### **Improving Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Other 21st Century Skills**

- Integrate 21st Century skills training into Job Corps curricula to maximize student workplace success, job retention, and employer satisfaction
- Provide students opportunities to practice and receive feedback on 21st Century skills to prepare them for the workforce and self-sufficiency

### **Cultivating a Safe and Supportive Living and Learning Environment**

- Evaluate the living and learning environment by implementing a comprehensive student engagement process that assesses safety and the extent to which the culture promotes academic and technical credential attainment
- Improve mental health resources and services to provide a safe living and learning environment

By implementing the recommendations set forth in this plan, the Job Corps program will rise to the standards of WIOA, the National Director of Job Corps, and industry leaders and place students on the road to greater self-sufficiency.

# Job Corps: A History of Adapting to Workforce Needs

Since Job Corps began serving a few dozen students at the first center in 1965,<sup>3</sup> the program has grown to help over 2.7 million young men and women turn their lives around.<sup>4</sup> As a testament to its tremendous value for youth, communities, employers, and taxpayers, the program has expanded its reach to 125 centers in 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. New centers have been constructed in the two remaining states, Wyoming and New Hampshire, which are expected to be operational by mid-2015.<sup>5</sup>

Through a process of continuous improvement, Job Corps has been effective in preparing at-risk youth for successful transition to college, the workforce, or the military. Among its many accomplishments are providing career technical training in the most in-demand fields, instituting project- and work-based learning to give students hands-on experience in their field, creating an extensive career development system, and launching an initiative to graduate more students with a high school diploma instead of a GED. Job Corps also developed an impressive outcome measurement system to track student results and program accomplishments and to identify areas that need to be strengthened. These and many other accomplishments have shown that Job Corps works for youth, employers, and taxpayers.



Figure 1

## Creation of a Career Development Services System

With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Job Corps adapted to better align with the needs of the workforce by implementing a career development services system. Within this system, staff deliver holistic career preparation and development services to students. The focus is on student career success beginning in recruitment and admissions, continuing in academic and technical training, and culminating with students' transition into employment, higher education, or the military.

## Focus on In-Demand Career Technical Training

Job Corps provides career technical training in over 100 careers in 11 of the most in-demand industry sectors (see Figure 1), with the opportunity for students to obtain industry-recognized credentials. For the rolling year ending March 31, 2015, 94.8 percent of all students enrolled in a technical training program obtained at least one credential.

## Emphasis on High School Diploma Attainment

In the early 2000s, in response to employer and program expectations, Job Corps focused on ensuring that students obtained a high school diploma, as opposed to a GED or other high school equivalency. As

a result, there were over three and a half times as many Job Corps graduates who earned high school diplomas in program year 2013 as there were in program year 2000.<sup>6</sup> Because high school diplomas yield better earnings than GEDs<sup>7</sup> and are more attractive to employers,<sup>8</sup> this initiative has better prepared Job Corps graduates for career success.

### Job Corps Works: Performance Results

To assess program effectiveness and enhance accountability, Job Corps developed a comprehensive student outcome measurement system. This system tracks student outcomes in high school diploma or equivalency attainment, career technical training completion, industry certification achievement, and initial job placement and earnings. Because of the program's commitment to the long-term success and stability of each student, Job Corps also tracks employment outcomes for students at six months and one year after graduation.

Job Corps' commitment to continuous improvement has led to great success in graduating students prepared for college and careers. During the 2013 program year, nearly 64 percent of students who entered the program without a high school diploma or equivalent obtained one, while almost 66 percent of students completed their career technical training program. Sixty-six percent achieved gains in reading or math. Impressively, educational and career technical training completion rates during an average nine-month enrollment at Job Corps are double the on-time graduation rates for two-year and four-year colleges (see Figures 2 and 3).<sup>9</sup>

Not only does Job Corps graduate a significantly higher percentage of students in less time, 82.3 percent of graduates in program year 2013 obtained employment, enrolled in higher education, or joined the military.<sup>10</sup> Job Corps' commitment to producing high student outcomes has helped it become one of the most successful youth training programs. Job Corps clearly works, has built a strong foundation of success, and is ready to meet the nation's economic and workforce needs for years to come.

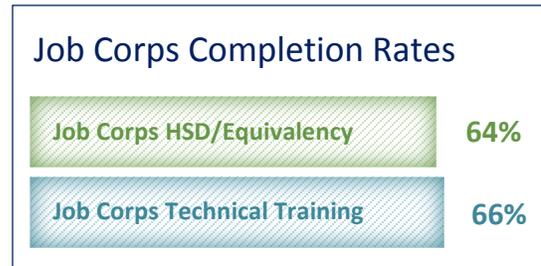


Figure 2. Sources: Job Corps OMS Center Report Card, PY2013

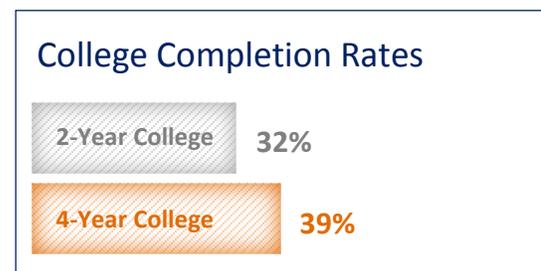


Figure 3. Sources: National Center for Education Statistics

# Capitalizing on Emerging Workforce Opportunities

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Just as Job Corps adapted after the passage of the Workforce Investment Act to better align with the needs of employers, it must continue to adapt to meet the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to prepare students for the demands of today's workforce.

WIOA places more emphasis on serving the needs of employers, reflecting the unique demands of today's economy. Millions of experienced workers are retiring at a time when the economy continues to grow and add new jobs. Meanwhile, millions of youth are out of work and out of school and lack the education, training, and skills employers need.

## Nearly 55 Million Job Openings Through 2020

Having now come through the worst of the effects of the Great Recession,<sup>11</sup> the U.S. economy continues to grow and is projected to add 24 million new jobs by 2020.<sup>12</sup> Although baby boomers have been working longer than in past generations, their labor participation rate is expected to fall from 80 percent to below 40 percent by 2022.<sup>13</sup> Their retirements will create another 31 million job openings through 2020.<sup>14</sup>

With 55 million new and replacement jobs opening up in the years to come, the economy will need every Job Corps graduate, but they will have to have the right education, technical training, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. Despite the growing demand for new workers, many companies and business leaders see a gap between the skills they need to fill jobs and the skills young people are bringing to the workforce. A 2013 Adecco survey found that 92 percent of executives in the United States and Canada are concerned about a skills gap.<sup>15</sup> Nearly 44 percent of respondents reported difficulty in filling jobs due to a lack of skills like communication and critical thinking.<sup>16</sup>

The economy will need every Job Corps graduate, but they will have to have the right education, technical training, and 21st Century skills.



## College- and Career-Ready Students Needed to Fill Jobs

There are over 6.5 million youth ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and out of work, many because they lack the skills needed for college and career success.<sup>17</sup> For the past few years, the push to ensure all youth are both college and career ready has been at the heart of many discussions on education and workforce development, including the development of the Common Core and other state standards.<sup>18</sup> Traditionally, career technical educational programs like Job Corps have been seen as an alternative to college for many at-risk youth, particularly for minorities, low-income youth, and youth with disabilities.

There is now an increased understanding that college preparation and career technical training should not be mutually exclusive.<sup>19</sup>

Job Corps students may take many paths after they graduate. While some will go directly to college or the military, most will enter the workforce. Others may work while they pursue postsecondary education or will pursue postsecondary education at a later point. Whatever path graduates choose, Job Corps must prepare them “with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to move adeptly between the workplace and postsecondary institutions as shifts in the economy, the future job market, and job requirements dictate.”<sup>20</sup>

College- and career-ready Job Corps graduates leave with a high school diploma or equivalent, the levels of proficiency in math and reading required by their chosen trade, and multiple nationally recognized certifications in that trade. They also possess the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills to connect with the workforce and continue on the road to self-sufficiency.



*Students at the Inland Empire Job Corps in California use skills they acquired in the classroom at a construction job site where a home is being built.*

## Job Corps for the Future Plan

Job Corps is positioned well to bridge the gap between what employers are demanding and what young workers currently bring to the workforce. The future of Job Corps must be wholly aligned with the needs of employers to put students firmly on the road to self-sufficiency. The following plan outlines the education, skills, and expertise employers need to fill the most in-demand jobs. The recommendations in this plan are aligned with the higher standards of WIOA and the priorities of the National Job Corps Director.

### Improving Academic Outcomes

 **Legislation** - Increased focus on intensive academic opportunities and postsecondary education

 **National Priorities** - Standards-based education, training, and employment programs; modernization and reform of policies

Today’s employers are demanding higher levels of education and academic achievement than ever before. By 2020, an estimated two thirds of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education (see Figure 4).<sup>21</sup> Out of every 100 jobs, 11 will require a graduate degree, 24 will require a bachelor’s degree, and 30 will require an associate’s degree or some postsecondary training. Although an estimated 36 percent of jobs will not require more than a high school education, most of those jobs do not pay a living wage. Jobs paying self-sustaining wages that don’t require some postsecondary education are becoming increasingly scarce.<sup>22</sup>

Job Corps students who graduate with a high school diploma or equivalent and the necessary nationally recognized credentials in their field will be well poised to fill the 30 percent of jobs requiring some postsecondary education. These jobs will lead to unsubsidized employment and greater self-sufficiency (see Figure 5).

While the economy is demanding higher levels of postsecondary education, over 60 percent of Job Corps students are high school dropouts and many enter the program far behind grade-level in reading and math.<sup>23</sup> Low educational attainment not only affects the employment prospects of students, it impacts the economy as well. If all youth who dropped out of high school in 2011 had graduated, they would have contributed an additional \$154 billion in income into the economy over the course of their lifetimes.<sup>24</sup> Every Job Corps graduate must leave the program with at least a high school diploma.

To improve academic outcomes for Job Corps graduates and instill a commitment to learning needed to connect to the workforce and postsecondary education, Job Corps should develop policies and requirements for centers to:

- Personalize learning for each student by using engaging digital tools
- Hire, train, and develop teachers skilled at connecting with students, and in using engaging learning resources
- Fully integrate career technical and academic curricula to engage students in their learning and improve math and reading proficiency

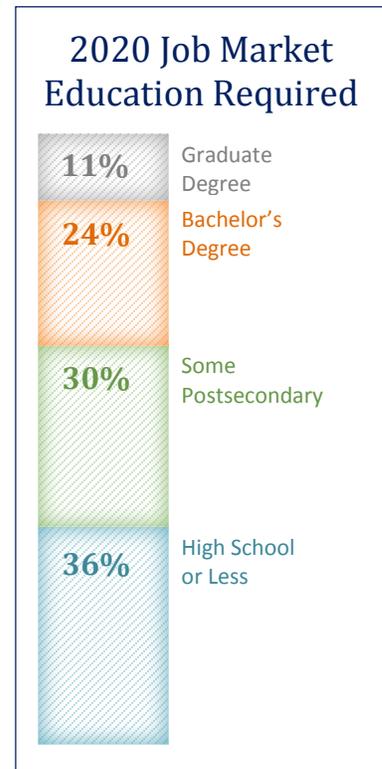


Figure 4. Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

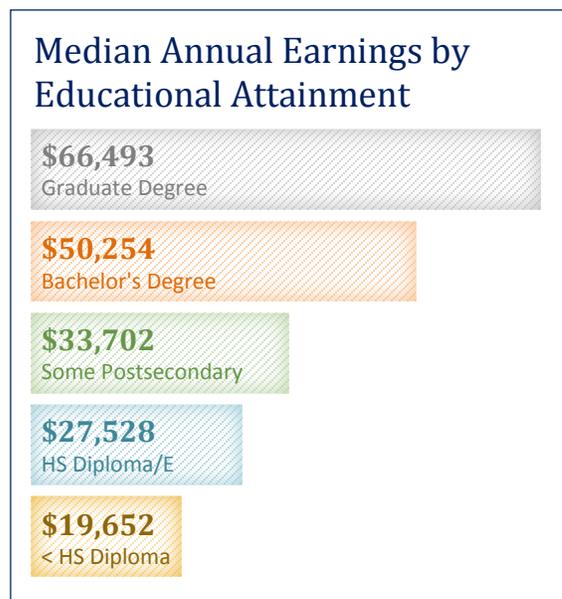


Figure 5. Source: 2009-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

- Expand and strengthen partnerships with postsecondary institutions to share resources, develop articulation agreements, and encourage postsecondary education

By employing these strategies, Job Corps will better provide students with the standards-based education they need to attain their academic credentials.



**Recommendation: Personalize learning for each student by using engaging digital tools**

The digital revolution has given rise to a learning revolution that has the power to prepare more students to be college and career ready,<sup>25</sup> as outlined in the President’s “ConnectED” Initiative.<sup>26</sup> The learning revolution occurs not simply because students have access to technology and online resources. The learning occurs because digital tools can be used to assess students’ learning, provide feedback, and customize the material for *each* student. Effective, personalized digital learning also includes active learning programs that allow students to explore and create.<sup>27</sup>

When used effectively, digital learning has been shown to improve outcomes for at-risk students.<sup>28</sup> In several studies, at-risk students who used computers for active learning projects outperformed other students on standardized tests. In one school, these students outperformed even the advanced placement students who were studying the same material.<sup>29</sup>

For digital learning to be successful in Job Corps, students and teachers must have sufficient access to the internet, computers, and other electronic devices. Job Corps must update its internet security policies to ensure students and teachers have the same access as other educational institutions. Digital learning has the potential to help better prepare Job Corps students to be college and career ready. However, if centers and classrooms are not equipped with the sufficient infrastructure, hardware, and software to be able to fully utilize effective technologies, Job Corps students will be at a significant competitive disadvantage in the labor market.



In June 2013, President Obama announced the ConnectED initiative, designed to enrich K-12 education for every student in America. ConnectED empowers teachers with the best technology and the training to make the most of it, and empowers students through individualized learning and rich, digital content.



Job Corps must be part of the digital learning revolution to better prepare Job Corps students to be college and career ready.

Job Corps must be part of this learning revolution by first, investing in the infrastructure necessary to use effective digital learning programs. Beyond this basic investment in infrastructure, Job Corps needs to invest in developing teachers who can use both technology and active learning models to improve student academic programs so that each student leaves with a high school diploma or equivalency.



***Recommendation: Hire, train, and develop teachers skilled at connecting with students, and in using engaging learning resources***

Of all the elements that contribute to the success of Job Corps and its students, effective and passionate teachers are the most critical. These teachers must connect with and engage a student population who have significant educational, emotional, employment, and life skills barriers. Research suggests that teacher quality is the most important predictor of learning gains among students.<sup>30</sup> This is especially true for students entering Job Corps.

Job Corps needs a way to identify and utilize outstanding teachers within the Job Corps community, similar to the public school system. Teachers who are effective in raising students' achievement levels, who excel at an active learning model, and who have incorporated digital tools into their classrooms should have an opportunity to share their knowledge with others. This will allow teachers to develop and disseminate best practices to improve student outcomes.

Attracting good teachers during the hiring process is critical. Job Corps competes for talent with the public school system, where teachers typically work in the classroom for nine months of the year and have opportunities both during the school year as well as during the summer to participate in teacher development activities. Job Corps teachers are required to work year-round with little time built into their schedules for development. Additionally, there is a significant pay disparity between public school teachers and their Job Corps counterparts. To better prepare students to meet the higher educational standards of today's workforce, the program must be competitive in hiring talented teachers.



***Recommendation: Fully integrate career technical and academic curricula to engage students in their learning and improve math and reading proficiency***

One of the best strategies for engaging students in active learning is to provide relevance and context to the subject matter.<sup>31</sup> For example, a carpentry student will be more willing to master the concept of fractions if fractions are presented as critical to reading a tape measure. Students in healthcare have a vested interest in statistical analysis if they understand that tracking a patient's blood pressure over time and against standardized averages is a key component of their future careers.

The concept of career technical education is that there are no barriers between academic learning and technical training. Rather, academic concepts are presented in the way a student would encounter on the job in their field.

Centers must provide time for collaboration by academic and technical training instructors to develop seamless curricula that promote both academic and technical skills acquisition. Capitalizing on students' interest in their chosen career field to teach basic academic skills will improve student academic outcomes, such as high school diploma attainment, and bolster students' success as they enter the labor market.



***Recommendation: Expand and strengthen partnerships with postsecondary institutions to share resources, develop articulation agreements, and encourage postsecondary education***

Given the value of postsecondary education to both employers and workers, Job Corps must do more to prepare students for success in their education by expanding and strengthening partnerships with community colleges and other career technical education programs. Effective partnerships raise student expectations about their own learning and expose them to postsecondary education through frequent campus visits, interactions with students and instructors, and the opportunity to sit in on classes.<sup>32</sup>

These partnerships should also focus on forming articulation agreements with community colleges that allow students to earn college credit at the center for completed academic and technical skills training and then transfer that credit to college upon graduation from Job Corps.<sup>33</sup>

Partnering with community colleges and other career and technical education programs creates a mutually beneficial relationship in which Job Corps centers and colleges can share resources. Most importantly, these partnerships can instill in students the expectation that they can and will succeed in their education throughout their lives.

### **Improving Technical Training and Placement Outcomes**

**WIOA**

**Legislation** - Increased focus on intensive career and technical education opportunities

leading to economic self-sufficiency; focus on serving the needs of employers



**National Priorities** - Standards-based education, training, and employment programs; nationally recognized credentials; modernization and reform of policies; program and data quality

Educational attainment alone will not be enough for Job Corps graduates competing for the 55 million jobs opening up in the coming decade. They will need to demonstrate that they have the right technical skills and competencies to perform the job. They need to possess industry-recognized credentials. Even when positions are going unfilled, employers have been reluctant to hire workers in need of training.

Only 22 percent of companies in a recent Accenture survey said they would consider hiring someone who requires additional training when they have had trouble filling the position.<sup>34</sup> Employers want to hire workers who can prove they can perform the required tasks.

Meeting employers' demands for a more highly trained workforce will require Job Corps to develop more partnerships with employers in high-growth, high-demand industries. Current employer partnerships must be redefined and strengthened. To provide Job Corps graduates with the in-demand technical skills they will need to launch and grow their careers, Job Corps should develop policies and requirements for centers to:

- Develop internships and apprenticeships in all high-demand industries to create a pipeline of talent between Job Corps and employers
- Develop a rapid-response system to change career technical training offerings quickly to meet employer demands
- Expand nationally recognized credential attainment to improve connectivity to the workforce
- Significantly enhance employer partnerships to provide employer-driven recruitment, training, and placement services



***Recommendation: Develop internships and apprenticeships in all high-demand industries to create a pipeline of talent between Job Corps and employers***

There are currently several examples of successful Job Corps and industry partnerships that provide a pipeline of talent to employers, such as the one developed with Ingalls Shipbuilding in Mississippi. As a result of this partnership, Ingalls has enhanced the advanced welding curricula taught at the center to specifically meet their requirements. Graduates of the advanced welding program are career ready and have been employed by Ingalls at a starting wage of up to \$24 an hour.

Another effective example is Job Corps' partnership with Walgreens, which offers pharmacy technician programs at several centers. As a result of this partnership, students are training as if they are already Walgreens' employees, learning key components of their corporate culture and learning firsthand the technical requirements of being a pharmacy technician. In turn, Walgreens has hired hundreds of Job Corps graduates.

More apprenticeships in all high-demand industries, such as IT and healthcare are needed.



While these and other partnerships have been effective in producing career-ready graduates for these employers, they must be expanded. More internships and apprenticeships in all high-demand industries, such as IT and healthcare, are needed to create a pipeline of talent between Job Corps and employers.



**Recommendation: Develop a rapid-response system to change career technical training offerings quickly to meet employer demands**

With the rapid pace of change in today’s marketplace, Job Corps must be more nimble in bringing on new career technical training programs. When a high-wage industry announces job shortages, centers must be able to quickly respond by identifying and partnering with employers to develop new training programs and credential offerings to meet the need.

There are successful examples of flexible career technical training systems that Job Corps can replicate. The public Lone Star College System in Texas, recognizing employer demands for updated skills, has developed rapid-response programs that produce new certificate offerings in less than two months.<sup>35</sup> To better adapt to the rapidly changing needs of employers, Job Corps must be just as responsive in bringing training to centers that will prepare students for the most in-demand jobs.

The public Lone Star College System in Texas, has developed rapid-response programs that produce new certificate offerings in less than two months.



**Recommendation: Expand nationally recognized credential attainment to improve connectivity to the workforce**

Job Corps graduates who obtain nationally recognized credentials, participate in an internship, and go to work in their field are on track for career success and self-sufficiency. Depending on the industry, credentials provide career pathways that may lead to better wages than a college degree. For example, some credentials in business, technical, and health fields lead to higher earnings than bachelor’s degrees in service and education fields.<sup>36</sup>

While opportunities to obtain nationally recognized credentials are currently offered at Job Corps, more must be done to ensure that training is offered in fields that yield the highest wages. Research has found that credential holders working in their field of study earn almost \$11,000 dollars per year more than workers with only a high school diploma. However, credential holders not working in their field of study are no better off than high school graduates.<sup>37</sup> Figure 6 highlights some of the highest paying, most in-demand careers that students can train for at Job Corps centers.



## In-Demand Jobs Through 2022

Job Corps Industry Sector	Job Title	Example of Job Corps Credentials Offered	Job Openings through 2022	2012 Median Annual Wage
Advanced Manufacturing	<b>Welders</b>	American Welding Society Certifications	108,500	\$36,300
Construction	<b>Building Maintenance Mechanic &amp; Repair Workers</b>	HVAC Fundamentals HBI	379,700	\$35,210
	<b>Carpenters</b>	Carpentry Fundamentals	329,200	\$39,940
	<b>Electricians</b>	Electrical Fundamentals HBI	224,600	\$49,840
Business & Finance	<b>Bookkeeping, Accounting &amp; Auditing Clerks</b>	Bookkeeping Fundamentals	370,000	\$35,170
	<b>Health Care Secretaries</b>	Electronic Health Records Specialist	252,500	\$31,350
Health Care	<b>Medical Assistants</b>	Certified Clinical Medical Assistant/CNA	269,900	\$29,370
	<b>Licensed Practical Nurses</b>	LPN Certification	363,100	\$41,540
Information Technology	<b>Computer User Support Specialists (Help Desk)</b>	A+ Certification	196,900	\$46,420
Automotive & Transportation	<b>Automotive &amp; Machine Repair Mechanics</b>	UAW-LETC Certificate of Completion	237,600	\$36,610
	<b>Heavy &amp; Tractor Truck Drivers</b>	CDL	464,700	\$38,200

*Figure 6. Source: MTC Institute Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections, 2012-2022*



***Recommendation: Significantly enhance employer partnerships to provide employer-driven recruitment, training, and placement services***

As the partnerships with Ingalls and Walgreens demonstrate, centers have had success in using employer-developed training programs and apprenticeships. Now, Job Corps should go one step further and recruit students based on those partnerships. As center staff develop and expand training programs with employer and industry partners, they will be the best equipped to market that employer or industry to potential Job Corps enrollees, train them to meet industry standards, and provide job placement. With this approach, Job Corps students will enter the program with an end goal in mind, including where they will work, what type of work they will be doing, what education, skills, and credentials they will need, and the wages they can expect to earn. They will begin and progress through their training programs with realistic, achievable expectations and launch their careers equipped with the skills and credentials employers need.

Currently, students are recruited, trained, and placed by several different entities who report to many different supervisors. This makes communicating with these entities and delivering effective student services challenging at best. A unified approach to recruitment, training, and placement will allow centers to recruit students directly for their newly developed apprenticeships and employer partners in high-demand industries. Having a direct pipeline approach to recruitment, training, and placement will maximize opportunities to put students on the path to self-sufficiency.

## Improving 21st Century Skills

WIOA

**Legislation** - Increased focus on intensive social and service-learning opportunities



**National Priority** - Standards-based education, training, and employment programs

For Job Corps graduates to be fully prepared to compete in an increasingly competitive global economy, they will need to supplement their educational and technical training with the development of essential life skills needed for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy—often referred to as 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. Employers and policymakers are calling on schools to better prepare youth with skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and self-management.<sup>38</sup>

While such skills have always been an asset in seeking employment, they are now recognized as necessary, and methods are being developed to better teach and measure this skill set.<sup>39</sup> One example is the Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (ATC21S), which is sponsored by technology giants Cisco Systems, INTEL, and Microsoft. ATC21S identifies four broad categories of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills: ways of thinking; ways of working; tools for working; and ways of living in the world (see Figure 7).

### 21st Century Skills

			
Ways of Thinking	Ways of Working	Tools for Working	Ways of Living in the World
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity and innovation</li> <li>• Critical thinking, problem solving, decision making</li> <li>• Learning to learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information literacy</li> <li>• Information and community technology literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizenship</li> <li>• Life and career</li> <li>• Personal and social responsibility</li> </ul>

Figure 7. Source: Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills

To ensure Job Corps graduates possess the 21st Century skills needed for success in their professional and personal lives, Job Corps should develop policies and requirements for centers to:

- Integrate 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills training into Job Corps curricula to maximize student workplace success, job retention, and employer satisfaction
- Provide students opportunities to practice and receive feedback on 21st Century skills to prepare them for the workforce and self-sufficiency



**Recommendation: Integrate 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills training into Job Corps curricula to maximize student workplace success, job retention, and employer satisfaction**

ATC21S and other groups, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, offer many resources on best practices for teaching and measuring 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills in the classroom. Among these resources are modules that, for example, measure students' collaborative problem-solving skills as they work together to solve a common challenge, while contributing knowledge and exchanging ideas.<sup>40</sup>

Activities that allow students to practice 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills should be incorporated into academic and technical training curricula and students should be assessed on mastery of those skills. As students develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills through practical application, they will leave Job Corps better equipped to find and retain a job and positively impact employer satisfaction with Job Corps.



**Recommendation: Provide students opportunities to practice and receive feedback on 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills to prepare them for the workforce and self-sufficiency**

In a 2014 survey of over 400 employers, 94 percent of executives said that they would be more likely to hire a recent graduate who had completed an internship and 69 percent said they would be more likely to hire someone who had completed a service-learning project.<sup>41</sup> Employers in the survey largely agreed that the applied learning gained through these experiences better prepares workers with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills needed for career success.

Some Job Corps students currently have opportunities for internships and service-learning. However, these activities once thought of as “nice to have” are increasingly becoming essential to meeting employers' demands. Every Job Corps student must participate in an internship or service-learning project before graduating from the program. As part of the experience, students should be evaluated on how effectively they demonstrate the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills employers require.

## Cultivating a Safe and Supportive Living and Learning Environment



**WIOA Legislation** - Increased focus on student safety



**National Priorities** - Safety and security; modernization and reform of policies

As Job Corps increases its efforts to prepare every student with the education, technical training, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills needed to achieve economic self-sufficiency, every Job Corps center must cultivate and strengthen a safe and supportive living and learning environment for students. One of the most critical elements of a safe living and learning environment is the degree of student engagement.<sup>42</sup>

Engaged students feel connected to their school, staff, and peers. They feel that staff and other students care about their learning and about them as individuals.<sup>43</sup> Engaged students see their Job Corps experience as important to reaching their educational, career, and life goals. These students spend more time on schoolwork and show behavior traits that employers need, such as persistence, hard work, attention to tasks, and a preference for challenge.<sup>44</sup>

Supportive living and learning environments also have a tremendous impact on safety. An environment in which students are engaged and feel connected to the center and their peers has been shown to protect students against violence, substance abuse, and other risky behaviors.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, students who are not engaged are more susceptible to behaviors that threaten the safety of themselves and others.

An environment in which students are engaged and feel connected to the center and their peers has been shown to protect students against violence, substance abuse, and other risky behaviors.

To cultivate the safe living and learning environment Job Corps students need to achieve higher levels of education, training, and skills, Job Corps should develop policies and requirements for centers to:

- Evaluate the living and learning environment by implementing a comprehensive student engagement process that assesses safety and the extent to which the culture promotes academic and technical credential attainment
- Improve mental health resources and services to provide a safe living and learning environment



***Recommendation: Evaluate the living and learning environment by implementing a comprehensive student engagement process that assesses safety and the extent to which the culture promotes academic and technical credential attainment***

As Job Corps seeks to measure the extent to which centers have safe living and learning environments, a comprehensive approach must be taken that includes student retention, outcomes, disciplinary rates and overall student engagement results. Surveys to measure and assess engagement are common in the workplace to improve productivity and are becoming more widely used in schools as well.<sup>46</sup> One common assessment, The Inviting School Survey, measures how the “five P’s”: people, places, programs, policies, and processes foster a safe, supportive, and engaged learning environment.<sup>47</sup> The Inviting School Survey process includes recommendations on how schools can further improve their learning environment so all students feel they have a stake in school safety.

Job Corps should develop a proactive student engagement process designed to evaluate how the “five P’s” affect the center environment. Strategies to improve engagement should focus on developing:

- People—friendly and caring staff, students, and teachers
- Places—attractive, well-lit classrooms, dorms, and outside areas
- Programs—thriving academic, training, work-based learning, and evening programs
- Policies and processes—fair and easy-to-understand behavior management systems; common sense internet and other policies that significantly impact students



The more engaged students are in their learning, their school culture, and each other, the more likely students are to feel safe and to succeed in their education and training.

While Job Corps currently conducts a student satisfaction survey that assesses students’ feelings of safety at their centers, it doesn’t comprehensively address factors that influence safety.

The more engaged students are in their learning, their school culture, and each other, the more likely students are to feel safe and to succeed in their education and training. Most importantly, engaged students will more likely become the engaged employees that employers so desperately need.



**Recommendation: Improve mental health resources and services to provide a safe living and learning environment**

There is a high prevalence of mental health issues among youth eligible for Job Corps. Of the roughly one quarter of students with documented disabilities in 2013, 84 percent had either a cognitive (learning) or mental health disability.<sup>48</sup> Holistic mental health services that address prevention, early intervention, and treatment are essential to creating a positive learning environment. Strategies to improve mental health services for students have been shown to improve learning outcomes, reduce behavioral problems, and foster a positive learning environment.<sup>49</sup> To fully cultivate a safe and supportive living and learning environment, Job Corps must increase the resources and services available to students with social and behavioral needs, cognitive disabilities, and mental health needs.

## Implementation

Job Corps stakeholders must persist in building on the program’s legacy of continuous improvement by implementing the spirit of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and corresponding national priorities, and responding to the changing labor market landscape.

As employers look to fill millions of jobs in the coming years, the need for highly educated, highly trained, and highly skilled young workers is greater than ever before. Job Corps must continuously seek

to improve student academic and technical credential attainment, workforce connectivity, and postsecondary attainment results to put graduates on the road to self-sufficiency.

To implement these recommendations, all Job Corps stakeholders must increase their accountability for student and program success by taking a “students-first” approach to decision making. An example of successful *students-first* decision making was when the Career Development Services System (CDSS) was implemented in the early 2000s in response to the Workforce Investment Act. The National Director set forth the vision of focusing all aspects of the program on student career success. The vision was clear, policy and funding decisions followed to support the vision, and centers began focusing all of their efforts on student career success. Operators were then selected based upon who could provide the best student career results.

A similar approach must be used to meet the new requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. At the national level, program, financial, and contracting decisions should be made based on what will produce the best student and program outcomes. At the center level, staff must also base their program, financial, and contracting decisions on what will deliver the best student and program outcomes. Job Corps administrators, center operators, and center staff can take greater accountability for program and student success by taking a *students-first* approach to decision making.



The more than 42,000 youth enrolled in Job Corps each year depend on policymakers, administrators, employers, operators, and teachers to work together to prepare them for the millions of opportunities in the workforce. Over 50 years of proven experience, millions of graduates, and thousands of employers have shown that Job Corps works. As Job Corps graduates enter the new economy—with the right education, training, and skills—their road to self-sufficiency looks bright.

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