NONRESIDENTIAL COLLEGE-FOCUSED JOB CORPS

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An Implementation and Outcomes Study of Idaho Job Corps and Job Corps Scholars

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The Authors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of Job Corps' evidence-based, continuous improvement process, between 2019 and 2024, it funded two college-focused, primarily nonresidential, variants of Job Corps designed to be less costly than other Job Corps programs.[1] The pilots also explored how a state or a college would implement Job Corps programs. The evaluation documents how these programs operated and explores whether student outcomes could be enhanced with these Job Corps variants. Most Job Corps students receive up to two years of services—secondary education and occupational training classes—in a residential setting, which includes furnished dorm rooms, meals, medical care, and living allowances. However, in the two pilots—the Idaho Job Corps (IJC) and Job Corps Scholars (JCS) programs—students received their education and training services in credit- or non-credit-bearing classes at a college with intensive Job Corps–provided personal and career counseling (1 counselor: 20 or 25 students rather than Job Corps' usual 1:60–90 ratio) instead of residential services.[2]

The IJC model explored how well a state-managed four-site Job Corps program, offering both high school equivalency (HSE) degrees and occupational training, could serve young people. The State of Idaho used its one Job Corps center to offer housing to a small fraction of its students, but education and training services were mostly provided by a local college. Three completely nonresidential satellite versions of the program were operated out of a geographically diverse set of community colleges.

The 26 JCS programs, spread across an additional 13 states, explored how well an almost entirely nonresidential Job Corps program located at and operated by a college could serve young people if the program focused on providing training, rather than HSE classes. Each college was allowed to add its own admission criteria (such as having a high school credential or a minimum math and/or English test score) to the basic Job Corps criteria, create its own program rules, and not offer HSE classes. Training was capped at 12 months (compared to Job Corps' usual 24 months).

The key research questions for the study were: How do students in these pilot programs compare to other Job Corps students? How did the programs provide education and training services? What were the short-term outcomes for pilot students? Combined, the two models offer lessons from the experiences of 2,680 young people (585 in IJC and 2,095 in JCS) across 30 geographically diverse examples of Job Corps programs that partnered closely with or were run by colleges.

1 The pilot operators were given between $13,500 and $15,000 per expected enrollee (Office of Job Corps, 2024a; and U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a). In program year 2019 the average cost per enrollee was $44,001, including regional and national costs not included in the pilot grants (Office of Job Corps, 2019b).

2 The college-located programs were run by four or five Job Corps staff members who were embedded in the college.

This implementation and outcome study used mixed methods to arrive at its conclusions. To understand how the programs operated, 30 Job Corps program managers filled out surveys about their sites, and the research team conducted interviews with dozens of staff members and students. To understand students' experiences, the team combined information from program records on education and/or training enrollment, credentials earned, time in the program, and completion and placement with information from focus groups and interviews with students and staff members. To examine employment outcomes, the team analyzed quarterly earnings records from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH), benchmarking the outcomes of the IJC and JCS students to those of other Job Corps enrollees in geographically similar centers who enrolled during the same time—1,999 students in North Central states and 48,384 students in non–North Central states. The outcomes of these reference groups are presented to put the pilot programs' student outcomes into context. The current study was not intended to be an impact evaluation with a valid comparison group.

Both models offered students a wide selection of training options, more than 50 on average, because the colleges already had credit- and noncredit-bearing classes in many career and technical occupational tracks. Job Corps students who were educationally qualified to immediately enroll in credit-bearing training classes were particularly successful in earning valuable degrees or credentials.[3]

The two models differed in the type of student they enrolled. IJC, which used existing Job Corps recruiting materials and offered HSE classes as well as training, enrolled students similar in age to other Job Corps students in Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota (18.6 years old versus 18.3) and similarly educated (37.8 percent had a high school diploma or equivalency credential versus 31.0 percent). JCS colleges did not offer HSE classes and developed recruiting materials that emphasized helping students attend college while earning valuable occupational credentials. Its students were older (20.1 years old versus 18.8) and more educated than other non–North Central Job Corps students (85.0 percent had a high school credential versus 39.0 percent).

The study finds that colleges successfully implemented their Job Corps programs. Both IJC and JCS students were more likely to complete the program (62.2 percent and 59.0 percent, respectively) than other Job Corps students (45.2 percent in the latest publicly available year, program year 2019). The median IJC student stayed in Job Corps 2.3 months longer than their counterpart (8.1 versus 5.8 months), while the median JCS student stayed 1.4 months longer than their counterpart (7.3 versus 5.9 months). JCS students could receive occupational training for a maximum of 12 months and up to 6 months of educational classes if they needed it to meet a prerequisite for that training. In IJC, no maximum was imposed on the different types of classes, and students could receive Job Corps services for up to two years.

3 "Educationally qualified" students met a college's educational prerequisites for a course, such as scoring at a particular level on an exam or having passed certain high school courses, such as algebra or geometry.

Six quarters after enrolling, the quarterly earnings of JCS students entering *with* a high school credential were $5,390, while the earnings of the other non–North Central Job Corps students *with* a high school credential were $3,332. The earnings in Quarter 6 for JCS students entering *without* a high school credential reached a similar level, $5,135, while the other non–North Central Job Corps students *without* a high school credential earned $2,337. However, JCS students both with and without high school credentials at enrollment earned more than those in their reference groups even before the program (a statistically significant $664 more for JCS students with a degree and $924 more for those without the quarter before they applied to Job Corps). The IJC students, on the other hand, earned the same as those in their reference groups the quarter before applying to Job Corps. Yet, the IJC students *with* a high school credential upon entry earned $4,073 by Quarter 6, also significantly more than those in their reference groups, other North Central Job Corps students *with* a high school credential ($2,535). However, IJC students *without* a high school credential upon entry did no better than other educationally similar North Central Job Corps students ($3,019 versus $2,894).

This report suggests that these types of college-focused Job Corps variants may be a promising addition to its constellation of program types if Job Corps wants to enroll and serve more of its eligible population. Colleges were able to successfully implement Job Corps, and with the extra support the programs provided, students were able to earn valuable credentials and see strong labor market outcomes. While these earnings outcomes are consistent with the hypothesis that these college-focused Job Corps programs may have helped their students more than other Job Corps programs do, it is unclear how much of the growth in earnings was due to the programs versus other factors. A rigorous impact study is needed to determine if the programs are truly impactful or if they just attracted students who would have achieved better outcomes than average Job Corps students. A future study could also examine the cost and cost effectiveness of these models. IJC showed how a state could both capitalize on its existing Job Corps center facilities but also serve a more geographically diverse set of students by establishing additional programs in colleges across the state. In sum, the results of this study are encouraging with respect to the potential of adding nonresidential college-focused variants to the Job Corps system.

1

Introduction and Description of the Pilot Programs

The Job Corps program serves young Americans (ages 16 to 24) from low-income backgrounds, helping them complete their high school education and providing them career and technical training (CTT) to prepare them for meaningful employment.[1] Job Corps centers are residential, which includes furnished dorm rooms, meals, medical care, and living allowances, though some offer a nonresidential option to some students that does not require them to reside at the center. Three-quarters of the centers are operated by private organizations, such as Adams and Associates. The other centers are operated by the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of the Interior, or Native American tribes.[2]

Starting in fiscal year 2019, Job Corps funded several pilot programs aimed at exploring if the program's reach and/or student education and employment outcomes could be enhanced by offering its education and training through colleges and diversifying the types of operators that provide Job Corps services, with colleges and state governmental agencies managing the programs.[3] As part of this effort, a four-site state-managed program in Idaho, Idaho Job Corps (IJC), and 26 college-run Job Corps Scholars (JCS) programs were created.[4] The State of Idaho piloted a model where Job

1 To qualify as low-income, an applicant must meet one or more of the following criteria: is on public assistance, has income below the poverty level, is experiencing homelessness, is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, or is a foster child. Applicants must also meet one or more of the following criteria: is basic skills deficient; did not graduate from high school; is homeless, is a runaway, is in foster care, or has aged out of foster care; is a parent; requires additional education; or is a victim of severe forms of trafficking in persons (Office of Job Corps, 2024b, Exhibit 1-1).

2 Edgerton, 2022; U.S. Department of Labor, 2019.

3 Edgerton, 2022.

4 Initially, a third non-college pilot, Louisiana's Job Challenge, was part of the study. This program offers graduates of the National Guard Youth Challenge the opportunity to participate in a National Guard–operated Job Corps program. Challenges the program was experiencing, however, precluded their participation in the study.

Corps education and CTT services would be primarily delivered by four geographically dispersed Idaho community colleges that already offered these classes non-residentially. At one of the four sites, the State paired its one Job Corps center, Centennial, with the local community college. This site provided housing to a small number of students who had significant housing challenges. All other students were nonresidential. In the JCS model, colleges were the operator, delivering Job Corps services primarily in a nonresidential manner. These pilots provide Job Corps with valuable lessons on how new types of operators run a Job Corps program.

In addition, these pilots offer lessons about what happens when Job Corps programs cut costs by both relying on the education and training infrastructure that exists in colleges and substituting intensive personal and career counseling for all or most of the residential services typically provided.[5] For more than a decade, Job Corps has been partnering with colleges located close to their centers, often allowing some Job Corps students to take advanced classes at a partner college when a center does not offer them.[6] In 2016, Job Corps funded a demonstration project designed to provide every student, not just advanced students, the opportunity to attend college, earn college credits, and obtain advanced credentials.[7] The residential Job Corps center provided students ages 16 to 21 with a college and career-academy experience—offering center-based high school–level education and support, combined with college-based training for all students. The evaluation of that demonstration project showed not only that this model was effective at increasing the amount of education and training students received, especially for enrollees who had a high school credential or who scored at a ninth-grade level in math and English at baseline, but also that this college-focused program expanded Job Corps' reach into its target population, attracting the more college-oriented segment of the Job Corps–eligible population who did not otherwise apply to Job Corps.[8] To learn more about how alternative types of partnerships with colleges would affect recruitment, the delivery of Job Corps services, and student outcomes, Job Corps commissioned this implementation and outcomes study of two alternative, primarily nonresidential college-focused programs, IJC and JCS.

Given the earlier research, it was expected that, compared to most Job Corps programs, these nonresidential college-focused programs might:[9]

- Enroll more college-oriented Job Corps–eligible students (more deeply penetrating Job Corps' target population),

- Reduce the number of staff members a program needs to hire,

5 The grants to the pilot operators for implementation were set to be between $13,500 and $15,000 per expected enrollee (Office of Job Corps, 2024a; and Employment and Training Administration, 2019). The average cost of Job Corps nationwide in Program Year 2019 was $44,001 (Office of Job Corps, 2019).

6 Grossman, Olejniczak, and Klerman, 2021.

7 Klerman et al., 2021.

8 Klerman et al., 2021.

9 Klerman et al., 2021.

- Offer students more CTT tracks from which to choose (which would make the program attractive to students with broader sets of career interests),
- Enable students to earn college credits, and
- Give Job Corps students access to a wide range of resources available from the college, with no need to hire additional Job Corps staff.

On the other hand, because the programs were largely nonresidential, students would have to:

- Be responsible for their own room and board,
- Have reliable transportation to and from the program, and
- Juggle their program commitments (classes and meetings) with shifting work and family responsibilities.

Because students would mostly be taking classes offered to the broader student body, the instruction might be less appropriate for the Job Corps students, and instructors might not appreciate the extra barriers many of these students face compared to standard college students. These obstacles could well cause students to drop out at higher rates than in other Job Corps programs. To offset these hurdles, more intensive personal and career counseling was provided, and the programs offered transportation assistance. IJC offered housing at the state's existing Job Corps center, the Centennial Center, to students with particularly challenging housing barriers, while the college-located JCS and IJC sites tried to connect students with housing assistance services.

To evaluate these variants, rather than jumping into an impact study, the U.S. Department of Labor first piloted the innovations and commissioned this implementation and outcomes study. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine if the models were operationally feasible or possibly needed refinement before embarking on a rigorous study to determine the impacts of the innovations.[10]

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect the United States in March 2020, less than six months after the first IJC students arrived (October 2019) and before the first JCS students could begin (fall semester of 2020).[11] All of Job Corps shut down for at least nine weeks, including the IJC and JCS programs.[12] Instruction resumed remotely at first. By the Fall 2020 semester, only 11 of the 30 programs were still fully remote, with that number dropping in 2021 to 8 in the spring and 4 in the summer. On average, in-person instruction was suspended for 10.3 months. The rapid and unexpected shift to a remote environment significantly affected

10 This approach of piloting an innovation and refining it using information from a formative implementation and outcomes study is similar to the early steps presented in Grossman et al., 2024.

11 Employment and Training Administration, 2019; Employment and Training Administration, 2020b.

12 Office of Job Corps, 2020a.

both the quality of instruction and the appeal of the program to young people, according to interviews conducted with both staff members and students. This report highlights lessons that appear to be related to the structures of the colleges and pilot programs, rather than the pandemic, but readers should keep in mind that these programs operated during an unusual time. Lessons from these programs should thus be considered suggestive, rather than definitive, evidence about what nonresidential college-focused Job Corps programs could achieve in the future. For example, staff members noted that students dropped out of the program when the only classes offered were remotely delivered, having been created hastily by instructors. Similarly, they said that many young people who might have applied did not, either because they felt they wouldn't be able to learn well remotely, or because they could alternatively get a job, based on the booming 2021 labor market.[13] Earnings may also have been affected by the strength of the economy. However, with these caveats in mind, the evaluation suggests that these types of college-focused programs might be a useful expansion of Job Corps' offerings.

The following section describes the two models. The chapter then presents the study's research questions and the methods that were used to answer those questions.

OVERVIEW OF THE TWO MODELS

Both models sought to expand the program's reach, boost outcomes, and lower costs by:

- Operating or administering out of a college or partnering heavily with a college to provide many services,
- Eliminating or significantly limiting residential services that most colleges could not provide, and
- Modifying other aspects of service delivery, such as providing more counseling.

Sixty-five percent of the JCS colleges and the college near IJC's Centennial Center had interacted with Job Corps before, such as by getting referrals from Job Corps, partnering with Job Corps at the local American Job Center, or providing instructors. Only 3 of the 26 JCS colleges and 1 of the 4 IJC colleges had not worked with the Job Corps–eligible students, who must be 16–24 years old, a lawful permanent U.S. resident, meet various low-income criteria, and have needs for further education or training to find or keep a job.[14] Thus, the learning curve for most program implementers was likely to be smaller than if the college had had no experience with Job Corps–eligible students.

13 Edwards, Essien, and Levinstein, 2022.

14 Job Corps has 10 standard eligibility criteria that consider the applicant's income, age, barriers, education and training needs, and disqualifying convictions. For additional detail on these criteria, see Chapter 1 in the *Job Corps Policy and Requirements Handbook* (Office of Job Corps, 2024b).

Exhibit 1 provides an overview of the two models and highlights some of the areas in which the models were expected to modify components of the standard Job Corps program. Narrative descriptions follow.

Idaho Job Corps

The Idaho Department of Labor (IDOL) managed the IJC program, running 4 sites that were expected together to serve 750 students between October 2019 and September 2022.[15] With input from the Idaho Office of the Governor, the IDOL developed a Job Corps model to serve both residential and nonresidential students by:

- Increasing the number of Idaho youth who had access to Job Corps education and training,
- Leveraging existing education and training resources in colleges, and
- Replicating the nonresidential parts of the program throughout the state, with a community college acting as a service base.

The IDOL based IJC out of the state's one existing Job Corps center (Centennial), but most of its education and CTT services were provided by the local college, the College of Western Idaho (CWI), not at the center. Residential services (room and board) were offered at the Centennial Center, but—unlike at a typical center—they were only offered to a minority of students. To enable more people to attend this primarily nonresidential version of Job Corps, three satellite programs were based in geographically dispersed community colleges—the College of Southern Idaho (CSI), the College of Eastern Idaho (CEI), and North Idaho College (NIC). In these satellites, all Job Corps services (education, CTT, and counseling and transition services) were based out of the college.

As in most Job Corps programs, IJC students had up to two years to complete the program. Those who completed IJC could receive up to 12 months of post-completion services (placement and retention services), just like students who complete other Job Corps programs.

Job Corps Scholars

Between June 2020 and September 2023, JCS programs operated in 26 colleges across 13 states—25 were 2-year colleges, and one was a historically Black 4-year university.[16] These programs were to serve young people who met all standard Job Corps eligibility requirements and

15 This section is based on the Job Corps Scholars *Funding Opportunity Announcement*, Employment and Training Administration, 2020a; and Employment and Training Administration, 2019.

16 Office of Job Corps, 2024a. The term "college" will be used throughout this report to cover the 2-year institutions and the one historically Black 4-year institution.

Exhibit 1. Overview of the Standard Job Corps, Idaho Job Corps, and Job Corps Scholars Programs

	Job Corps[a]	Idaho Job Corps (IJC)	Job Corps Scholars (JCS)
Operators	Private for-profit organizations, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs	Idaho Department of Labor (IDOL)	25 community colleges and 1 4-year historically Black university
Locations	Approximately 120 centers across the 50 states and the U.S. territories	4 locations in the State of Idaho: • One site paired a Job Corps center, Centennial, with its local community college. • 3 satellite sites were run out of geographically dispersed community colleges.	26 locations in 13 states: CA, FL (3), GA, IA (2), KY, LA, MI (2), MO (2), NC (3), NY (2), OH (2), OR (2), TX (2), WA, WV (The Job Corps Scholars programs operated entirely out of colleges.)
Participant Eligibility	16–24 years old; lawful permanent U.S. resident; meets various low-income criteria; needs further education or training to find or keep a job[b] (Centers range from 100 to 1,500 students, Berk et al., 2018.)	Job Corps–eligible youth who are Idaho residents (750 students were expected to enroll over the life of the grant.)	Job Corps–eligible youth (16–24 years old) who are new college enrollees and meet the college's admissions criteria for their chosen career and technical training (CTT) program, such as having a high school credential (Each college was expected to enroll 80 students.)
Core Services	A full-service residential program providing secondary education (high school equivalency classes), CTT training and support for generally up to 24 months at the center	Up to 24 months of services (same as other Job Corps programs) but provided non-residentially, mostly at the college (A small number of participants could live at the Centennial Center.)	CTT classes for no more than 12 months; if required to meet CTT track standards, up to 6 months of secondary education remedial classes (developmental education, not high school equivalency classes)
Engagement Strategies	Personal and employment counseling (caseloads are often large, 60–90 students per counselor), residentially provided life skills classes	Counseling/advising staff, with a 25:1 limit on caseloads; life skills classes	Counseling/advising staff with a 20:1 limit on caseloads; life skills classes
Duration of services	Generally, up to 24 months of program services and up to 12 months of post-program employment services	Up to 24 months of program services and up to 12 months of post-program employment services	Up to 12 months of CTT, up to 6 months of developmental classes (if needed to enroll in CTT), and up to 12 months of employment counseling and placement services
Environment	Mostly residential, but some nonresidential students	Nonresidential except for some residential services at the Centennial Center	Nonresidential, except for a few students in 5 of the colleges
Period of Operation[c]	Operated since 1964 by contractors with 2-year contracts	October 2019–September 2022	June 2020–September 2023

SOURCE: Authors-designed exhibit based on information collected from the programs and from the Job Corps *Policy and Requirements Handbook* (Office of Job Corps, 2024b).

[a] Information from Edgerton, 2022; and Office of Job Corps, 2024b.

[b] Office of Job Corps, 2024b, Exhibit 1-1.

[c] The programs launched during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected their start-up and their operations throughout their contracts.

were not currently enrolled in the college.[17] In addition, JCS programs could also require students to meet the college's existing admissions standards, such as having a secondary credential or a particular level of academic competence. Over 60 percent (61.5 percent) required a high school diploma or equivalency credential. The DOL asked each college grantee to provide these Job Corps–eligible youth with CTT classes in programs that could be completed in 12 months or less. College grantees also had to offer students intensive counseling services to support and facilitate their training and career success, as well as up to 12 months of employment placement assistance. While a student's maximum time in CTT could not exceed 12 months, JCS programs could fund up to 6 additional months of developmental (remedial education) coursework when this was necessary for a student to qualify for their chosen CTT track. While JCS students had to fulfill all Job Corps eligibility requirements, the colleges could also impose their own existing CTT requirements, such as already having a high school credential or a given level of academic proficiency.

Participating in the Job Corps pilot would be attractive for colleges because JCS students would have access to more financial and in-kind support than typical community college students, making them more likely to remain enrolled for longer than they would have without this level of support.

Comparison of the Models to the Usual Residential Model

The structure of the two pilots differed from that of the usual Job Corps center in several ways. In both models:

- Residential services were not required nor expected.
- Caseloads for counseling and advising services were limited (no more than 20 students per counselor in IJC, and no more than 25 in JCS).[18]

But in addition for the JCS programs:

- A college was able to impose additional admissions eligibility requirements, such as having a high school credential;
- CTT services were limited to a maximum of 12 months;[19]

17 Job Corps has 10 standard eligibility criteria that consider the applicant's income, age, barriers, education and training needs, and disqualifying convictions. For additional detail on these criteria, see Office of Job Corps, 2024b, Chapter 1.

18 Job Corps contracts have no stated caseload maximum. The last study reporting caseload size found the average counselor's caseload ranged from 60 to 80 (Johnson et al., 1999).

19 Employment and Training Administration, 2020a. In addition, JCS students had to be a new enrollee at the pilot college (i.e., not currently admitted or attending classes and not a transfer student). However, those who had been previously admitted but were not currently enrolled were eligible. Job Corps Scholars Eligibility Criteria webinar, Office of Job Corps, 2020b, minute 36.

- If students needed stronger math or English Language Arts skills to qualify for their CTT classes, colleges could offer the student up to 6 months of developmental coursework; and finally,

- Job Corps' student code of conduct and disciplinary policy did not apply to JCS students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

To draw lessons from the pilots about how Job Corps could partner with colleges in the future, the evaluation addressed research questions in seven main areas:

1. What staff did the programs hire, and how did that differ from standard Job Corps programs?

2. How did the programs recruit students?

3. Using those recruitment strategies, what types of students enrolled in these college-focused Job Corps programs, and how does this compare with standard Job Corps students?

4. How do college-focused Job Corps programs provide education and training services?

5. How do these college-focused Job Corps programs build a supportive environment that helps Job Corps students achieve their program goals?

6. For how long did students engage in the programs, and how does this compare with other Job Corps students?

7. What are the short-term outcomes (such as credential receipt and earnings) for students, and how do those outcomes compare to those of other Job Corps students?[20]

To address these research questions, the study team collected data from the following sources (Box 1 provides more detail on these data and the methods used to analyze them):

- A program survey of the 26 JCS and 4 IJC program directors/managers (May 2022),

- Administrative records on student activities and achievements from both Job Corps and the pilots,

- National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) earnings data collected on pilot and non-pilot Job Corps students who enrolled in Job Corps from October 2019 through March 2023,

- Monthly phone calls (30–60 minutes) with the IJC manager,

20 Originally, the implementation and outcomes study included a cost study, but because the pandemic profoundly affected how the programs recruited and delivered services, the cost study was dropped.

BOX 1

Data Source Details and Methods

Data on program activities and achievements were obtained for all the IJC (585) and JCS (2,095) students from the Employment and Training Administration's Grant Data Center. Comparable data was pulled from the Job Corps Data Center for their reference group (see Box 2). The reference group for IJC were the 1,999 Job Corps students who enrolled in four other North Central states' centers at the same time as the IJC students (between 10/1/2019 and 12/31/2022). The reference group for JSC were the 48,384 Job Corps students who enrolled in the non–North Central states' centers at the same time as the JCS students (between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023). Means of all non-missing variables by group (IJC, JCS, and the two reference groups) were calculated. T- or chi-squared tests between all the groups' means were run to determine whether differences were statistically significant. Means and frequencies of the survey data were also calculated by pilot. Statistical tests were not conducted on these data because the samples were too small.

National Directory of New Hires data provides employment and earnings data from July 2020 until May 2023. Earnings data are inflation-adjusted to Quarter 4 2023 using the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Areas. Within that window, the study examined data from the quarter before a student enrolls, (Q(-1), through six quarters after the enrollment quarter (Q0). To ensure that the sample was consistent across the quarters, only individuals that had all six follow-up quarters were included in the analysis. The data covers the 228 IJC and 298 North Central Job Corps students who enrolled on 10/1/2019 or later and the 963 JCS and 9,074 non–North Central Job Corps students who enrolled on 8/1/2020 or later.

Qualitative data was thematically coded by a small team that met regularly to conduct inter-rater reliability checks to ensure consistent coding among team members and to refine or expand the codebook based on themes that emerged from the data. The common themes seen across programs are the ones highlighted in the report.

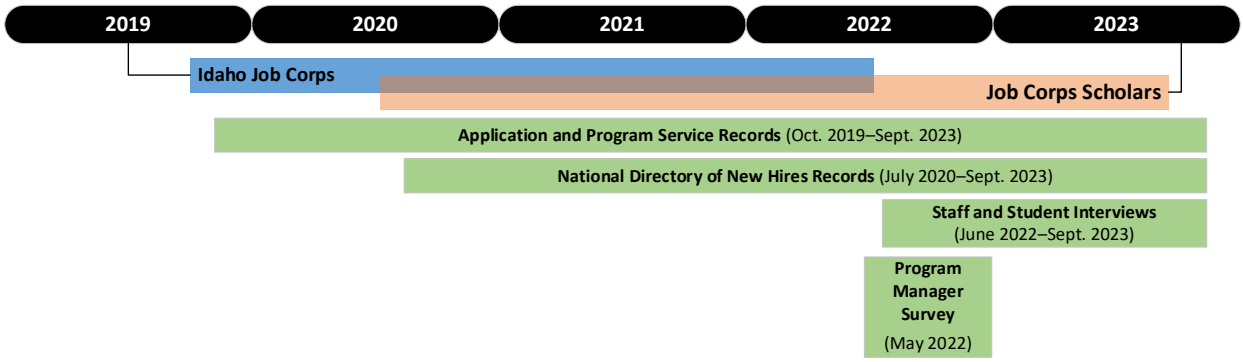
- Five one-time exploratory phone calls with JCS site managers completed prior to the design of the program survey to understand the range of services being offered,
- Quarterly narrative reports submitted by the pilots, and
- Site visits to 5 JCS sites, the IJC's Centennial Center, and 1 IJC satellite program in spring and summer 2023, as well as additional calls with staff at 4 other sites to:
    - Interview (virtually or in person) 70 staff from the programs, the colleges, and employers (from 9 JCS sites and 2 IJC programs),
    - Conduct two in-person focus groups, 1 with 8 students and the other with 5, and

- Have virtual interviews with 31 other program students (from 5 JCS sites, the IJC's Centennial Center, and one IJC satellite program).

A mixed-method analysis strategy was applied to collect and analyze the relevant data. The study team iteratively analyzed the data and triangulated between qualitative and quantitative data to surface potential themes. The analyses provided a deeper understanding of the programs—how they operated, the challenges they faced, and the types of practices implemented to ameliorate problems. For example, information gathered from the one-time exploratory phone calls with JCS sites provided the foundation for a survey of center directors/managers. To ensure the team visited colleges that spanned the range of implementation choices, data from that survey and administrative Job Corps data pulled in March 2023 were used to select sites to be visited. The Job Corps data pulled in June 2023 were used to refine the qualitative codes used to tag and analyze site visit information.

Exhibit 2 provides a timeline showing when the pilots operated and when the research activities occurred.

Exhibit 2. Timeline of the Job Corps Scholars and Idaho Job Corps Programs and Research Activities



SOURCE: Authors' illustration based on information collected from the programs.

REPORT STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 describes how the pilots staffed their Job Corps programs and recruited students. Chapter 3 examines how the pilots provided education and training, considering how services may have differed from training offered by standard Job Corps centers. Chapter 4 describes what the pilots did to support students in their quests to complete their education and training programs. Chapter 5 presents some short-term outcomes for pilot students and benchmarks them to the outcomes of standard Job Corps students. Chapter 6 offers key lessons learned and implications for policy.

2

Hiring Staff and Recruiting Participants

This chapter describes how the nonresidential college-focused Job Corps programs staffed their programs and what types of students they were able to recruit.

STAFFING

A Job Corps center has many types of staff: recruitment staff, career counselors or case management staff, employment counselors or placement staff, secondary education instructors, CTT instructors, life skills instructors, mental health counselors, residential staff, and security staff. Because the JCS program and the IJC satellite sites were nonresidential and used the training infrastructures of the partner colleges, it was anticipated that these programs would need fewer dedicated staff members than residential Job Corps centers.

Indeed, the number of program staff was much smaller in the programs located at colleges than at Idaho's one residential center, Centennial. The IJC Centennial Center that provided housing for some of its participants—but not instruction—had about 17 staff members, while the 3 IJC college-based satellites each had 5. Satellite IJC staff included a program coordinator, a workforce consultant (who provided both recruitment and placement services), personal and career counselors, and a student activities/health coordinator. These satellite sites provided students with secondary education classes, CTT, and other services typically offered at a Job Corps center, such as tutoring and health services, by directing students to the existing services offered at the local college. The Centennial Center, on the other hand, had set up a formal partnership with its local college (CWI) to offer participants education, training, and some support services, but center staff also provided many support services.

The staffing at the college-based JCS programs closely resembled the three IJC satellites, averaging 4.8 staff members across the 26 colleges. Each of the JCS sites typically had a program manager

or coordinator, one or two personal and career counselors, and one or two employment counselors. Like the IJC satellite sites, all education and training services and many support services were provided by the college or, if the college did not have the needed service, by a referral organization. Five JCS programs also had a designated recruitment staff member, but most JCS programs asked all staff to help with recruitment and enrollment. One interviewee at a site without a designated recruitment staff member said the ability to recruit more participants would be greatly improved if there was someone dedicated to recruitment.

Hiring for new positions in a time-limited program posed challenges. However, the programs that operated out of a college (JCS and the IJC satellite sites) could hire from a pool of individuals who were already educating and training young people: existing college staff. Job Corps staff members interviewed during site visits noted that hiring from the college was quite useful as these staff members brought with them knowledge of college resources and procedures. Thus, they needed less training and could better direct students on how to access college services.

The staffing of the Centennial Center was slightly different than most Job Corps centers because the multiple IJC sites were managed by the State (IDOL) out of the center. In particular, several IDOL staff members based at the Centennial Center were charged with overseeing both operations at Centennial and staff at the satellite programs. The Centennial program manager also served as the pilot's overall grant lead, interfacing with Job Corps' National Office and with the IDOL. As part of the State team, she had helped develop operating procedures for all sites and was responsible for hiring all staff and signing all contracts at all locations. The education program supervisor and the life skills instructor at Centennial similarly oversaw their respective services at all locations. The IDOL expected that by centralizing management, implementation across the state's programs would be more consistent. As noted later, this does seem to be the case.

Staffing Challenges that Had an Impact on Students' Experiences

Both Job Corps pilots faced significant challenges hiring and retaining staff, as did many employers during and soon after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] In one four-month period in 2021, IJC lost 30 percent of its staff members. In particular, the IJC Centennial Center experienced high turnover of residential advisors and cooks—jobs that paid between $15 and $18 per hour—because wages for these positions were often higher in the private sector. Later, as the grants that funded the two pilots were winding down, resignations at both pilots increased as staff members needed to find jobs before the grant ended.[2]

1 Fuller and Kerr, 2022.

2 An exodus of staff near the end of a grant period is often seen in DOL grants, such as with the Workforce Investment Regional Economic Development Initiative, Aging Worker Initiative, and Reentry Projects.

Staff turnover at the JCS sites and the IJC satellite sites increased the workloads and lowered the morale of the remaining staff, leading students to have fewer long-standing relationships with their counselors. A JCS staff member said turnover also increased delays in services for students. Changes in caseloads for case managers and counselors required students to establish new relationships with other or new staff. One IJC staff member reported that some IJC participants had to change case managers three or four times. In one of the student focus groups, a student noted, "It was hard to figure it out, who your advisor is, if you weren't told." Another added that the program should "keep us up to date with staffing, who's here or who's leaving." A JCS staff member reported that constant staff turnover also led to challenges in reaching students for post-graduation services because the participants did not know the new staff and did not have a relationship with them. Thus, in a later chapter of this report, when the earnings of program students are compared to those of other Job Corps students, the outcomes seen from these programs may be an underestimate of the outcomes of future students in more steady-state situations.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

A study of a prior college-focused Job Corps program, the Cascades College and Career Academy (CCCA), found that the Washington State–based program explicitly helped students earn college credits by enabling them to obtain their training from a college and attracted Job Corps–eligible young people who were better prepared academically, with the CCCA-eligible applicants being 40 percent more likely to have finished high school and 83 percent more likely to have at least 9th-grade proficiency in math and reading than Job Corps students at other geographically similar centers (that is, those in the Pacific Northwest).[3] The study also showed that among CCCA-eligible applicants who were not offered a CCCA position (the control students), only 57 percent enrolled in another Job Corps program, despite being given a referral to another nearby Job Corps center.[4] In other words, this college-focused program attracted and served a different segment of Job Corps' target population—students with different skills, interests, and abilities from those who enroll in non-college-focused Job Corps programs. Therefore, the current implementation and outcomes study investigated if a similar pattern was found for the JCS and IJC programs, finding that, like in the Cascades project, JCS students were more educated (and older) than other Job Corps students. However, the IJC students were more similar to the average Job Corps students. Interviews suggest that the way the programs portrayed themselves to prospective students influenced who enrolled. The next section discusses how the programs recruited students and compares the characteristics of the program students to those of Job Corps students in standard centers in more detail.

3 This paragraph is based on the findings in Klerman et al., 2021, p. 23.

4 Klerman et al., 2021, Executive Summary, page x.

Recruitment Strategies

The study's program survey found that the specific recruitment strategies staff used were fairly similar across the two sets of programs, though their messages differed. The most common recruitment practices in both were the use of posters and flyers, working with the partner college and sometimes nearby community-based organizations, working with school districts and high schools, and encouraging word-of-mouth referrals. However, interviews revealed that IJC staff in their recruitment materials and process portrayed their program as an Idaho version of Job Corps, while JCS staff said their message was to portray their programming as enabling students to enroll in college and take occupationally related classes. In Idaho, program staff relied more heavily on Job Corps' existing marketing system and materials. For example, they prioritized building relationships with the local Job Corps outreach and enrollment advisers across the state. When Job Corps–eligible Idahoans contacted these advisers but were not deemed to be a good fit for residential programs in nearby states, they were often referred to IJC as a nonresidential version of Job Corps. On the other hand, the JCS programs did not use Job Corps' recruitment materials, with each college developing its own marketing materials focusing on earning college credits. JCS staff worked most closely with college admissions departments to get referrals of individuals who had approached the college but had not completed the enrollment process or who were simultaneously enrolled in high school and college (dual-enrollment programs). One JCS student, who had previously been enrolled at the college but had had to drop out, told researchers that when she decided to return, she connected with JCS staff as a result of seeing JCS materials on a table before her departure.[5]

As the programs could only admit students who were not currently enrolled in the partner college, staff also worked to build relationships with high schools and General Educational Development (GED) programs to help with student referral and recruitment. Program staff worked with guidance counselors, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), student success advisors, and community centers to develop referrals. The programs were especially appropriate for those students who were interested in dual-enrollment programs and could take CTT credits through the program while working toward a high school diploma or GED at their high school or through a GED program. Staff visited local high schools to interact directly with students, dropping off flyers or setting up booths or tables to share information. Word-of-mouth referrals also came from the personal and professional networks of staff, who often referred former students or neighbors or recommended the program to colleagues or friends with college-age children.

Staff felt that the pandemic hampered recruitment, especially for IJC, whose recruitment efforts were shut down mid-operations when the Job Corps program closed nationally for nine weeks. Even when the IJC program reopened and JCS started up in June 2020, the lockdown orders in different states and the remote nature of different schools prevented the programs from recruiting in person. In the end, IJC enrolled 585 individuals instead of the 750 they had planned. It took the JCS programs longer to enroll the number of students they wanted, but ultimately they enrolled 2,095, having expected to enroll 2,080.

5 IJC staff also worked with the admissions departments at their partner colleges, but to a lesser degree.

When IJC and JCS staff members were asked what strategies helped increase enrollment, they suggested the following:

- Setting a trial period for students to determine if they were able to keep up with program requirements,
- Offering a large number of occupational training tracks and adjusting them based on student interest, and
- Holding orientations during the application process.

IJC staff members felt that requiring students to sign a commitment form and go through a two-week trial period helped their retention rate. This strategy was used to allow students time to start engaging with staff and determine if they were able to keep up with IJC requirements like clocking in, knowing where to go for classes and meetings with case managers, and tracking activities and assignments.

JCS staff members, whose sites began with limited numbers of training tracks (because they expected to fill classes with only Job Corps students), reported that increasing and adjusting the kinds of occupational training offered to meet students' preferences attracted more students. JCS staff members also often mentioned holding orientations to build interest in the program and motivate students to join by encouraging interested students to see themselves as part of a group. Staff members could provide more information about the program, allowing students and their families to meet program staff and tour the facility. As a result, while JCS programs originally expected to enroll students in formal cohorts, colleges dropped cohort enrollment over the first year of implementation to increase their recruitment numbers and avoid losing students should their participation be delayed by having to wait for an enrollment cohort to accumulate.

Characteristics of Enrolled Participants

This section discusses the characteristics of the 585 IJC students and the 2,095 JCS students and compares them to similar Job Corps students. (See Box 2 for definitions of the groups.)

Exhibit 3 shows that the IJC students were fairly similar to other geographically similar Job Corps students, while the JCS students were somewhat older and much more likely to have a high school diploma than other geographically similar Job Corps students.[6] As noted in the first chapter, the JCS colleges were allowed to add their own requirements on top of the Job Corps eligibility criteria, with 16 of the 26 colleges requiring students to have a high school diploma or high school equivalency (HSE) credential. Thus, the educational differences are not surprising.

6 In this section, only statistically significant differences ($p = < 0.05$) are discussed.

BOX 2

Benchmarking Pilot Students to Other Job Corps Students

To put the pilot students' characteristics and experiences into context, they are compared to those of other Job Corps students. However, Idaho is more rural and demographically more white than the rest of the United States (Frey, 2021). Thus, IJC students are compared to Job Corps students who live in other North Central states that are rural and more white (North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming). JCS students, who live in a more diverse set of states, are compared to the rest of Job Corps, "non–North Central Job Corps students." Note, these are not impact study comparison groups but rather just reference groups.

Exhibit 3. Baseline Characteristics of the Pilot Enrollees and Other Job Corps Students

	Idaho Job Corps	North Central Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars	Non–North Central Job Corps
Average Age (years)	18.6*	18.3	20.1*	18.7
Male (%)	63.4*	72.1	52.3*	64.3
Ethnicity (%)				
Hispanic/Latino	24.8*	8.6	27.7*	20.6
Not Hispanic/Latino	73.7*	91.4	54.0*	79.4
Did not self-identify or missing	1.5*	0	18.3*	0
Race (%)				
Black/African American	3.9*	8.4	31.2*	45.8
White	69.1*	53.7	41.3*	24.3
Other	4.6*	31.5	8.4*	12.3
Did not self-identify	22.4*	6.4	19.1*	17.7
Highest school grade completed between 1 and 12 (average)	10.7*	10.4	11.5*	10.6
Highest educational level completed (%)				
No high school attainment	56.9*	66.6	4.0*	57.2
High school diploma	33.7*	26.7	77.9*	38.2
High school equivalency	4.1*	4.3	7.1*	1.7
Other[a]	5.3*	2.4	11.1*	3.0

(continued)

Exhibit 3. Continued

	Idaho Job Corps	North Central Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars	Non–North Central Job Corps
Basic skills deficient[b] (%)	37.9	NA	15.5	NA
Received no public benefits in the last 6 months (%)	92.0*	27.7	74.7*	43.7
Experiencing homelessness (%)	5.5*	4.1	9.1*	4.8
In or aging out of foster care (%)	2.7*	1.3	2.5*	0.4
Disclosed a disability:				
cognitive, mental health, or other (%)	57.1*	14.0	13.4*	3.4
Sample size	585	1,999	2,095	48,384

SOURCES: Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Job Corps' Center Information System, and the Employment and Training Administration's Grant Data Center. The data covers IJC students and North Central Job Corps students who enrolled on 10/1/2019 or later and JCS students and non–North Central Job Corps students who enrolled on 8/1/2020 or later. N = 2,095 for JCS students, N = 585 for IJC students, N = 1,999 for North Central Job Corps students, and N = 48,384 for non–North Central Job Corps students.
NOTE: * indicates that the pilot group percentage differs statistically (at p = < 0.05) from that of its reference group of Job Corps centers. NA indicates that data is not available.
[a] Includes any prior postsecondary enrollment.
[b] Basic skills deficiency in Job Corps is defined as students who score below Educational Function Level (EFL) 5 in reading and/or 6 in math on the TABE 11/12. No statistical tests against their reference were conducted because standard Job Corps programs do not record this variable at baseline.

The average age of JCS enrollees was 20.1 years old, which was 1.5 years older, on average, than the IJC enrollees and about a year older than other non–North Central Job Corps students. Both sets of programs enrolled more women than other centers. Prior studies found that nonresidential Job Corps programs tend to serve students who are more likely to be female and older because of their family responsibilities.[7]

As noted, 61.5 percent of the JCS programs required a high school credential. But even without that requirement, the programs enrolled mostly individuals with a high school education. Almost four-fifths (77.9 percent) of the JCS enrollees had a high school diploma, and an additional 7.1 percent entered the program with an HSE credential. Among geographically similar Job Corps students, 57.2 percent had no high school credential, and only 38.2 percent had diplomas. Thus, JCS served a different slice of the Job Corps–eligible population than that served by other Job Corps centers. IJC, on the other hand, did not require a high school diploma prior to enroll-

7 Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell, 2008.

ment and provided HSE classes, like other centers. Its student body was more like that of other geographically similar Job Corps students, though slightly more educated.

While the JCS students were older and more educated than other Job Corps students, it was common to hear in interviews that students in JCS had many more needs than typical students in the partner colleges. Given that eligible students must either be on public assistance, have income below the poverty level, be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, be experiencing homelessness, or be a foster child, this higher level of need is to be expected. But Exhibit 3 shows that fewer enrollees in both sets of programs, compared to other Job Corps students, had availed themselves of public assistance in the six months prior to applying to Job Corps, despite being income eligible. Students in both programs were more likely to be experiencing homelessness and more likely to be from the foster care system than other Job Corps students. In addition, pilot students were more likely to disclose that they had a disability, such as a cognitive or mental health disability.

In summary, as was found in the earlier CCCA study, the JCS program attracted and enrolled higher rates of the Job Corps–eligible population that already has a high school diploma or HSE credential than center-based Job Corps programs.[8] Thus, having two types of programs available in the system might enable Job Corps to reach a broader segment of its target population. While this is an emerging pattern, more research should be done to determine if this claim is true. However, while the average JCS student, especially when the college required a high school credential, had completed more education than many other Job Corps students, all JCS students had limited incomes, and some had challenges, such as homelessness or basic skills deficiencies, that would make taking college courses difficult.

8 Klerman et al., 2021.

3

Program Education and Career and Technical Training Services

The DOL's expectation was that the pilot programs would deliver education and training services to eligible young people, along with personal and career counseling and assistance.[1] While the Centennial Center would provide residential services to some students, all other sites, based in colleges, were expected to provide services in a nonresidential manner. The services the programs were expected to provide were:

- Secondary education,
- Postsecondary career and technical training,
- Intensive counseling services to support and facilitate each student's education and training completion and their employment and career success, and
- Employment services.

This chapter discusses how Job Corps education and training services were provided. The following chapter describes how the pilots delivered the other services.

SECONDARY EDUCATION SERVICES

The IJC model, by design, was more closely aligned than the JCS approach with the usual Job Corps model. The State of Idaho required all IJC sites to offer HSE classes, as all other Job Corps centers do, while JCS programs did not offer secondary education classes. Sixteen of the JCS col-

1 Employment and Training Administration, 2019; Employment and Training Administration, 2020a.

leges chose to require students to have a high school credential upon starting the program. JCS colleges provided secondary education classes (primarily developmental math and English Language Arts classes) to the degree that they were needed for the students to qualify for their training courses.

Half the IJC students (50.1 percent) and 9.9 percent of the JCS students started the program taking secondary education classes (see Exhibit 4). Almost all these students (all but 0.3 percent in IJC and 4.8 percent in JCS) obtained an educational credential.[2] In IJC, most of the credentials obtained were HSE credentials.

The differences in the educational requirements and offerings of the two pilot models led to differences in outcomes. Only 9.9 percent of the JCS participants started the program in a secondary education class. Few of these secondary education enrollees (9.7 percent) earned a high school credential, but 86.5 percent of these JCS students passed the developmental courses and earned college credit or a recognized educational certificate below an associate's degree. On the other hand, 50.1 percent of the IJC students chose to enroll in HSE classes, with 87.4

Exhibit 4. Percentage of Pilot Students Who First Enrolled in Secondary and Postsecondary Education Classes and the Educational Attainment of These Secondary Education Enrollees

	Idaho Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars
Secondary education program	50.1	9.9
Of those, percent receiving:		
High school diploma	8.2	6.3
High school equivalency	87.4	3.4
Associate's degree	7.5	2.9
Other recognized education credential or college credit	19.8	86.5
Did not receive a credential while in program	0.3	4.8
Postsecondary education program	32.1	70.5
Did not enroll in an education program first	17.8	19.6

SOURCE: Employment and Training Administration's Grant Data Center data. The data covers IJC students who enrolled between 10/1/2019 and 12/31/2022 and JCS students who enrolled between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023. N = 2,095 for JCS students and N = 585 for IJC students.

2 Besides high school credentials, students could earn a credential indicating they had passed their needed developmental courses or had achieved a particular English as a Foreign Language score on the TABE test (the Test of Adult Basic Education).

percent of them earning an HSE credential. All but one student earned some sort of educational certificate or degree.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL TRAINING SERVICES

The postsecondary CTT courses offered in both models were similar in many ways to those offered in most Job Corps programs. The most common CTT tracks offered were in health care, information technology, and manufacturing. Both models offered credentials that could be accumulated over time (stacked) and/or classes that supported multiple credentials or goals, such as an industry-recognized credential and a college degree (latticed). The parameters that the DOL placed on the two models, though, differed with respect to the maximum length of training. JCS students could enroll in CTT classes for no more than 12 months, while IJC students could train for up to 24 months (like in many Job Corps programs). What was particularly unique about CTT in the two models was that, unlike training classes at Job Corps centers, many of the pilot training classes were credit-bearing college courses. Thus, participants had opportunities to earn college credits as well as an occupational credential.

The partner colleges provide occupationally focused training in two ways: students (both Job Corps students and others) can take noncredit courses offered by the workforce or continuing education side of the college that lead to an industry-recognized credential, or they can take credit-bearing classes on the academic side and receive an occupational certificate, usually after a one-year program of courses. The credits earned in the latter manner can be applied toward an associate's degree if the student chooses to continue with college. There are advantages and disadvantages to both pathways. For example, noncredit pathways tend to be much shorter and not require a student to have already completed a high school diploma or its equivalent before enrolling. On the other hand, while the credit-bearing pathways are longer, they enable a student to build credits toward a degree.

Each site customized its offerings based on a variety of factors—and changed its offerings over time as those factors changed. In other words, the programs provided the operators the flexibility to tailor training to student demand and the evolving local labor market.

Every site offered many of their existing training programs that fit the requirements of the model, as this was the simplest and fastest route to offering training and classes that met the needs of local industry. While all the IJC sites and 24 of the 26 JCS sites offered credit-bearing classes—as credit-bearing academic programs are the bulk of college offerings—all the IJC colleges and 19 of the 26 JCS colleges also included some of their noncredit programs in their pilot offering. Over half the sites offered all the tracks (credit and noncredit) they had that fit within their model criteria (such as being completable within JCS's 12-month time limit). Others chose a subset of these tracks, weighing various factors, such as the extent of local demand for occupations, the perceived constraints of potential students, the existing demand for various courses, and the ability to find the staff necessary for an expansion of enrollment in existing offerings. The average number of courses a college offered was 54, with a median of 28. Some interviewed JCS staff members indicated that their programs intentionally selected short-term

trainings that students could complete successfully, noting that many of them were taking a college course and envisioning themselves as college students for the first time. Interviewed staff members thought that if students could complete a short-term program successfully and build self-confidence about being a student, they might go on to complete more education or training. Some students stacked these trainings and credentials. For example, students could complete an eight-week Certified Nurse Aide program and then enroll in a phlebotomy class. Another college administrator said that they had decided not to offer trainings that were very heavily oriented toward information technology because they thought the Job Corps students might be at a disadvantage having grown up with limited access to computers and technology.

Only six colleges developed new training tracks. The main impetus to develop a new course was to meet particularly high employer demand through the pilot funding. For example, one JCS college felt that one-year manufacturing tracks would seem too long for many of the program students. So, the site decided to develop new, shorter-length, noncredit training options.[3] One staff member described how the JCS program leadership convened an employer advisory group to determine which skills were most essential for some entry-level manufacturing-related positions. A one-year manufacturing program became a five-week boot camp, which included welding (determined to be universally needed) along with basic components of safety and tool identification, robotics and programming, and forklift, electrical, and other Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety compliance issues. Another JCS college developed an accelerated associate's degree program—an equivalent of two years condensed into one year with summer sessions—to meet high employer demand.

Other colleges included noncredit credential trainings, such as apprenticeships, that later could qualify for college credit if the student subsequently enrolled in a credit-bearing program and the college had the practice of awarding credit for prior learning. For example, IJC's CSI offered apprenticeship programs that, if they subsequently enrolled in a college that awarded credit for prior learning, would leave students only 15 credits shy of receiving their associate's degree. This type of experience, while not credit-bearing, offered students a pathway to gain credit if they subsequently moved into a credit-bearing certificate or degree program.

Over time, colleges that had planned to fill program training classes with cohorts of program students dropped this cohort approach and expanded the number of offerings to better serve students.

Originally, the JCS model expected students to move through training in cohorts. In theory, cohorts would have enabled the JCS students to be in classes together and have the support that cohort training models often provide, as students and instructors get to know each other over the duration of the course and often develop trust and supportive relationships. After attempting to fill a smaller number of courses that would meet students' needs and address enrollment

3 An advantage of noncredit programs is that, because they do not need to be accredited like credit-bearing programs, they can be developed and offered quickly and taught by adjunct instructors who come directly from industry and do not need to be regular college faculty.

targets, the sites discovered that it was more efficient to allow students to join regular classes for general students. In this way, the program could offer a wider selection of tracks and serve students with a broad set of occupational interests without having to hire instructors to teach each of the tracks and fill those classes with Job Corps students.

Ultimately, classes that mixed Job Corps and non–Job Corps students may have benefited students in addition to their programs. Students in both credit and noncredit tracks described making nice connections and friendships with non–Job Corps students in their classes. The interviewed students appreciated getting to know students who were not part of the JCS program. Once the programs made this transition of mainstreaming Job Corps students, program students participated in very few, if any, activities just among themselves. However, in interviews as well as focus groups, the students did not mention that this was problematic or disappointing. They continued to feel the support of the program through their relationships with their personal and career counselors. The students the study conducted interviews with indicated that they also appreciated the opportunity to pursue a much wider variety of training options.

Students in both models who were able to immediately enroll in credit-bearing college courses (rather than first taking secondary education classes or enrolling in noncredit courses) were quite successful in earning a valuable degree or credential. But more of these academically stronger students in IJC were able to earn associate's degrees than those in JCS (60.8 percent versus 8.3 percent).

Exhibit 5 shows that of the 70.5 percent of JCS enrollees who started the program enrolling in credit-bearing college courses, 81.4 percent earned a recognized educational credential (either college credit or a credential) while in the program, and 8.3 percent earned an associate's degree. Only 10.1 percent of these students left without some type of educational credential. Of the 32.1 percent of IJC enrollees (188) who were able to directly enroll in college courses, 60.8 percent (114) of them earned associate's degrees, and 49.2 percent earned credit or other credentials.

These success rates show that many Job Corps–eligible students were successful in credit-bearing college pathways with the supports these programs provided. The percentage of associate's degrees earned in IJC is particularly notable. While Exhibit 3 shows 3.9 percent (23) of the IJC enrollees entered having taken college courses, a total of 19.5 percent (114) of the IJC students ultimately earned an associate's degree. The difference in the rates of associate's degrees between the two models is undoubtedly related to the length of time program students could be enrolled in credit-bearing training courses. Model parameters allowed IJC students to take credit-bearing training for up to two years, while JCS students could take credit-bearing training courses for only one year.

Across all students who enrolled first in secondary or postsecondary education classes, all but one (99.9%) of the IJC students received either a degree, diploma, college credit, or recognized postsecondary certificate while in the program, and 90.4 percent of the JCS students did so.

Exhibit 5. Percentage of Students First Enrolling in Postsecondary Classes and the Educational Credentials They Earned

	Idaho Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars
Percent of Students Enrolling First in Credit-Bearing Postsecondary Classes	32.1	70.5
Of those, percent receiving:		
High school diploma	4.2	0.5
High school equivalency	15.0	0.1
Associate's degree	60.8	8.3
Other recognized education credential or college credit	49.2	81.4
Did not receive a credential while in program	<0.01	10.1

SOURCE: Employment and Training Administration's Grant Data Center data. The data covers IJC students who enrolled between 10/1/2019 and 12/31/2022 and JCS students who enrolled between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023. N = 2,095 for JCS students and N = 585 for IJC students.

In summary, both models were highly successful at providing their students with one or more valuable secondary education and/or postsecondary credentials. Exhibit 6 shows that in JSC, only 9.6 percent of students who enrolled in secondary or postsecondary classes did not earn some education degree or certificate. Most (82.0 percent) of these education enrollees earned a postsecondary certificate (below an associate's degree), but 7.5 percent were able to complete an associate's degree with their 12 months of CTT classes. On the other hand, in IJC, 53.2 percent of students who took education classes earned a high school equivalency credential, 5.0 percent earned a high school diploma, 30.4 percent earned an associate's degree, and 29.7 percent earned a recognized postsecondary certificate.

A question for future research is how many more JCS students would have earned an associate's degree had JCS not imposed the 12-month limit on training but rather allowed Job Corps' more standard 2 years of participation. While 3.9 percent of the IJC students had attended college before enrolling in Job Corps (Exhibit 3), 7.6 percent of the JCS students had. Thus, had the JCS students had more time to take credit-bearing training, perhaps many more would have earned associate's degrees.

Exhibit 6. Percentage of Pilot Students First Enrolling in Any Education Classes and the Educational Credentials They Earned

	Idaho Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars
Percent of Students Enrolling First in Education Classes	82.2	80.4
Of those, percent receiving:		
High school diploma	5.0	1.0
High school equivalency	53.2	0.5
Associate's degree	30.4	7.5
Other recognized education credential or credit	29.7	82.0
Did not receive a credential while in program	0.2	9.6

SOURCE: Employment and Training Administration's Grant Data Center data. The data covers IJC students who enrolled between 10/1/2019 and 12/31/2022 and JCS students who enrolled between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023. N = 2,095 for JCS students and N = 585 for IJC students.

4

Other Program Services to Support Students

Beyond education and training, Job Corps provides students with a wide range of other services that help them stay engaged long enough to finish the classes they intended to complete, as well as providing them with classes that further their ability to be self-sufficient workers. Job Corps centers provide physical and mental health services, various life skills classes, personal counseling, and recreational/social opportunities. Because colleges provide many of those same services to their students, the programs that operated out of a college were expected to be able to provide this same set of services to the Job Corps participants.

To ensure their Job Corps students did not get lost in college and because Job Corps serves those who might have more trouble navigating college than the average college student, both models made intensive personal and career counseling a central component, limiting the caseloads of counselors to 20 students per counselor in JCS and 25 per counselor in IJC.[1] Counselors were expected to assess their students' needs, help them access college, community, and government resources to meet those needs, and help students decide what training program would be most appropriate for them, as well as monitoring their progress through the program.

This chapter describes the personal and career counseling services and other support services the colleges provided to support students and build a sense of community. The chapter ends by examining how the students' length of stay in the pilot programs compared to that of other Job Corps programs.

1 This decision was based on a review of the literature that found that counseling increased the retention of students with high risk factors (Employment and Training Administration, 2020a, p. 10).

COUNSELING, MONITORING, AND SUPPORT SERVICES

A core service of both models was the intensive personal and career counseling provided for the enrolled Job Corps students.

Students expressed that the personal and career counselors were critical to their success.

Students who participated in focus groups described the personal and career counselors as much more than simply staff members who connected them to resources. Rather, they described them more like family, even parents: "[My advisers] worked with me a lot … [from] juggling work … being a single dad to multiple children, to losing a job. They helped me with everything that I needed … to my vehicle breaking down, and then giving me the money to fix my personal vehicle. Everything, everything that I could have needed." Counselors provided many students with emotional support, encouragement, and compassion. Some would even pick a student up to take them to class when the student was in a transportation bind.

Most of the programs set up recurring meetings to support students seeing their counselors regularly. The IJC model required students to attend weekly one-on-one meetings with their personal and career counselors, either in person or virtually. A few IJC staff members and students suggested that the IJC program (which enrolled more younger students, on average, than the JCS program did) had engagement challenges because some of the students were not mature enough to stay focused or persist in their college courses, where learning is more self-directed than it had been in high school. This is one of the reasons that students in IJC were mandated to meet weekly with their career and personal counselor. Nonetheless, one IJC staff member said that many of their students were not as college ready as they had expected.

Only 4 of the 26 JCS sites required such frequent meetings. Twelve sites scheduled one-on-one meetings biweekly, while five scheduled monthly one-on-one meetings. The rest scheduled meetings once a term or on an ad hoc basis. Perhaps the looser requirements were due to the fact that community colleges were used to serving an older (and presumably more mature) student body. Nationwide, the average community college student was 27 years old in 2016, while JCS students averaged 20.1 years old.[2] However, in addition, staff proactively monitored students and met with each other to discuss or conference about challenges faced by particular students.

A challenge that was often mentioned was juggling work and school. Because room and board were not provided by the program, the students had to cover these expenses. One JCS staff counselor suggested that as many as 95 percent of the program students at their site worked while in the program. Sometimes work affected a student's program participation. Work schedules could shift to conflict with a class, or other work obligations could arise to prevent a student from attending class regularly. An IJC staff member noted that even if the program student did show up to class, they were sometimes tired from working long hours. One student said they worked nights to keep their day open for classes but that this was not ideal. This student sug-

2 Beer, 2018.

gested that if they could not have a work schedule that allowed for their program obligations, they would likely have to choose work over school. One JCS student noted that they worked with their counselor to balance work and school schedules.

Monitoring attendance closely was critical to supporting students in a timely manner.

Staff members from both sets of programs noted that when students encountered challenges, it often resulted in attendance issues. Thus, staff at both IJC and JCS closely monitored attendance to identify students who were struggling. Monitoring included checking for tardiness and absences from classes or counselor meetings and noting when staff had to contact a student multiple times to get a response. IJC required students to record (using an app) when they completed certain classes and activities. One IJC staff member suggested that attendance issues were even more common than in most Job Corps programs because the majority of students lived at home, where they were more likely to have to shoulder a variety of responsibilities that affected their program participation.

In addition to regular check-ins to provide students with guidance or support, the counselors also sought to track progress and identify when students were struggling by communicating with instructors and even accessing quiz and midterm exam grades. One JCS counselor reported that the counselors worked closely with instructors to identify challenges early so that they could provide support before students became discouraged and stopped participating. This type of proactive tracking was easiest when the program was fully integrated with a college, giving counselors access to the college's learning management system, which allowed them to directly monitor homework and midterm grades. But when the program was structurally outside the part of the college that maintained the learning management system, access was problematic, such as at IJC's Centennial Center, which was a separate entity from its college partner, CWI. Centennial staff members, in particular, noted many challenges getting access to the college systems, making the sharing of grades much more difficult.

Interviewed staff members and students said the most common non-academic challenges students struggled with were mental health issues and housing- and transportation-related problems. The set of support services that were already available at the college for similar students, as well as what was available in the community, critically shaped how the programs could meet individual student needs—through on-campus services or with offsite referrals, sometimes using program funds to pay for them.

The easiest way to address student needs was when the tuition and fees that Job Corps paid the college provided the program's students with access to college-provided, on-campus supports. When Job Corps students did not have access to these services, the program could either pay for the services or have staff members make off-campus referrals and hope students availed themselves of these services.

Both surveyed and interviewed staff members noted that mental health services were particularly critical and needed. Some of the students who spoke to the research team also noted that they had to deal with feelings of anxiety or being overwhelmed. To support students with mental

health challenges, all the IJC sites and 19 of the 26 JCS sites offered mental health counseling through the college. The other JCS programs provided it through on- or offsite non-college partners. Only one program college (a JCS site) did not offer mental health services.

Whether these services were available on- or off-campus depended on how mental health support was delivered at the college. If these services were available to all students, the JCS students could access them. However, in some colleges, some non-academic services, such as mental health services, were available only for degree-seeking students. If the JCS programs at these sites were operating out of the workforce side of these colleges, the program had to refer students to offsite mental health services. In addition, staff in rural settings often noted the dearth of mental health services. For example, a staff member at an IJC satellite site said that "mental health services are severely lacking" in their area. Another challenge of providing mental health services was getting the students to attend. As one staff member put it, "Often times when mental health services are set up, it is difficult to ensure that students will attend. Often, they will miss appointments. This makes it difficult because we are required to pay for missed services."

To support students with housing needs, the two pilot programs offered a variety of direct and indirect services. The IJC Centennial Center had residential dorms available like the usual Job Corps center. However, the Centennial Center had more stringent housing eligibility requirements than other Job Corps centers.[3] A few JCS sites that had on-campus housing and significant funds in their budgets after paying for tuition and staff were able to offer residential housing, but again often just for those students with major housing or transportation barriers. Most of the JCS colleges offered no on-campus housing, but almost all of them did offer assistance in finding off-campus housing or connected students to outside services for securing low-cost housing. The programs largely did not have enough funds to both deliver the program and subsidize housing. Thus, a common reason cited by staff about students who exited the program was the need for housing.

The vast majority of students did not live on campus, making transportation to college an issue. To help the Job Corps students with their transportation challenges, all the programs offered transportation support out of their grants. Program staff reported that this was one of the most used supports (besides assistance with books and school fees). The programs tailored their assistance to their geographic area. More rural colleges offered mileage reimbursement and gas assistance, while more urban colleges subsidized access to public transportation (bus or train passes). One JCS staff member said they also used gas cards as an incentive by requiring students to meet participation requirements in order to receive the benefit.

When the colleges allowed program students to participate in their extracurricular activities, such as clubs and athletic events, the Job Corps students felt part of the broader college community.

3 In particular, Centennial residential students had to be at least 18 years old and were interviewed to establish that they had "significant need" for residential services. Bamer, 2019.

Many of the colleges offer a rich set of support services, such as tutoring, study halls, study skills classes, advising, and career guidance. When the fees the programs paid to the college to "enroll" the Job Corps students covered these extra services, program students could potentially fully integrate as any other college student and have access to all of the college's resources, including the support services. Beyond providing students with the possibility of a richer set of services, some of the interviewed program participants and staff mentioned that this access made many students feel part of the broader college community. The programs offered the Job Corps students many college-based extracurricular activity options, such as participation in college clubs (all of the IJC programs and 24 of the 26 JCS programs) or access to athletic events (3 of the 4 IJC programs and 16 of the JCS programs) and fitness facilities (3 of the IJC programs and 17 of the JCS programs).

It appears from the focus groups that when students expressed feeling more a part of the college environment and experience, they were also more likely to express wanting to continue with their education or training. Thus, helping Job Corps students feel part of a college during their Job Corps stay could not only provide a sense of belonging and reduce program dropout but might also affect longer-term educational outcomes.

While IJS followed the usual Job Corps approach of proactively incentivizing and mandating particular non-core activities, such as life skills classes, JCS put much more responsibility on the students to decide how they would engage in services.

Most of the program sites offered group and one-on-one personal preparation services and activities that focused on helping students build skills like time management and conflict resolution, become more self-confident, and learn to mitigate some of their life challenges for better engagement in the program. Topics also included connecting with local resources to address challenges like food insecurity and housing instability. Job Corps staff also engaged with community organizations, such as banks and financial counseling services, to host workshops and have professionals in the field deliver advice to the students. The focus of these life skills services and activities was to support students' independence and confidence in areas like professionalism, finances, and maintenance of personal well-being so that they could function effectively after finishing the program and gaining employment.

In IJC, as in most Job Corps programs, life skills classes were mandatory.[4] In JCS, on the other hand, each college got to decide how life skills services were to be delivered—in classes, on an ad hoc basis, or individually through the personal counselors to students who need them. In general, the JCS colleges tended to treat the JCS students like their other students in that these "extracurricular" services were optional. Four colleges did not offer life skills services that were distinct from personal counseling; 15 of 26 had life skills classes and activities but did not make them mandatory for students. However, some of the skills addressed in life skills classes were also addressed in the mandatory career readiness classes that are developed with coun-

4 In regular Job Corps programs, these classes help students meet Job Corps' Career Success Standards. Office of Job Corps, 2024b, 3.4–11.

selors, including business etiquette and occupational wellness, as well as résumé building and interview preparation.

The national Job Corps model provides students with biweekly stipends that are tied to class attendance to increase attendance and length of stay.[5] The IJC model did provide biweekly stipends, hoping to extend engagement in the program. However, some IJC staff members said these stipends were quite small and not a very effective incentive. When IJC students achieved larger milestones, such as earning a high school credential, they received more substantial financial bonuses, though. According to one IJC staff member, these larger incentives were quite motivating. One student also told researchers, "You get $200, and you're like, 'Wow, I did it.' And so that saves you money and that also makes you happy." JCS colleges were less likely to offer incentives. Less than a quarter (23.1 percent) of the JCS programs offered financial incentives, and 38.5 percent offered non-financial incentives, such as recognition or a party, for achieving program milestones, such as completing a résumé or a mock interview.

Lastly, most of the programs tried to create a culture that was fun and cultivated a sense of belonging. Some sites used WhatsApp group messaging to keep students connected and engaged. All the IJC programs and 17 of the JCS programs hosted social gatherings, which were for program students only. However, many of the interviewed students noted that between work and classes, they have little time to attend optional social gatherings.

An engagement strategy that did not work as planned was organizing students into cohorts.

The reason for organizing pilot students into cohorts is to encourage students to build relationships with each other and with staff, and originally, the IJS and JCS programs both expected students to go through in cohorts. However, because students had a broad range of career interests and the pandemic slowed enrollment, it was taking too long to create cohorts large enough to fill pilot-only classes. As a result, the initial cohort strategy was either dropped or changed. Staff members at one of the JCS programs that received a site visit reported that though they explored ways to engage cohorts, they were unsuccessful in getting students interested. Nonetheless, all the IJC sites and 17 of the 26 JCS sites held orientation sessions for all students by cohorts.

To summarize, a key individual support appeared to be proactive attendance monitoring and assistance from counselors to catch and resolve problems early. Common student problems included school-work balance, family responsibilities, and mental health, housing, and transportation challenges. The high level of assistance that their personal and career counselors provided helped students more successfully negotiate work, school, family, and personal challenges. Mental health challenges seemed quite prevalent during the study period, which was during and soon after the height of the COVID-19 period. While colleges did their best to offer professional services either on campus or off, the availability of mental health services was limited, and the students did not always use the services that were available. To deal with housing challenges, the Centennial Center was able to offer housing to students with the most significant housing

5 Office of Job Corps, 2024b, Section 6.3.

challenges, but relatively few of the other colleges had the facilities or the funds to do much more than provide housing referrals. The most common support provided was transportation assistance. Many of the interviewed students noted how grateful they were that the program could defray some of their transportation costs. Together, these and the other supports the programs offered students helped them stay in the programs longer than they otherwise could have. One of the interviewed JCS staff members explicitly noted that support services had a measurable positive impact on student retention and completion rates. Similarly, some students said the program's assistance was instrumental in enabling them to stay in the program. The next section examines empirically how long pilot students were able to stay compared to other Job Corps students.

EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT SERVICES

Many colleges have strong relationships with their local employers. One of the reasons Job Corps wanted to test models operated or administered out of colleges was to see if these relationships could be leveraged to help Job Corps students find jobs.

All the IJC programs and 88.5 percent of the JCS programs had program students use their college career services to identify job openings. A higher fraction of the JCS programs also relied on instructors to connect students to job opportunities (65.4 percent versus 25.0 percent for IJS) and got commitments from local employers to hire graduates (42.3 percent versus none of the IJC programs).

To a large extent, both sets of programs used fairly similar strategies to help get students ready to find jobs. Both provided students with employment counselors, who—like in usual Job Corps programs—helped students find jobs, assisting them with preparing résumés and cover letters and developing interview skills, as well as providing job search and placement assistance. Exhibit 7 shows that the two most common placement strategies used by both were referring students to local career services, in particular the college's career services (all the IJC programs and 88.5 percent of the JCS programs) and/or the local community employment assistance office (80.8 percent of the JCS programs and 75.0 percent of the IJC programs). About half the sites also tried to bridge the work-based learning activities that transitioned students into full-time employment (53.8 percent of the JCS programs and 50.0 percent of the IJC programs). However, JCS instructors were asked more often than IJC instructors to connect their students to jobs. Only 1 of the 4 IJC programs used this strategy, while 17 of the 26 JCS programs (65.4 percent) did so. The other placement strategy that differed between the two models was obtaining commitments from local employers to hire a certain number of graduates. Among JCS programs, 42.3 percent of them did this, while none of the IJC programs had this arrangement.

Students' relationships with their employment counselors were less close than they were with their personal and career counselors, making the transition problematic for some students.

Exhibit 7. Percentage of Pilot Programs Using Particular Strategies to Place Students in Jobs

Placement Strategies	Idaho Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars
Working with community employment assistance organizations	75.0	80.8
Working with college career services	100.0	88.5
Bridging work-based learning activities to full-time employment	50.0	53.8
Relying on instructors to connect students to job opportunities	25.0	65.4
Visiting different employers to gauge student "fit"	75.0	65.4
Local employer commitments to hire graduates	0.0	42.3
Other strategies	50.0	26.9
Number of Programs	4	26

SOURCE: Program survey of all 30 program directors/managers in May 2022.

Because personal and career counselors interacted with students from the beginning of the program, helping them achieve their program goals, students often had solid relationships with these staff. But when it came time to find a job, students were supposed to work with an employment counselor. Several interviewed staff members at JCS programs noted that this transition to a new counselor (that is, to the employment counselor) did not work well.[6] One JCS staff member said the students had built trust with the personal and career counselors and that it is hard to transition that trust to someone new. Another said the distinction between roles was not as clear in practice as it was on paper. A few JCS programs received permission to combine the personal and career counselor and employment counselor roles, so that one coach worked with the students throughout the program with no need to pass them off from one staff member to another. Feedback from several program directors suggested that if they could start over from the beginning, they would combine the two roles.

PROGRAM COMPLETION AND TIME IN PROGRAM

This section discusses the percentage of students who completed their Job Corps program, with exhibits examining how long the IJS and JCS participants stayed compared to other Job Corps students. The behavior of IJC students is compared to other Job Corps students in the

6 In the interviews conducted with two of the IJC programs, this issue was not covered. Thus, it is unclear if the issue was solely a JCS issue or also seen at the IJC programs.

North Central states, while the reference group for JCS students is other Job Corps students in non–North Central states. The data show that both IJC and JCS students stay longer in their programs than those in their Job Corps reference groups.

As a reminder, the IJC model allowed students to pursue education and training for a maximum of 2 years, while the JCS model capped the length of training at 12 months and education at 6 months. Both groups could receive 12 months of post-program employment services. Because far fewer of the JCS enrollees needed to enroll in secondary education classes, many could go straight into their desired training classes after a brief orientation period. Thus, these students would be expected to participate for fewer months than IJC students.

The completion rates of the pilot students were greater than that of other Job Corps students.

About 60 percent of the students in both sets of programs (62.2 percent of IJC students and 59.0 percent of JCS students) completed Job Corps. To graduate Job Corps, students must earn a high school credential while in the program and/or complete their career and technical training program.[7] The latest publicly available data for Job Corps as a whole, 2019, showed a completion rate of 45.2 percent.[8] As an exhibit described below will show, pilot students were less likely than other Job Corps students to drop out of the program.

The median student in both models stayed longer than other Job Corps students.

The socio-demographic characteristics for IJC students were fairly (but not statistically) similar to those of other North Central Job Corps students (Exhibit 3)—being the same age (18) on average and only somewhat more likely to enter the program with some form of high school credential attainment (43.0 percent versus 35.1 percent). Despite this, IJC students stayed in their program longer than their reference group. Exhibit 8 shows the percentage of enrollees still in the program over time.[9] The average length of stay in IJC was 9.8 months, compared to 8.1 months for other Job Corps students—a 20 percent increase in the average amount of education and training received. The difference in the median lengths of stay was even larger: 8.1 months compared to 5.8 months. Exhibit 8 shows that IJC students were much less likely to leave the program early compared to other North Central Job Corps students.

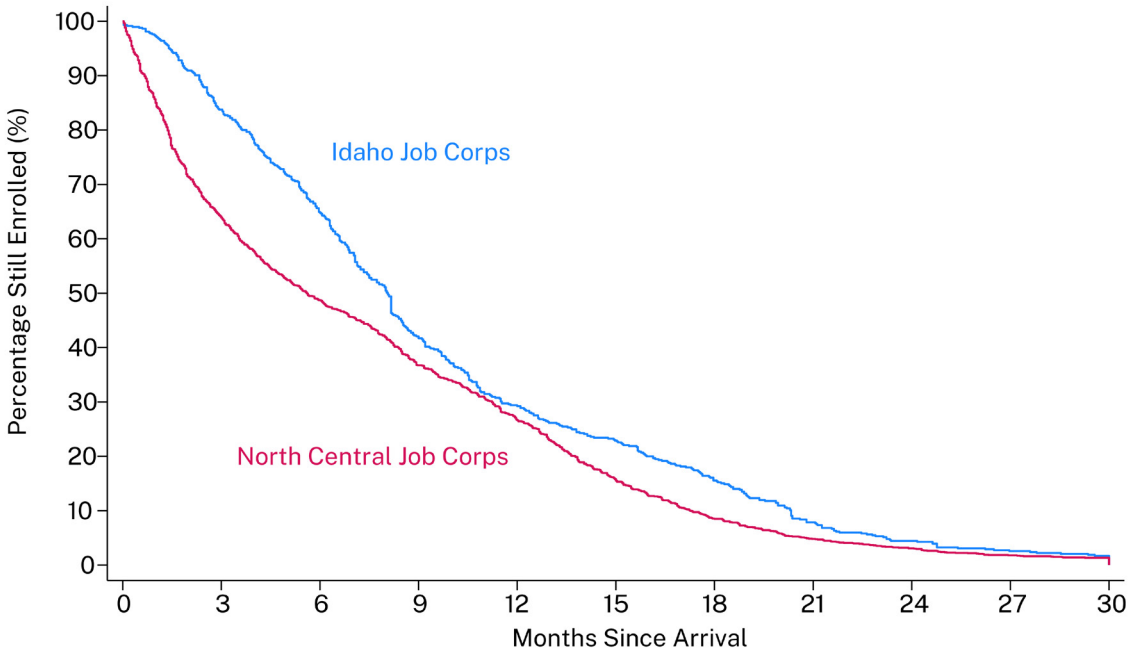
JCS students also stayed in the program longer than their counterparts. The average length of stay in JCS was 8.6 months, compared to 8.0 months in other non–North Central programs. Thus, despite the JCS model's 12-month cap on training duration, the average length of stay was still 7.5 percent longer than that in other Job Corps programs. The median length of stay—7.3 months for JCS participants versus 5.9 months for geographically similar students—was 23.7 percent longer.

7 U.S. Department of Labor, 2024.

8 Office of Job Corps, 2019.

9 These percentages are calculated using the survival rate formulas in Kaplan and Meier (1958).

Exhibit 8. Percentage of Idaho Job Corps and North Central Job Corps Students Retained Over Time in Months



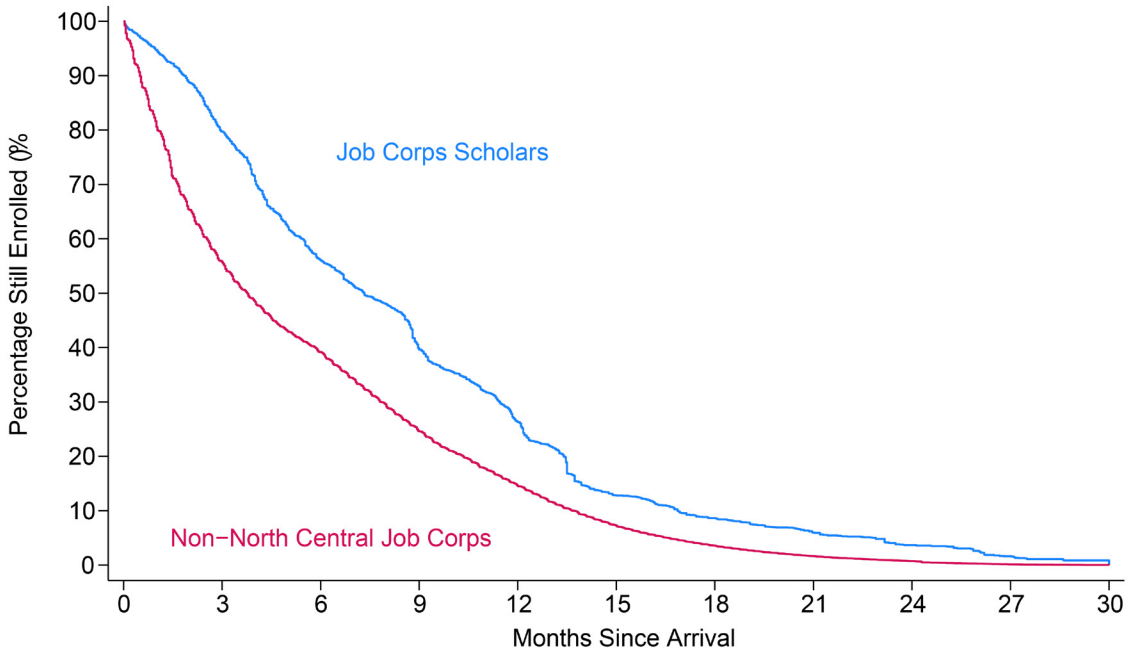
SOURCE: These Kaplan-Meier survival rates are based on individual-level student data from Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center. The data covers IJC students and North Central Job Corps students who enrolled between 10/1/2019 and 12/31/2022. N = 585 for IJC students, and N = 1,815 for North Central Job Corps students.

Part of the longer stays might be explained by the composition of JCS students relative to their reference group. JCS students were substantially older (20 versus 18). Prior studies of Job Corps have found that older students, especially those 20 years old or older, stay substantially longer in the program than younger students.[10] However, because almost all the JCS students (95.9 percent) entered Job Corps with a secondary education certificate, most of them would not need the additional six months the programs allotted for students to pursue secondary education but could instead proceed immediately to taking their CTT classes after a brief orientation period. Because the DOL had placed a 12-month cap on training, the program's training tracks were all intentionally 12 months or less. Despite this cap on their CTT engagement, the JCS students stayed longer than the geographically similar but younger students. In Exhibit 9, one sees students leaving the program as they finish their shorter training tracks.[11]

10 Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman, 2001, p. 154.

11 Because JCS allowed students to take up to 6 months of remedial developmental education classes, if they needed them, preceding their up-to-12-months training, JCS students could remain in the program for up to 18 months.

Exhibit 9. Percentage of Job Corps Scholars and Non–North Central Job Corps Students Retained Over Time in Months



SOURCE: These Kaplan-Meier survival rates are based on individual-level student data from Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center. The data covers JCS students and non–North Central Job Corps students who enrolled between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023. N = 2,095 for JCS students, and N = 45,930 for non–North Central Job Corps students.

In discussions with program staff, staff members indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic also affected students' length of stay. Job Corps centers closed from March 16, 2020, through May 10, 2020.[12] For students who were enrolled at the time, this extended spring break mechanically lengthens the number of weeks between their arrival date and their exit date. After May 10, centers reopened remotely. Because classes were delivered by the colleges, though, the remote status of IJC and JCS was dictated by the decisions of the colleges. In Fall 2020, many of the programs still only offered remote instruction. It was not until Fall 2021 that all the programs offered in-person instruction (with the exception of one that permanently switched to online-only instruction). Students who did not like learning remotely may have dropped out earlier than they would have. Another factor that could have influenced how long students stayed in the programs was the strong economy that existed once the lockdowns ended. Program staff members told us that the wages for many of the jobs typically available to Job Corps–eligible students had increased, drawing students out of school and into the labor market. So the earlier cohort of program students—those enrolling before Fall 2021—were affected by unusual forces that might have both elongated students' length of stay and shortened it relative to what it

12 Employment and Training Administration, 2020a.

would have looked like in a more typical period. Accordingly, Exhibit 10 displays the average length of stay for the early cohort of students who enrolled before Fall 2021 (whose participation was most affected by the pandemic) and for the later cohort of students who enrolled in Fall 2021 or later.

Exhibit 10. Average Length of Stay for the Early and Later Cohorts

	Idaho Job Corps	North Central Job Corps	Job Corps Scholars	Non–North Central Job Corps
Full Sample	9.8*	8.1	8.6*	8.0
Early Cohort	12.9*	10.5	9.9*	8.7
Later Cohort	6.9	6.2	7.7*	5.5

NOTE: * indicates that the length of stay for the pilot students was not equal to that of its reference group at a p = < 0.05 level.

SOURCE: Authors used Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center data. The data covers the 585 IJC students and the 1,815 North Central Job Corps students who enrolled between 10/1/2019 and 10/30/2022 and the 2,095 JCS students and the 45,930 non–North Central Job Corps students who enrolled between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023 (sample sizes for North Central and non–North Central Job Corps exclude enrollees for whom length of stay could not be calculated due to missing or implausible arrival and separation dates). The early IJC cohort (enrolling before 10/1/2021) consists of 279 students; the later cohort consists of 306 students. The early IJC reference group consists of 612 students; the later cohort consists of 1,203 students. The early JCS cohort (enrolling before 10/1/2021) consists of 878 students; the later cohort consists of 1,217 students. The early JCS reference group consists of 5,010 students; the later JCS reference group consists of 40,920 students.

The exhibit shows that the time in Job Corps was longer for the early cohort than the later one. This is true for both the students in the pilot programs *and* other Job Corps students. Once the colleges and the economy opened back up, stays in the pilot programs were shorter than previously—6.9 months for IJC students and 7.7 months for JCS students. While students in both pilots still stayed longer than other Job Corps students, the later cohort of IJC students stayed only 6 percent longer, while JCS students stayed substantially longer than their later cohort reference group, 30 percent longer. Thus, if these programs were replicated in the future, one could expect average stays of about 7 months.

In summary, the students in both models stayed in the Job Corps program longer than other Job Corps students throughout the study period. The longer stays are consistent with the hypothesis that the more intensive supports that the programs provided their students helped them to stay longer than they would have in a standard Job Corps program. However, the differences in the students' characteristics could also be responsible for these differences. More research needs to be done to know for sure how the intensive counseling and support affected participation. The final section of the chapter discusses the reasons students left the programs despite the support services they were provided.

REASONS FOR EARLY PROGRAM EXIT

Students in the programs left their training programs before they completed them for a wide range of reasons, as they do in other Job Corps centers. Approximately 40 percent of the students in both models (37.8 percent in IJC and 40.7 percent in JCS) left their program before completing either a high school credential or their CTT classes. The last publicly available information on Job Corps completion rates (for program year 2019) showed that the overall rate was higher, 54.8 percent.[13]

Discussions with program staff members and students suggested that the most common reason for exiting prior to completion was employment.

As noted previously, many students had to work while participating in the pilots to pay for their living expenses because the programs, for the most part, did not provide room and board. Some of those students struggled to manage both program participation and work at the same time. Other students simply chose to take advantage of the pandemic-related surge in wage rates, as well as the attractive hiring bonuses employers were offering for workers in what was a very tight labor market. While conflicts with employment needs were cited as the most common reason to leave, this reason is unlikely to have contributed to the differential lengths of stay between the students in the pilot programs and other Job Corps students.

However, disciplinary action—a factor that is important with early program exit in other Job Corps programs, especially in the first three months—was much less prevalent in JCS than in IJC or most Job Corps programs.[14]

Because most Job Corps programs operate out of a residential center, there are many behavioral rules. On the other hand, colleges put relatively few rules on the behavior of nonresidential students. Job Corps' code of student conduct did not apply to the JCS students.[15] Almost all the JCS programs (23 of 26) just adopted their college's disciplinary rules. In the program survey, 69.2 percent of the JCS programs responded that disciplinary issues "had not been a problem," with an additional 23.1 percent noting that there were rarely disciplinary issues. Interviewed JCS students said the programs had only attendance rules, and there were no mentions of students being separated from the program due to behavior.

On the other hand, Centennial and the three IJC satellites reported that disciplinary issues arose "on a monthly basis." There could be several reasons for the difference. First, the IJC students were younger. The research team's analysis of disciplinary actions in Job Corps found

13 Office of Job Corps, 2019.

14 From analysis done by the evaluation team on separation reasons by month in Job Corps using the 43,189 Job Corps students who interviewed with Job Corps after October 2016 and arrived at the center before January 1, 2018, using Outreach and Admissions Student Input System and Center Information System data. Disciplinary separations are heavily weighted toward the first three months of participation.

15 Office of Job Corps, 2020b, minute 37.

that older students (20 years old or older) were much less likely to be disciplined.[16] Second, the IJC Centennial Center, which had a residential component and more closely resembled other Job Corps programs, had a curfew and other residentially related rules, including Job Corps' "zero tolerance" policies around violence or threats of violence. However, one IJC student, who had been in another Job Corps center, said the rules at their other center were stricter than at Centennial, so "students had more chances to mess up" at Centennial than at other Job Corps centers. All three IJC satellite sites were also asked to adopt disciplinary policies that differed from their colleges and were more aligned with the usual Job Corps policies.

In summary, this chapter described how the intensive personal and career counseling that the pilot programs provided were highly valued by the students. This counseling, as well as the transportation, mental health, housing, and other supports provided, may have contributed to the program participants being able to obtain more months of education and training than other Job Corps students and complete the program at a higher rate. But the students still faced many structural barriers and challenges that prevented many from completing the program. The next chapter examines the employment and earnings of the program students and compares them to the outcomes of geographically similar students in Job Corps.

16 From analysis done by the evaluation team on separation reasons by month in Job Corps using the 43,189 Job Corps students who interviewed with Job Corps after October 2016 and arrived at the center before January 1, 2018, using Outreach and Admissions Student Input System and Center Information System data.

5

Short-Term Labor Market Outcomes

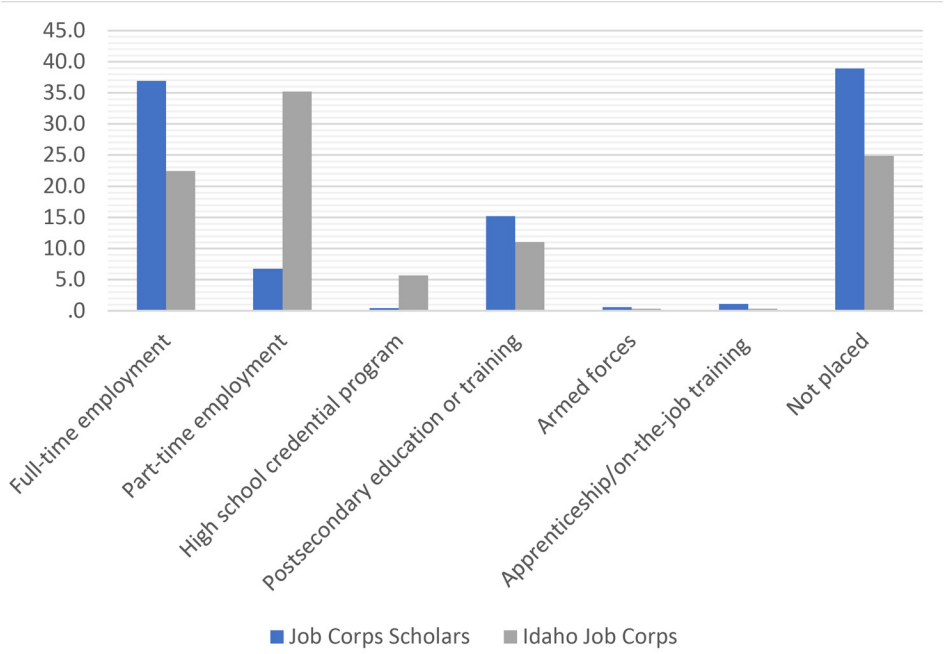
This chapter presents several short-term outcomes for the pilot program students and examines how they changed over time. First presented are the placement outcomes, as recorded in the DOL's Grantee Data Center system. Then the chapter presents employment and earnings outcomes, as measured in the NDNH system, over the six quarters after the enrollment quarter for the students in the IJC and JCS programs. While these outcomes describe the post-program situations of the students, they say nothing about the effects of the programs on their students. Many of the students would have been employed even without the programs. Some portion of the observed outcomes could be due to the program, but how much is unknown. Readers are urged to keep this caveat in mind.

PLACEMENT OUTCOMES

Three-quarters of the IJC students (75.1 percent) who qualified for placement services (those who participated in the program for at least three months or who earned a high school credential or completed their CTT classes) were placed in a qualifying placement, while 61.1 percent of those individuals in JCS were placed. Exhibit 11 shows the types of placements that were made in the two models. While a smaller percentage of those exiting JCS were placed, many more of their placements were into full-time jobs than was the case for those exiting IJC (36.9 percent versus 22.5 percent, respectively). The average wage at placement was also higher for JCS students than IJC students, $17.10 versus $12.74. The percentage placed in a high school credential program was greater for those exiting IJC, while placements into postsecondary education or training were greater for those exiting JCS.

The program operators tried to track the exiting students over time, recording how many were still employed at 6 and 12 months after leaving the programs, but they were only able to recontact a very small percentage. At 6 months, only 6.8 percent of those exiting JCS and 30.4 percent of

Exhibit 11. Percentage of Exiting Pilot Students Placed in Different Types of Placements, by Model



SOURCE: Authors used Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center data. The data covers the 585 IJC students who enrolled between 10/1/2019 and 12/31/2022 and the 2,095 JCS students who enrolled between 8/1/2020 and 9/30/2023.

those exiting IJC were found. Even fewer were found at 12 months. Thus, NDNH data is used to examine how employment outcomes changed over time.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES OVER TIME

The rest of the chapter presents how employment and earnings of the programs' students changed over time. Earnings are inflation-adjusted to Quarter 4 2023 price levels using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers. To provide some context for the changes observed among the students in both models, the outcomes for each "Job Corps reference group" are also presented. As before, the outcomes of the IJC students are benchmarked against those of Job Corps students in other North Central states, while the outcomes of the JCS students are benchmarked against those of Job Corps students in all other non–North Central states.

The comparisons between the program students and other Job Corps students should be interpreted with care. The differences are not necessarily due to the programs. There are many observed and unobserved differences between the students who applied to the pilot programs and other Job Corps programs, as well as differences in the labor markets the four groups of students faced. In particular, Exhibit 3 shows that JCS students were older and more likely to

have a high school credential than either IJC students or Job Corps students in general. The NDNH data also shows that students enrolled in both pilots earned more money than did other Job Corps students even *before* enrolling in the programs. Thus, some of the differences in their subsequent earnings are likely to be related to the characteristics of the students themselves and their labor markets rather than the effects of the programs. However, this chapter shows that the students in both pilots were more likely to be employed and earned more than students in their reference groups throughout the six-quarter follow-up periods.

Rates of Employment Over Time

Exhibit 12 shows the percentage of students in the two pilots and in the two reference groups who were employed in a particular quarter. Exhibit 13 shows the earnings the program students and other Job Corps students had by program quarter. Quarter 0, Q0, is defined as the calendar quarter in which the individual enrolled in Job Corps. Q(-1) is the quarter before that, while Q1 is the first calendar quarter after a student enrolled. The individuals included in the exhibits are the students for whom earnings could be observed in their quarter of enrollment as well as for at least six quarters post-enrollment.[1]

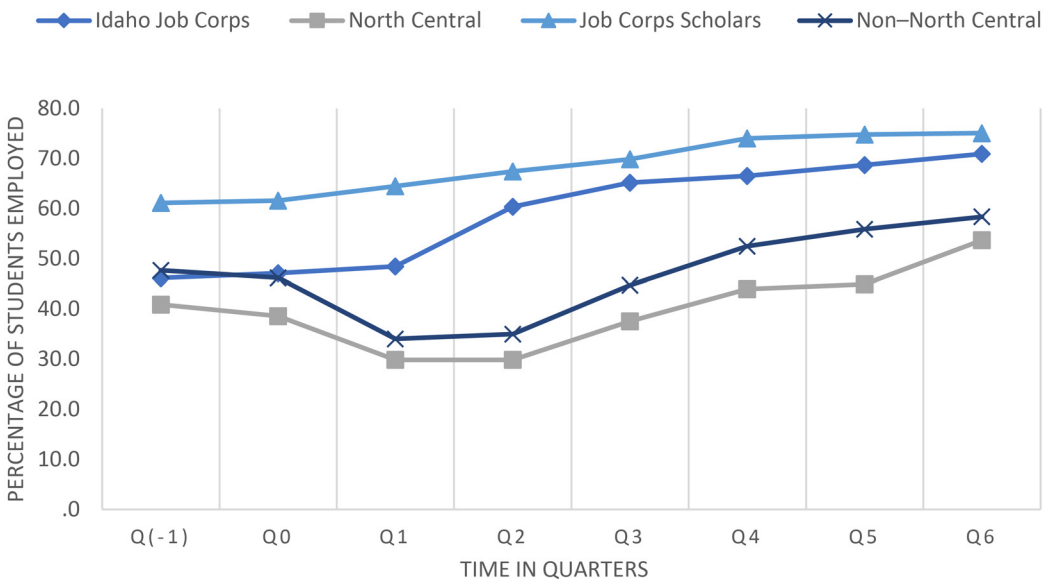
By six quarters after enrollment, the employment rates increased by 50.5 percent for the IJC students and 21.9 percent for the JCS students.

Exhibit 12 shows that just under half the IJC students (47.1 percent) had been employed at least for some time during the quarter in which they enrolled. Six quarters later, 70.9 percent had jobs (a 50.5 percent increase), with employment rates jumping from 48.5 to 60.4 percent between Q1 and Q2, reaching 65.2 by Q3. Depending on when in Q0 they enrolled, this jump could happen approximately 6 to 12 months after they enrolled in Job Corps. No large jump was observed among the JCS students. Among the JCS students, 61.6 percent were employed at least for some time during the quarter in which they enrolled. Six quarters later, 75.1 percent were employed (a 21.9 percent increase).

One difference in the pattern of employment between the pilot students and other Job Corps students is that, among other Job Corps students, employment rates decrease from their entry-quarter levels as they move to their residential Job Corps centers. This dip in employment is not observed among the primarily nonresidential program students who needed to continue working to support themselves. Indeed, the challenge of juggling work (to pay for their room

1 Of the IJC students, 39 percent of them have the required 6 quarters of post-enrollment data; of the JCS students, 46 percent do. The research team examined the outcomes in both the six-quarter pilot samples and using data from all the students (where fewer and fewer students are included in the later quarters). The patterns in outcomes were the same. In both samples, both IJC and JCS students earned more than their peers. Thus, this chapter uses the sample where the students across time are constant. The team also compared the results of the early cohort (that is, those who enrolled before Fall 2021) and the later cohort. The patterns did not differ qualitatively between the two cohorts.

Exhibit 12. Percentage of Pilot Students and Other Job Corps Students Employed in a Quarter



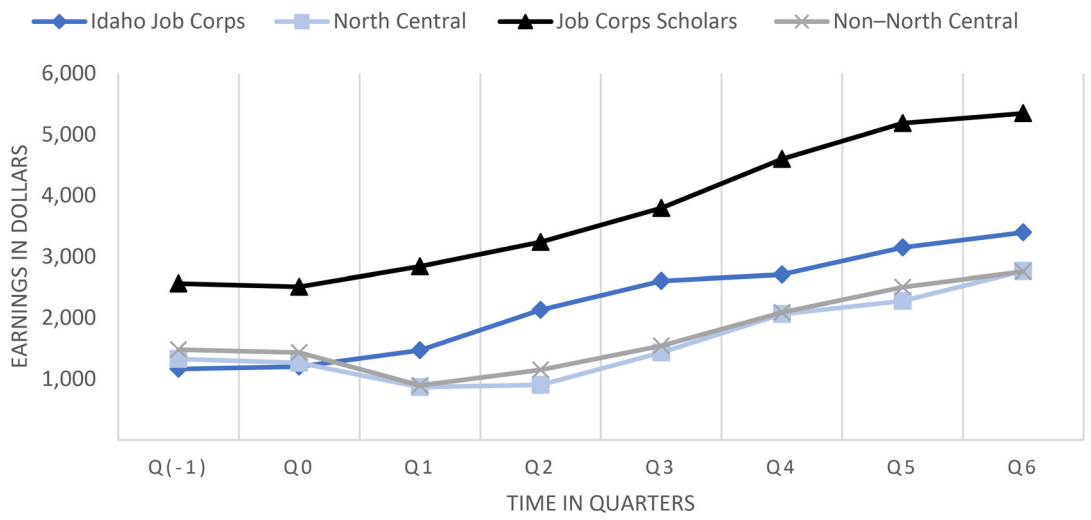
NOTE: Q0 is the quarter the student enrolled in Job Corps.

SOURCE: National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) (July 2020–May 2023), Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center data. To maintain a consistent sample across quarters, only students with at least 6 quarters of NDNH data after their enrollment quarter are included. IJC students and North Central Job Corps students enrolled on 7/1/2020 or later. JCS students and non–North Central Job Corps students enrolled on 8/1/2020 or later. The sizes of the samples are: IJC = 227, North Central Job Corps students = 298, JCS = 963, and non–North Central Job Corps students = 9,074.

and board) and program requirements was a common theme in the interviews that researchers conducted with program staff and students.

The employment growth experienced by the reference groups can put these program changes into perspective. However, the difference in pre-enrollment employment rates, Q(-1), between the program students and other Job Corps students (46.2 percent versus 40.9 percent for IJC and 61.1 percent versus 47.7 percent for JCS) shows that the program students are not comparable to these reference students in terms of employment, especially for the case of the JCS students. With that noted, the growth rates in employment from their entry quarter, Q0, to Q6 was smaller for both reference groups: 39.1 percent for the IJC reference group and 26.3 percent for the JCS reference group. Thus, the IJC percentage change was larger than for other geographically similar Job Corps students, while the JCS percentage change was fairly similar to that of geographically similar Job Corps students.

Exhibit 13. Quarterly Earnings of Pilot Students and Other Job Corps Students



NOTE: Q0 is the quarter the student enrolled in Job Corps.

SOURCE: National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) (July 2020–May 2023), Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center data. To maintain a consistent sample across quarters, only students with at least 6 quarters of NDNH data after their enrollment quarter are included. IJC students and North Central Job Corps students enrolled on 7/1/2020 or later. JCS students and non–North Central Job Corps students enrolled on 8/1/2020 or later. Earnings are inflation-adjusted to Quarter 4 2023 using the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers. One apparently errant observation was deleted from the dataset; this mid-follow-up observation was more than 5 times larger than the observation before and after that quarter. The sizes of the samples are IJC = 227, North Central Job Corps students = 298, JCS = 963, and non–North Central Job Corps students = 9,074.

Earnings Outcomes Over Time

Exhibit 13 shows the quarterly earnings the students had over time. The earnings of the IJC students grew from $1,163 to $3,395 by quarter 6, a 182.4 percent increase, while the earnings of the JCS students more than doubled, growing from $2,563 to $5,347. To put these increases into context, during those same quarters, the earnings of students in the IJC reference group, North Central Job Corps students, grew by 118.9 percent, while the earnings of students in the JCS reference group, non–North Central Job Corps students, grew by 92.2 percent. Note that, while the quarter before enrolling, the IJC students' earnings of $1,163 were statistically equivalent to those of the other geographically similar Job Corps students ($1,329), the JCS students' earnings of $2,563 were significantly more than what was seen in their reference group ($1,482).

As noted earlier, comparisons of the outcomes between the pilot students and those in their Job Corps reference groups are problematic because the groups inhabit different labor markets and have different observable and unobservable characteristics. Some part of the differences in earnings growth between the JCS and IJC students and other Job Corps students is undoubtedly

due to these differences. Thus, the research team repeated the exercise controlling statistically, using regression analysis, for several baseline characteristics: the amount the individual earned in the quarter before they enrolled, Q(-1), the individual's age at enrollment, and their baseline high school credential status, gender, and minority status, as well as whether the student was homeless, from the foster care system, or had a disclosed disability. The regressions were run separately for (1) IJC and the North Central Job Corps students, and (2) JCS and the non–North Central Job Corps students. When these observable characteristics were controlled, IJC students' quarterly earnings went from being $102.94 more than other North Central Job Corps students in the enrollment quarter to $761.84 more six quarters later. For the JCS students, when observable differences were controlled, the difference in quarterly earnings with their reference group went from $194.27 in the enrollment quarter to $2,006.31 in Quarter 6. Even though observable differences were controlled in this exercise, the labor markets the students work in and the students' unobservable characteristics still differ, thus the extent to which the differences between the program students and other Job Corps students is due to the program is unknown.[2]

Earnings Outcomes By High School Credential Status

Because the earnings of individuals with and without a high school credential differ and the pilot students were more likely to have this credential, the research team disaggregated the samples by whether the student had a high school credential upon entry. Exhibit 14 shows the quarterly earnings over time separately for the IJC students who entered the program with and without a high school credential.

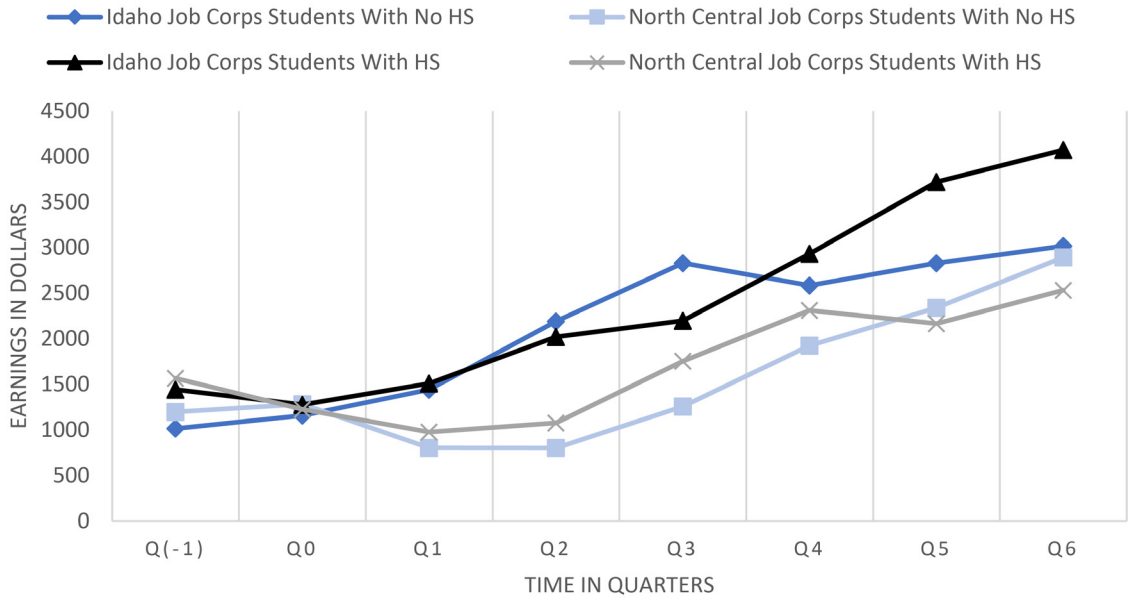
The earnings of IJC students who entered the program *with* a high school credential increased more than those of other geographically and educationally similar Job Corps students. By six quarters after the enrollment quarter, the earnings of IJC students who entered the program *with* a high school credential increased by 218.5 percent, while the earnings of other similarly educated Job Corps students increased by 106.5 percent, despite having similar pre-enrollment and enrollment quarter earnings (p = .51 and p = .63, respectively).

The earnings of IJC students who entered the program *without* a high school credential increased by 160.2 percent, while the earnings of other similarly educated Job Corps students increased by 125.4 percent over the same period. However, by Quarter 6, IJC students entering *without* a high school credential earned not much more than other similar Job Corps students, $3,019 versus $2,894 (p = 0.84).[3]

2 Earnings in each of the study quarters, Q0 to Q6, were analyzed separately using two simple OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) regressions: one on the earnings of that quarter for the sample of IJS and North Central Job Corps students and one on the earnings of that quarter for the sample of JCS and non–North Central students. Each regression included a dummy variable for being an IJS student or a JCS student or a regular Job Corps student from a North Central state or a regular Job Corps student from a non–North Central Job Corps state, as well as dummy variables for the individual's age, whether they had a high school diploma or credential when they enrolled, and their earnings in Q(-1).

3 The pre-enrollment earnings of IJC students entering without a high school credential ($1,444) were also

Exhibit 14. Quarterly Earnings for IJC Students With and Without a High School (HS) Credential at Enrollment Compared to Other Job Corps Students



NOTE: Q0 is the quarter the student enrolled in Job Corps.

SOURCE: National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) (July 2020–May 2023), Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center data. To maintain a consistent sample across quarters, only students with at least 6 quarters of NDNH data after their enrollment quarter are kept. IJC students and North Central Job Corps students enrolled on 10/1/2019–12/31/2022. Earnings are inflation-adjusted to Quarter 4 2023 using the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers. One apparently errant observation was deleted from the dataset; this mid-follow-up observation was more than 5 times larger than the observation before and after that quarter. The size of these samples are IJC with a High School Credential (HS)=82, IJC without HS=146, North Central Job Corps students with HS=105, and North Central Job Corps students without HS=193.

Chapter 3 noted that 60.8 percent of IJC students who started the program enrolling in post-secondary classes, as opposed to secondary education classes, earned an associate's degree, while most of the students that started in secondary education classes earned only a high school credential while they were in the program. Indeed, IJS students with a high school credential when they entered the program saw a near tripling of their quarterly earnings—from $1,279 in Q0 to $4,073 in Q6—while other similarly educated Job Corps students experienced a doubling of their earnings (from $1,227 to $2,535) despite their pre-enrollment and enrollment quarter earnings being statistically similar (p = .76 and p = .88). The difference in earnings is consistent with the associate's degree being valuable in the labor market.

statistically the same as their reference group's ($1,568).

In JCS, the earnings of students who entered the program both *with* or *without* a high school credential increased more than other Job Corps students over the first six quarters. The earnings of JCS students entering *without* a high school credential grew 128 percent, while their reference group's earnings grew 117.7 percent. The earnings of JCS students entering *with* a high school credential grew 110.4 percent, while their reference group's earnings grew 72.7 percent.[4]

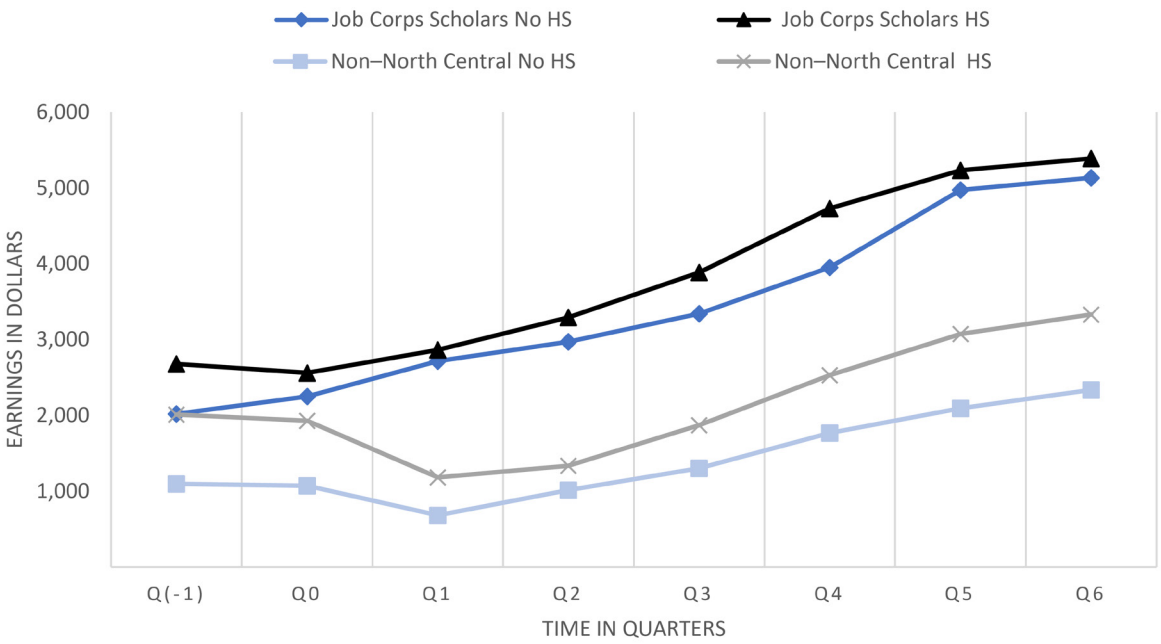
Exhibit 15 shows the quarterly earnings over time of the JCS students who entered the program *with* and *without* a high school credential. The earnings outcomes of the two groups of students are very similar. Chapter 3 noted that 82 percent of the JCS students who started in either secondary or postsecondary education classes earned college credits or a postsecondary certificate less than an associate's degree. Few (2.9 percent) earned associate's degrees. The similarity of the two groups' earnings is consistent with the similarities of these in-program achievements.

In summary, the pilot students' earnings grew substantially over the first year and a half after they enrolled in the programs, at least doubling their earnings. For IJC students entering *with* a high school credential, earnings were tripled. Other Job Corps students also saw a doubling of their earnings over that period, but the growth of the pilot students' earnings was always greater than that of other Job Corps students. It is impossible to know, without a true impact study, how much of the greater earnings growth was due to the programs because the characteristics of the pilot students and those in the reference groups differed in important ways. However, unlike the JCS students, when the IJC students and those in their reference group are split by whether the student has a high school credential when they enrolled, the IJS students and those in the education-similar reference group *with* and *without* a high school credential had similar earnings both in the quarter before and in the quarter of their enrollment. By Quarter 6, the IJC students *with* a high school credential upon entry earned significantly more ($4,073 compared to $2,535 for other Job Corps students). IJC students *without* a high school credential upon entry, who for the most part left with no more than a high school equivalency credential, had similar earnings to those in standard Job Corps programs by Quarter 6 ($3,019 versus $2,894). JCS students both with and without high school credentials at enrollment earned significantly more than those in their reference groups, too, but did so even before the program.

Given this study is not an impact study with a valid comparison group, readers need to keep in mind that the degree to which the programs contributed to any of the pilot students' higher earnings is still unknown. As this report has repeatedly cautioned, the pilot students were different from other Job Corps students in many ways. Importantly, they earned more than those in their reference groups even *before* entering Job Corps. However, the pattern of short-term outcomes suggests that both models could be promising avenues for further exploration and more rigorous evaluation.

4 The p values for the tests comparing the Q6 earnings of each group with their reference group were both smaller than 0.001. Indeed, there was no statistical difference (p = .59) between the Q6 earnings for JCS students who entered with ($5,390) or without ($5,135) a high school credential.

Exhibit 15. Quarterly Earnings for JCS Students With and Without a High School (HS) Credential at Enrollment Compared to Other Job Corps Students



NOTE: Q0 is the quarter the student enrolled in Job Corps.

SOURCE: National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) (July 2020–May 2023), Outreach and Admissions Student Input System, Center Information System, and Grantee Data Center data. To maintain a consistent sample across quarters, only students with at least 6 quarters of NDNH data after their enrollment quarter are kept. JCS students and non–North Central Job Corps students enrolled on 8/1/2020–9/30/2023. Earnings are inflation-adjusted to Quarter 4 2023 using the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers. The sizes of these samples are JCS without HS=163, JCS with HS=800, non–North Central Job Corps students without HS=5,255, and non–North Central Job Corps students with HS=3,819.

6

Key Lessons Learned and Implications

As part of Job Corps' evidence-based, continuous improvement process, between 2019 and 2024, the DOL funded pilot programs and an evaluation to explore the viability of two, hopefully less costly, nonresidential college-focused model variants. IJC explored how well a state could serve its young people with Job Corps services if it paired the resources of its one Job Corps center with its community colleges. It offered housing to only a small fraction of its students at the Job Corps center, while the education and training services were mostly provided by a local college. Three completely nonresidential satellites of the program were operated out of a geographically diverse set of community colleges. JCS explored how well a college could serve young people if it provided Job Corps CTT classes (but not high school equivalency classes). The college was allowed to add their own admission criteria to the basic Job Corps criteria. Over 60 percent (61.5 percent) required a high school credential. The DOL capped JCS training at 12 months. Combined, the two pilots provide the field with 30 geographically diverse examples of Job Corps programs that partnered closely with or were run by colleges. Their experiences illustrate how these types of college-focused models might operate in the future—who might enroll in them, what challenges they might have, and what outcomes future students might experience. IJC also provides insights on how a state (or Job Corps itself) could enlarge Job Corps' footprint by combining center-based programs with college-based programs.

This report suggests that colleges can successfully implement Job Corps programs, with many of the students earning valuable credentials and experiencing strong labor market outcomes. However, a rigorous impact study is needed to determine if the programs are truly impactful or if they just attract students who would have achieved better outcomes than average Job Corps students. A brief summary of the findings follows.

It seems that when a nonresidential college-focused Job Corps program emphasizes that the program enables students to "attend college," it attracts and enrolls more of the Job Corps–eligible population that has already finished high school than standard Job Corps programs do. By contrast, a nonresidential college-focused program that offers HSE classes

and portrays itself as a standard Job Corps program appears to attract students who are like other Job Corps students.

While both models were primarily nonresidential college-focused Job Corps programs, they attracted and served different populations. Who they attracted appears to depend on how they advertised and recruited and whether they provided HSE classes, as well as their program requirements. IJC programs advertised themselves as Idaho's Job Corps program, offering HSE and training and using existing Job Corps recruiting materials. They attracted a population of students who were quite similar to those at nearby Job Corps centers. JCS programs, on the other hand, did not offer HSE classes and emphasized how the programs could help students "attend college" and earn an occupational credential, as well as possibly earn college credits. This approach attracted a student body that was older and more likely to have finished high school than those at standard centers. Given that many of the colleges required a high school credential, these differences are not surprising. But even those programs that did not require a high school credential attracted many who had completed high school. This suggests that the JCS program model may have attracted more educated students. Having these two types of Job Corps program "flavors" (IJC-like programs and JCS-like programs) available in the system could enable Job Corps to reach a broader segment of its target population. While this is an emerging pattern, more research should be done to determine if this hypothesis is true.

The programs were able to offer students more CTT tracks from which to choose than what is typically available at other Job Corps centers.

While the evaluation did not collect data on the tracks that students enrolled in, in interviews, staff members explicitly noted that being able to enroll Job Corps students in CTT classes that included college students enabled the program to offer their students a wider range of the classes than if the classes had had to be filled with Job Corps students only (as is the case in other Job Corps centers).

Many program students earned college credits while in the program.

All the IJC programs and almost all the JCS programs offered both credit and noncredit training classes. Noncredit classes enabled students who did not want to meet a college's academic prerequisites to earn a credential, while credit classes enabled students to both earn a certificate and accumulate college credits. The implementation study did not collect student-level college records; thus, how the structure of the program affected the number of college credits the students earned cannot be estimated. However, interviews with both staff members and students noted that many of the JCS and some of the IJC students did earn college credits. Students noted that successfully completing these college courses let them see that college was possible for them. In the IJC program, where students could take up to two years of college training courses, among the third (32.1 percent) of the students who started immediately in credit-bearing training classes, 60.9 percent were able to earn an associate's degree. Only 8.3 percent of the JCS students who enrolled immediately in credit-bearing training earned an associate's degree. One wonders how many JCS students could have earned an associate's degree had the program paid for two years of training, as IJC did.

The personal and career counselors were critical for providing support to many of the students.

The personal and career counselors did much more than simply connect students to services. The amount of assistance they provided students on common challenges, such as mental health issues, transportation challenges, and work-school balance problems, was critical to the students' success, according to the students. They spoke of how these counselors helped them solve a wide range of problems and provided them with encouragement to overcome the many barriers they had to navigate. Real-time attendance monitoring by the counselors was key to detecting these problems early.

The programs gave Job Corps students access to other resources through a college without Job Corps having to hire staff to provide them.

On average, the nonresidential IJC satellites operated with 5 Job Corps staff, while JCS programs operated with 4.8, far fewer than in residential Job Corps centers. Almost all the education and training services were provided by college-employed instructors. While this study cannot quantify how many students accessed college-provided non-teaching resources and support services, staff members and students alike mentioned that at least some of the program students did make use of college-provided services. For example, staff members mentioned that students were referred to the college's career services, tutoring services, student clubs, and recreational facilities.

Students mentioned that being treated as part of the campus community made them feel like they belonged.

Once on campus, many of the program students (especially those enrolled in credit-bearing courses) had access to general college services, such as tutoring, career services, physical and mental health services, second-language support, and so forth. Interviewed students noted that having access to these services both enriched their time in Job Corps and made them feel more a part of the college.

Both IJC and JCS students completed the program at higher rates and received more months of education and training than other Job Corps students.

Compared to a 45.2 percent completion rate for Job Corps students in 2019, 62.2 percent of IJC and 59.0 percent of JCS students graduated their program. The median length of stay in IJC was 8.1 months, compared to 5.8 months for those in their Job Corps reference group—a 39.7 percent increase in the average amount of education and training received. The median length of stay in JCS was 23.7 percent longer for JCS students than those in their Job Corps reference group, 7.3 months versus 5.9 months.

Over the six quarters after the enrollment quarter, the earnings of both sets of pilot students grew substantially—increasing more than two and a half times for IJC students and more than doubling for JCS students. By Quarter 6, JCS students who entered the program with or without

a high school credential, as well as IJC students who entered the program with a high school credential, all earned more than students in their Job Corps reference groups. The earnings of IJC students who entered without a high school credential were the same as those in their reference group by Quarter 6.

While these earnings outcomes are consistent with the hypothesis that the programs may have helped students who, through Job Corps, enrolled in "some college" (as job applications often state) more than the usual Job Corps program would have, it is unclear how much of the earnings growth was due to the program versus other factors. For example, students in both models earned more than the reference Job Corps students even before the program (except for IJC students entering without a high school credential), and the JCS students are on average older. Only a more rigorous evaluation of these college-focused Job Corps pilots can determine how impactful the programs are. However, the results of this study are encouraging with respect to the potential of adding nonresidential college-focused variants to the Job Corps system.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has three major limitations. First, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected how the program could recruit and deliver its services for many months. IJC staff members, for example, strongly felt the pandemic was the main reason why that program was unable to recruit its targeted number of enrollees (585 versus the expected 750). The programs had to deal with the implications of lockdowns and implement remote instruction with little or no preparation. The pandemic also affected the students' physical and mental health, as well as the labor market they faced. Finally, the expanding labor market of 2021 gave individuals, at least in the short run, other options than participating in Job Corps. What the implementation would have looked like in a more stable environment with more time to mature and refine the models is unknown. Thus, readers should view the implementation results of the study as suggestive.

Second, the study was designed to examine student *outcomes*, not to estimate the programs' *impacts* on outcomes. The two reference groups—North Central Job Corps students and non–North Central Job Corps students—were intended merely to provide some context for the magnitude of the outcome changes that were observed for the pilot students. The differences between a pilot's outcomes and those of its reference group were affected not only by the different programs the students experienced but also the differences in the students' characteristics and motivations, as well as differences in their labor markets.

Third, a formal cost analysis was not conducted. While the per-enrollee costs of the pilots are quite likely to be less than that of Job Corps' primarily residential program given the $13,500 to $15,000 per-enrollee grant, the actual cost is not known. Thus, it is unclear how many residential slots Job Corps would need to cut at a center to be able to afford, in a cost-neutral manner, to operate more geographically dispersed nonresidential college-based programs. The next study of these nonresidential college-focused programs should conduct such a cost analysis.

POSSIBLE PROGRAM REFINEMENTS

The experiences of the programs suggest three areas for refinement that Job Corps may want to consider if it continues to investigate nonresidential college-focused model variants: supports to further enhance persistence, the approach to counseling, and access to college support services.

According to staff members and students, attendance and persistence in the programs appear to have been more of a challenge than expected. Work-school challenges are typical for community college students, but they may be more problematic for Job Corps students as they typically have fewer resources and may face more structural barriers. For example, transportation assistance was highly valued and used by the pilot students but also was not always enough to prevent chronic absenteeism. The high level of support personal and career counselors were able to provide students because of the manageable caseloads they had (20 or 25 students per counselor) was also highly valued by students. While work-school balance issues may be inherent to nonresidential college-focused programs, perhaps more thinking could occur around what else can be done to support the students or expand residential services.

One advantage of college-based programs seems to be that if Job Corps students are given full access to services available to the overall student body, they potentially can access a broader set of services and supports than are typically available at a Job Corps center. However, the degree to which the pilot students were able to access the full range of college services depended in some colleges on whether the program was based out of the academic or the career side of the college. Perhaps Job Corps should consider asking its colleges to make these services available to its students no matter where in the college the program is housed or only partnering with colleges that can otherwise ensure Job Corps students have full access to their support and recreational services.

How counseling is structured in these types of college-focused programs should also be examined. While many students formed strong relationships with their personal and career counselors, staff members and students noted that the bonds did not transfer to the employment counselors. Some colleges wanted to combine these tasks in one person. This variant could be explored in the future. However, if these two very different jobs were combined, the training for these personal and employment counselors would have to cover both.[1] Perhaps the personal counselors could continue to interact with the student but work closely with the employment staff, who would develop job placement opportunities and talk to employers.

1 While combining the roles could work, Grossman et al. (2023) found another challenge. When staff are charged with providing both personal and employment assistance, the personal assistance demands often grow to take up almost all the counselors' time.

LESSONS ABOUT STATE-OPERATED JOB CORPS PROGRAMS

The IJC programs showed how a state could both capitalize on its existing Job Corps center and serve a more geographically diverse set of students by establishing additional programs in colleges across the state. Idaho took over the operations of its one residential Job Corps center but also expanded the program's reach by opening fully nonresidential satellite programs in three of the state's community colleges. Procedures were developed at the state level. Several key Centennial staff members were in charge of monitoring all three of the satellites' operations. Because the state designed (and then monitored) the program, the four IJC programs implemented the program along similar lines. In particular, unlike for JCS, where each college created its own policies and rules, the policies and rules in the three satellites were fairly similar. These college-based programs also offered high school equivalency classes. The IJC program was designed to attract and serve students who were quite similar to the Job Corps students in nearby states. Thus, it appears that this state-managed set of Job Corps programs served students at least as well as other nearby centers. Job Corps could work with other states to expand this type of program and management structure, studying the program's impact.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE NONRESIDENTIAL COLLEGE-FOCUSED PROGRAMS

The study suggests that if Job Corps added some nonresidential college-focused and/or college-based programs to its assortment of offerings, it may be able to broaden Job Corps' attractiveness to different segments of its eligible population. First, nonresidential programming can serve young people with family responsibilities, such as women with children. The broader range of training options colleges can offer also makes a college-focused Job Corps program appeal to individuals with a wider set of occupational interests. Finally, earlier research showed that the ability to earn college credits attracts more academically prepared Job Corps–eligible students than traditional centers do.[2]

College-focused programs seem to set a student on a pathway to a degree, enabling them to try college and earn at least some college credits, with some extra support available to them if they need it. Other Job Corps centers that do not partner with a college cannot do this. In addition, college campuses offer many opportunities and supports not offered to the same extent in other centers, such as a wider range of training options, tutoring, career services, second-language support, parenting support, extracurricular activities, and so forth, that could further enrich Job Corps students' experience in these college-focused programs and even provide them with extra support should they avail themselves of the opportunities.

2 Klerman et. al, 2021.

Just being on a college campus can be a transformative experience for some students who may have never seen themselves as "college material." With the intensive level of support these college-focused Job Corps pilots provided, many students were able to experience success in college courses and see that a college education could be a real possibility for them. More research and longer follow-up periods are needed to see how many of the pilot students end up returning to college, getting other certificates or degrees, and what the impacts on earnings are over both the short and the long term.

All in all, this implementation and outcomes study suggests that nonresidential college-focused Job Corps models are both feasible to implement and promising. They can be operated successfully by the colleges themselves or by a state. Depending on how they recruit, they may be able to broaden Job Corps' appeal to its target population, but the IJC pilot showed that they can also serve more geographically dispersed traditional Job Corps students at least as well as center-based programs. Expanding these models and conducting an impact study to ensure that they are cost-effective would be a well-warranted next step.

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