



Job Corps: Connecting Underserved Youth to Opportunity

Job Corps provides holistic academic, career technical education, and life-skills training to 16- to 24-year-old youth at 126 safe residential campuses across the country. All Job Corps students come from low-income homes with most coming from families who have experienced multiple generations of poverty. Without Job Corps, these youth face enormous barriers to employment, postsecondary education, and economic security.

Of the 50,248 youth in need of high school diplomas, industry-recognized credentials, mentoring, work experience, mental-health support, and intensive behavioral and career counseling whom Job Corps enrolled in program year 2015¹:

- 35,725 students (or 71.1%) received primary industry-recognized credentials in their field prior to graduation (e.g. A+, Certified Nursing Assistant, and Automotive Service Excellence)²;
- 86.2% of those who graduated were placed in jobs, postsecondary education institutions, or the military³; and
- \$12.22 is the average wage of employed graduates 12 months after completing the program⁴.

In fact, Job Corps is one of the few programs that has demonstrated long-term impacts on this vulnerable population.⁵ Job Corps works for youth, employers, and the economy.

A Vision for Job Corps' Future

With more than 5.5 million out-of-work and out-of-school 16- to 24-year olds, each of whom is estimated to cost taxpayers \$700,000 over his/her lifetime, Job Corps is needed now more than ever⁶. To strengthen Job Corps' results for youth, employers, and the economy, the new administration is urged to focus on the following priorities:

1) Launch a national outreach and recruitment strategy so Job Corps can serve 15,000 more students — the majority at no additional cost!

Calls to Job Corps' national recruitment hotline have dropped by 74% since TV, print, radio, and social media advertisements were discontinued. As a result, student capacity has fallen to 78% — meaning the program could be currently serving 8,400 more youth at little to no additional cost.⁷ The Department of Labor (DOL) also reduced Job Corps' operating capacity by more than 15% owing to the 2012 budget shortfalls, such that an additional 7,000 beds and classroom seats sit empty within Job Corps.⁸ Altogether, Job Corps has the capacity to serve more than 15,000 additional youth!

2) Promote academic rigor, career pathways alignment, and postsecondary enrollment.

11.5 million of the 11.6 million (99%) jobs that we recreated since the Great Recession went to workers with at least some postsecondary education.⁹ Even employers not asking for college degrees say they want their employees to have more education in reading, writing, and math.¹⁰ To better prepare students for college and careers, Job Corps must:

- Address the wage gap that results in Job Corps teachers who work three months more but are being paid approximately 25% less than the average secondary school teacher.¹¹ This has resulted in a turnover rate of 22% in the last year alone.¹²
- Research shows such turnover has significantly negative impacts on educational outcomes, particularly among the population Job Corps serves.¹³

- Align academic instruction with widely accepted college and career-ready standards.
- Expand and strengthen career pathways linkages with postsecondary institutions by sharing resources, developing articulation agreements, and expanding co-enrollments.

3) Align and integrate Job Corps into regional and local sector strategic partnerships.

With the rapid pace of change in today's marketplace, Job Corps, like employers, must be more nimble. When a high-wage industry announces job shortages, centers must be able to quickly respond by identifying and partnering with employers to develop new training programs and credential offerings to meet the need. Unfortunately, it currently can take several years for centers to receive approval from the National Office to change career technical training programs.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandates sector partnerships be implemented to better align services and meet industry needs. Job Corps centers require greater flexibility to adjust their training programs and curricula so they can be integrated into these efforts.

4) Implement a 21st century, evidence-based approach to discipline and safety.

The most important mission Job Corps is charged with is ensuring the safety, security, and care of the thousands of minors and young adults who live and learn on Job Corps centers 24/7. Given that the behaviors these youth often learn in their communities are maladaptive for school or work, Job Corps must take a thoughtful and rigorous approach to both discipline and behavioral management.

WIOA requires Job Corps to implement a zero-tolerance policy with respect to violence and drugs. DOL recently began implementing a new zero-tolerance policy for non-violent, minor infractions.

Such overly punitive and exclusionary zero-tolerance policies have been opposed by the Departments of Education and Justice,¹⁴ as well as by national educational organizations for disproportionately affecting at-risk students and students of color, the very population that Job Corps serves. Furthermore,

there is no evidence that they actually make campuses safer.¹⁵

Both the departments of Education and Justice have advocated for moving away from discriminatory, zero-tolerance policies. They instead advocate for a wide range of evidence-based strategies to reduce misbehavior and maintain a safe living and learning environment, such as conflict resolution, restorative practices, counseling, and a system of positive supports and interventions.¹⁶

Job Corps should review research and evidence with respect to behavioral management policies including zero tolerance, drug-testing, and closed campuses in order to identify policies and best practices at other educational institutions that may better align with Job Corps' mission and the needs of our students.

5) Streamline and Improve Job Corps' Administration.

Job Corps' 2012 budget crisis, backlog of procurements, and current under-enrollment crisis, are objective indicators that Job Corps' administration has struggled in recent years. These unresolved administrative challenges continue to negatively impact Job Corps students and at-risk youth. Immediate steps should be taken to rectify Job Corps' administrative challenges:

- Conduct a process improvement analysis of Job Corps' federal administration including an evaluation of the efficacy of splitting interdependent functions, including contracting, budgeting, and program administration, under different offices.
- Reevaluate the structure of the contractual relationship with Job Corps operators to minimize unnecessary reporting and maximize the resources directed towards student services as well as — first and foremost — to incentivize excellence in student outcomes.
- Simplify and make more timely and transparent the selection of center operators. Most importantly, contract awards should be based on expectations regarding student outcomes.
- Formalize the policymaking and regulatory process to directly incorporate both initial input and feedback from the stakeholders on the ground who will implement new policies.

This summation of recommendations reflects the input and support of the Job Corps Association's membership. It is also a guarantee to work with you and other policy leaders as the Job Corps community on strengthening the program.

- ¹ Job Corps Executive Information System. *Trend Analyzer, Enrollment by Program Year—National (PY 2015)*, Retrieved July 25, 2016.
- ² Calculated using figures from Job Corps Resources Library. *Outcome Measurement System, Center Report Card, 07/01/2015-06/30/2015*. Percentages based on PY 2015 enrollment of 50,248. Retrieved July 25, 2016.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Mitchell, M. V., Jenkins, D., Nguyn, D., Lerman, A., and DeBerry, M. (2003). *Evaluation of the YouthBuild Program*. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- ⁶ Opportunity Nation (2016). *Youth Disconnection*.; Belvin, C.R., Levin, H.M., and Rosen, R. (2012). *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. Corporation of National and Community Service.
- ⁷ Job Corps Executive Information System. *Current OBS by Region*. Retrieved July 25, 2016.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Carnevale, A. P., Jayasundera, T., & Gulish, Artem (2016). *America's Divided Recovery: College- Haves and Have-Nots*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.
- ¹⁰ Hart Research and Public Opinion Strategies (November 2014). *Views on High School Graduates' Preparedness for College and Careers*. Achieve.
- ¹¹ National teacher salary based on an average annualized salary of \$59,305 for secondary academic and career technical education teachers. Sources: Occupations Employment Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2015, Career Technical Education Teachers, Secondary School; Occupations Employment Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2015, Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education. Job Corps teacher salary of \$42,940 based on wage data of academic and CTE instructors from a sample off 22 Job Corps centers.
- ¹² Job Corps teacher turnover rate based on data of academic and CTE instructors from a sample of 22 Job Corps centers.
- ¹³ Ronfeldt, M, Loeb, S., & Wycoff, J (2012). How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement. *American Education Research Journal* 2013:50. Retrieved July 5, 2014, from [https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/4.full .pdf](https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/4.full.pdf).; Guin, K. (2004). Chronic teacher turnover in urban elementary schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(42). Retrieved August 26, 2004, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/197>.
- ¹⁴ US Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division and US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, "Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline," letter, January 8, 2014.
- ¹⁵ APA Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). *Are Zero-Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools?* American Psychological Association
- ¹⁶ US Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division and US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, "Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline," letter, January 8, 2014.