

# IssueBRIEF



"Workforce skills are the key to a strong economy and a thriving middle class. The U.S. has the most talented and resilient workforce in the world. We have to invest in them...to build our human capital."

—U.S. Department of Labor

## What Predicts Training Completion and Credential Receipt?

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### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS BRIEF

- **Trainee background characteristics.** Trainees' education levels and whether they had worked in the past five years predicted their completion of training programs. Age and health status predicted whether trainees received a credential.
- **Training program characteristics.** Trainees were more likely to complete and earn credentials from vocational training programs than educational programs. The occupational focus of the program also predicted completion and credential receipt.
- **Other services.** Trainees who received supportive services were more likely to complete training than those who did not. But receiving other services, such as meeting with an employment counselor, was not predictive of training completion or credential receipt.
- **Reasons for not completing.** The most common reason given for not completing a training program was pregnancy or illness.

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Policy Research



WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs | Gold Standard Evaluation

**T**raining offers job seekers the possibility of obtaining marketable skills, advancing their career paths, and achieving job security. Earning a credential, such as a certificate or degree, as a result of training can further open the door to higher-paying, stable employment.<sup>1</sup>

Yet many people who start a training program do not finish it and ultimately might fail to reap the potential benefits. Others enroll in training programs but do not gain credentials because they choose programs not linked to these accreditations or do not complete or succeed in those programs.

In this brief, we examine whether three factors predict completion of training programs and credential receipt:

1. Characteristics of the people who enroll in training (who we call trainees)
2. Characteristics of the training programs
3. Receiving services designed to support trainees in succeeding in training, such as meeting with a counselor, or financial assistance for books, tools, uniforms, transportation, or child care

To do this, we used information from a survey of customers enrolled in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of specific services provided by the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs (see box below).

### FEATURES OF THE WIA ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS GOLD STANDARD EVALUATION

- Nationally representative study
- 28 local areas, randomly selected
- More than 200 American Job Centers
- More than 34,000 customers randomly assigned to one of three study groups
- More than 4,500 customers surveyed 15 and 30 months after enrolling in the study

This brief focuses on the group of study participants who were allowed access to all of the services they would have been offered in the absence of the study, including training funded by the Adult or Dislocated Worker programs. Because the local workforce investment areas in the study were chosen randomly, these participants' experiences are representative of workforce customers' experiences with the programs as they typically operated throughout the country, rather than just in select areas.

The findings discussed in this brief should be viewed as descriptive and not causal. The factors that predict training program completion and credential receipt could reflect differences in the characteristics of customers who chose to enroll in the training programs that we did not control for in our analysis. For example, it could be that customers are more likely to complete a vocational training program because more job-ready customers enroll in these programs.

### ABOUT THIS BRIEF

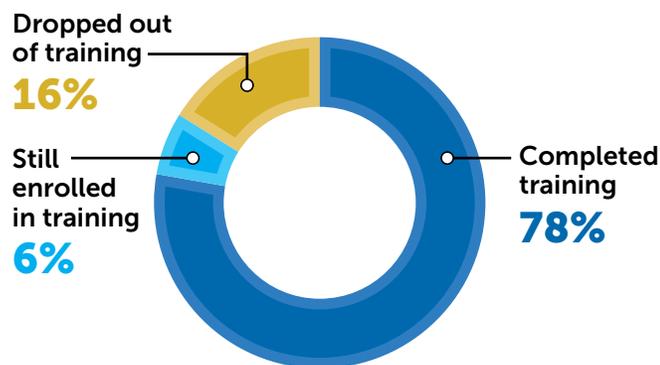
- This brief focuses on study participants who:
  - Were offered the same services as they would have been offered in the absence of the study
  - Completed a 30-month follow-up survey
  - Reported starting a training program within 18 months of study enrollment
- "Training programs" include any general education or vocational training programs, including those that study participants attended without Adult or Dislocated Worker program funds.
- Some study participants enrolled in more than one training program over the follow-up period; we focused on the first one.
- We calculated means across categories and statistically tested the differences.
- The findings are nationally representative. All findings are statistically significant unless otherwise indicated.
- In examining differences across program characteristics and receipt of services, we also adjusted for the characteristics of trainees.<sup>2</sup>
- Unless otherwise noted, adjusting for these characteristics did not change the findings.

### Overall training completion and credential receipt

Of the 1,623 study participants considered in this brief, slightly less than half (740 participants) reported that they had enrolled in a training program within 18 months of beginning the study. These programs included a wide range of educational and vocational training programs offered by employers, vocational institutes, community colleges, and other sources.

In total, 78 percent of trainees completed a training program (Figure 1) and 56 percent received a credential from the program. Only 16 percent of trainees reported not completing their programs and 6 percent of trainees were still enrolled in their programs 30 months after study enrollment. If all customers still enrolled in training programs subsequently completed their programs and earned credentials, the completion rate would increase to 84 percent and the rate of credential attainment would increase to 62 percent.

**Figure 1.** Overall training completion rates



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys.

### Which trainee characteristics predict training completion and credential receipt?

We found two background characteristics that predicted whether trainees completed their programs during the 30-month follow-up period: whether they had held a job in the past five years and their education level (Figure 2, top two panels). Only 75 percent of trainees who had worked in the past five years completed the training program they enrolled in compared with 86 percent of those who had not worked in the past five years.

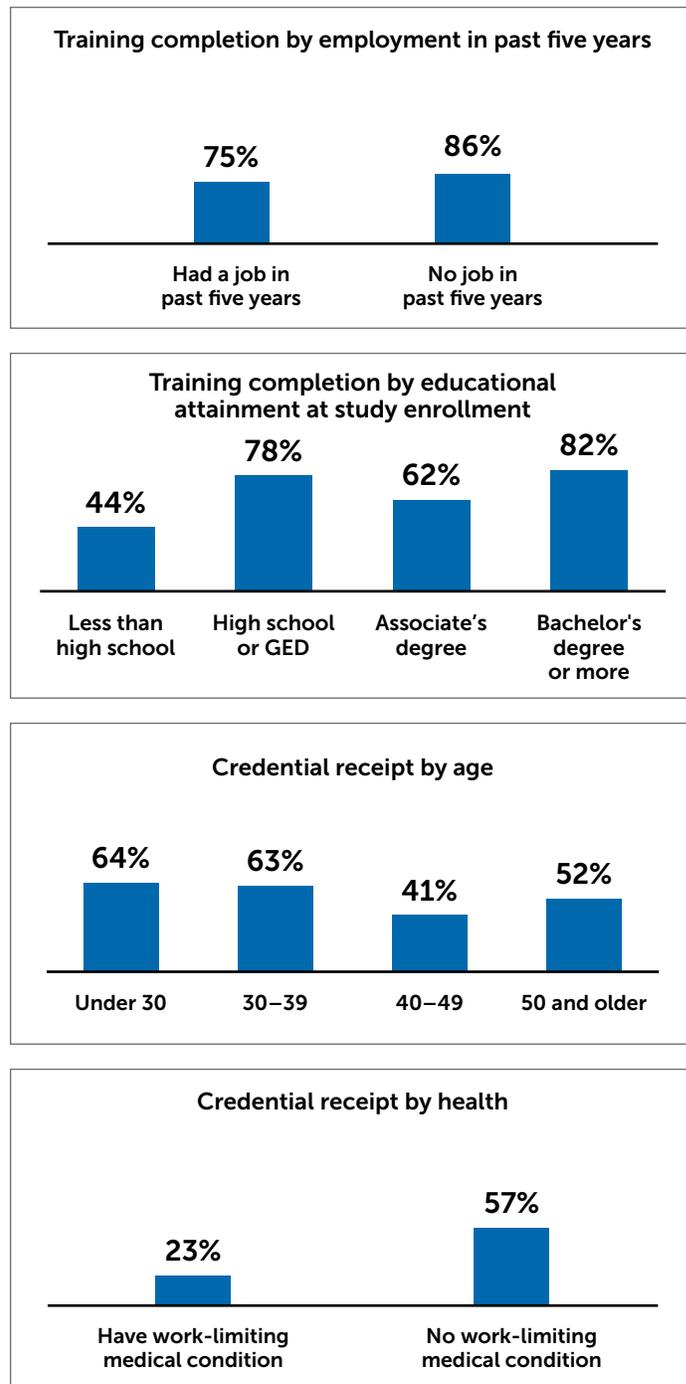
Training completion varied by education and was higher for two groups: (1) trainees who had completed high school or had a General Education Development (GED) certificate but had no higher degree and (2) trainees who had obtained a Bachelor's degree or more education. For example, 78 percent of trainees with high school diplomas or GEDs completed their training programs. In contrast, only 44 percent of trainees without a high school diploma or GED completed their training programs.

Not all trainees who completed a training program received a credential. Some programs do not offer a credential. Even if the program does offer a credential, some trainees might not pass the test or satisfy other requirements for earning the credential.

Age and whether the customer had a work-limiting medical condition predicted credential receipt (Figure 2, bottom two panels). Older trainees were less likely to receive credentials than younger ones. Almost two-thirds of trainees younger than 40 received a credential compared with 41 percent of trainees in their 40s and 52 percent of trainees ages 50 and

older. Only 23 percent of trainees with a work-limiting medical condition received a credential compared with 57 percent of those without such a condition.

**Figure 2.** Training completion and credential receipt, by select trainee characteristics



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys and study registration form.

Note: The means within each panel are significantly different at the 0.05 level.

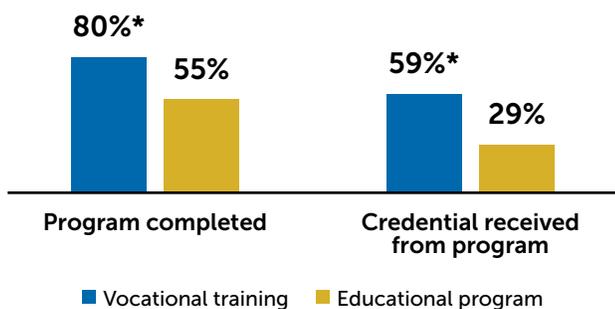
None of the other background characteristics of trainees that we examined—whether they were an adult or dislocated worker, their gender, race and ethnicity, whether they had an hourly wage rate in their last job that was higher or lower than the median for study participants, and whether they received benefits from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Unemployment Insurance program, or other programs—predicted either training completion or credential receipt.

### Are trainees more likely to complete and obtain credentials from vocationally-oriented or general education programs?

In all, 87 percent of the trainees in our study enrolled in programs that provided training focusing on specific vocations, such as truck driving and nursing. Only 13 percent enrolled in general education programs; these included preparation courses for a GED certificate exam and liberal arts education programs.

Trainees who enrolled in vocational programs were more likely to complete them than trainees in educational programs (80 percent versus 55 percent) (Figure 3). They were also more likely to receive a credential from vocational training programs than educational programs (59 percent versus 29 percent).

Figure 3. Training completion and credential receipt by program type



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys.

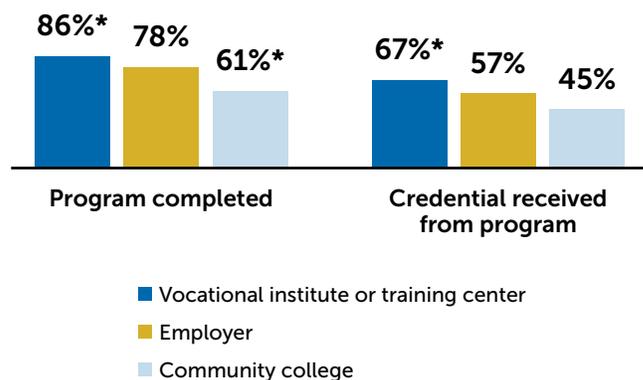
\* Difference between vocational training and educational programs is significant at the 0.05 level.

### Do trainees who enroll in programs with different providers have different rates of completion and credential receipt?

Trainees reported attending training programs offered by a variety of providers including, most commonly, vocational institutes or training centers (29 percent), their employers (24 percent), and community colleges (21 percent).

Trainees were more likely to complete programs offered by a vocational institute or training center and more likely to receive a credential from these programs than from programs offered by other providers (Figure 4). Trainees who attended training at a community college were much less likely to complete these programs than those who attended training at the other types of providers. These differences persisted even when we controlled for whether a program had a vocational or educational focus.

Figure 4. Training completion and credential receipt by provider type



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys.

\* Difference between provider and all other (listed and nonlisted) providers is significant at the 0.05 level.

### Are trainees more likely to complete training or earn a credential depending on the occupation trained for?

Trainees participated in training programs with more than 100 different occupational focuses. These reflect a broad range of not only subject matter but also length, difficulty, and how tightly linked the program is to a credential.

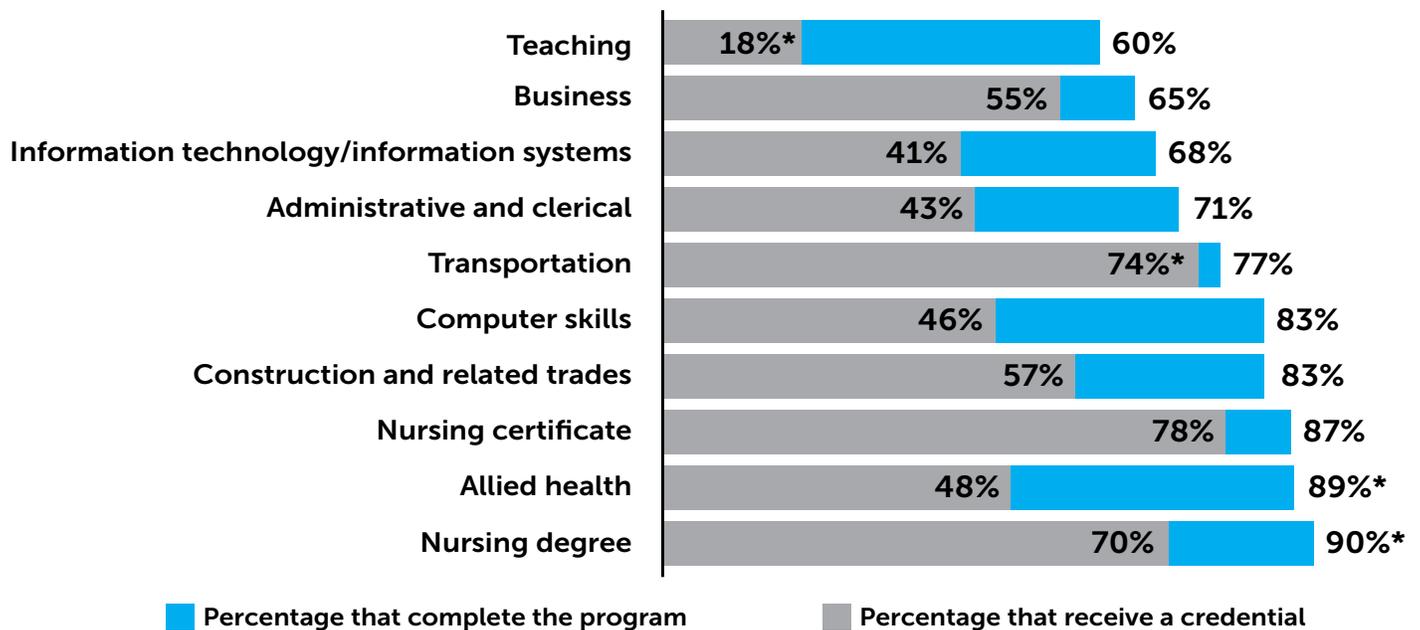
More than half (58 percent) of the programs could be categorized into 10 groups based on occupational focus (see box to right). On average, 78 percent of trainees completed programs but rates ranged from 60 to 90 percent by occupational group (Figure 5). Trainees were more likely to complete allied health, nursing certificate, and nursing degree programs than all other programs. They were less likely to complete teaching, business, and information technology/information systems programs than all other programs. Few of the differences in completion rates were statistically significant.

On average, 56 percent of trainees received a credential, with rates ranging from 18 to 78 percent. Trainees were more likely to receive a credential from nursing degree, transportation, and nursing certificate programs than all other programs, and less likely to receive a credential through teaching, information technology/information systems, and administrative and clerical programs than all other programs. But, again, few of the differences were statistically significant.

### COMMON TRAINING PROGRAM OCCUPATIONAL GROUPINGS AND EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

- **Administrative and clerical (2 percent of programs):** accounting/bookkeeping, office administration
- **Allied health (10 percent):** medical lab tech, medical billing specialist
- **Business (3 percent):** financial planner, e-commerce
- **Computer skills (6 percent):** basic computer skills, Microsoft Office
- **Construction and related trades (6 percent):** welding, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning
- **Information technology/information systems (2 percent):** A+ Certification, Network Plus
- **Nursing certificate (9 percent):** Certified Nursing Assistant, other nursing assistant
- **Nursing degree (9 percent):** Licensed Practical Nurse, Registered Nurse
- **Teaching (2 percent):** teaching certificate, courses in education
- **Transportation (8 percent):** truck driving, diesel mechanic

**Figure 5. Training completion and credential receipt by occupational focus**



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys.

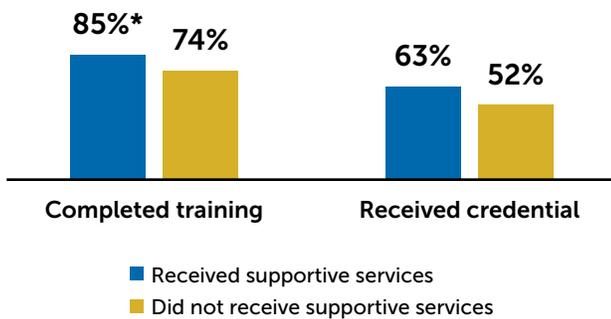
\* Difference between program with given focus and all other (listed and nonlisted) programs is significant at the 0.05 level

## Are trainees who receive other services more likely to complete training and earn a credential?

Trainees in our study could access services at American Job Centers and elsewhere to help lessen some obstacles to attending and completing training programs. Examples of these supportive services include gas cards and other transportation assistance as well as assistance paying for books, tools, and other materials required for some education and training programs.

Among trainees, 38 percent received at least one supportive service. They were more likely than those who did not receive any supportive services to complete training, but were not significantly more or less likely to receive a credential (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Training completion and credential receipt by receipt of supportive services



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys.

\* Differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

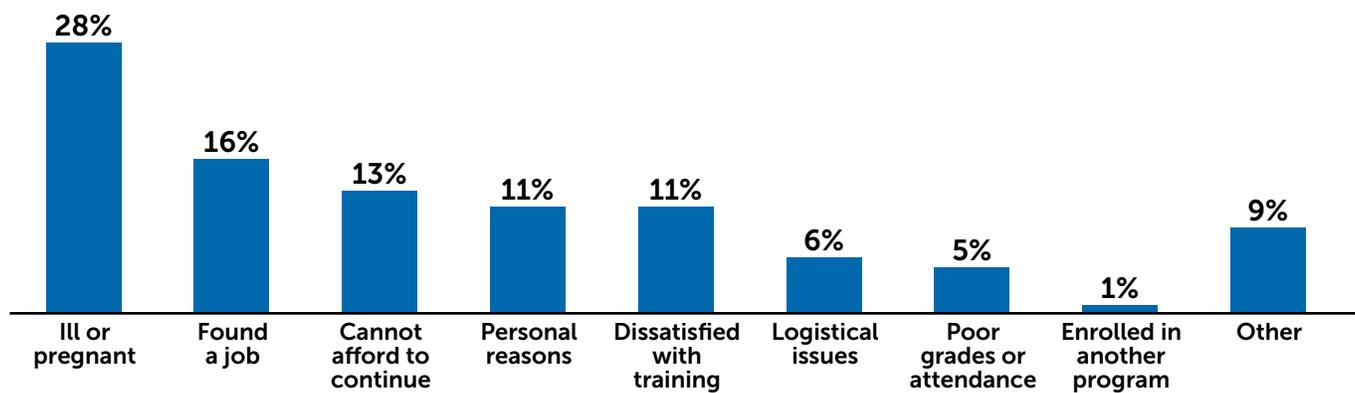
Looking at specific supportive services, after adjusting for customer characteristics, trainees who received help paying for child care, medical and dental fees, tests, or transportation were more likely to complete their training programs than those not receiving these supports. Trainees who received assistance to pay for child care were also more likely to receive a credential than those who did not receive this assistance.

Other services a trainee might have received from an American Job Center or elsewhere in the community did not predict increases in training completion and credential receipt. These services include one-on-one assistance, workshops, assessments of basic skills or aptitudes, job clubs, and resource rooms.

## Why did trainees drop out of training programs?

When asked, the 16 percent of trainees who dropped out of their training program before completion reported a wide variety of reasons for doing so (Figure 7). Trainees often left programs because of personal reasons, most commonly an illness or pregnancy (28 percent). Sixteen percent left programs because they found a job and 13 percent left because they could not afford to continue. About one-quarter left for reasons having to do with the program, including dissatisfaction (11 percent), logistical issues (6 percent), and poor grades or attendance (5 percent). One percent enrolled in another program, and 9 percent left for other reasons.

**Figure 7.** Reasons cited for leaving program before completion



Source: WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation follow-up surveys.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Jepsen, Christopher, Kenneth Troske, and Paul Coomes. “The Labor-Market Returns to Community College Degrees, Diplomas, and Certificates.” *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2014, pp. 95–121.

Lazarte, Veronica Milagros Minaya, and Judith E. Scott-Clayton. “Labor Market Trajectories for Community College Graduates: New Evidence Spanning the Great Recession.” Working paper. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, we examined trainees’ dislocated worker status, gender, age, race, education, primary language spoken, past vocational education, marital status, employment history, last real hourly wage, household size, whether the customer previously used an American Job Center, and receipt of public assistance benefits.

### ABOUT THIS SERIES

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Through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Congress allocates about \$2 billion annually for employment and training services that states and their Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) provide to adults and dislocated workers. WIA mandates that job seekers and employers have access to employment and training resources provided by more than a dozen workforce system partners through American Job Centers (AJCs, formerly known as One-Stop Career Centers). AJC job-seeker customers can also access core services, such as information on local labor markets and job openings. In addition, eligible adults and dislocated workers may receive WIA-funded intensive services, such as career counseling and skills assessments, and training services.

This issue brief is one in a series that present findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, which is being conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The study examines the implementation, effectiveness, and benefits and costs of the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs using an experimental design. The study occurred in 28 local areas that were randomly selected to participate. For more information about the evaluation, please visit the [project web page](#).

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