

# Jobs to Careers

*Transforming the Front Lines of Health Care*

## Evaluation Brief: Preliminary Results for Educational Institutions

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- Marty Heilstedt, Vice President of Instruction, Renton Technical College

## Background

Many educational institutions are currently experiencing a surge in enrollment from adult and employee learners. Economic restructuring and downturns have sent many individuals back to school to obtain marketable skills and credentials. Meeting the unique learning needs of low-wage incumbent workers, however, has been a challenge. These workers face challenges to pursuing formalized education such as transportation logistics, childcare arrangements, job schedules, and the often prohibitive cost of postsecondary education.

The *Jobs to Careers: Transforming the Front Lines of Health Care* initiative, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in collaboration with the Hitachi Foundation, is a promising new workforce development model that has the potential to help educational institutions meet the education and training needs of low-wage incumbent workers more effectively. Through work-based learning, educational institutions (e.g., community colleges, 4-year universities, independent training providers), employers, and other relevant stakeholders work in collaboration to create education and career advancement for incumbent frontline health and health care workers (FLWs).

## Evaluation Methodology and Objective

An evaluation team housed at the UNC Institute on Aging (in collaboration with the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research) conducted an in-depth examination of the 17 *Jobs to Careers* pilot programs through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key informants (e.g., CEOs, HR personnel, upper level administrators, program staff, supervisors, and frontline workers). The purpose of this brief is to present the preliminary findings of this evaluation that have specific relevance to educational institutions. Specifically, this report:

1. Describes the *Jobs to Careers* work-based learning model of education and career advancement and its application in real world settings
2. Identifies the key issues that educational institutions should attend to when designing and implementing programs based on this model
3. Illustrates the benefits of incorporating work-based learning into existing educational and training strategies

## Work-Based Learning and the Jobs to Careers Model

The work-based learning model (WBL) of education and career advancement is the central concept guiding the *Jobs to Careers* initiative. As described by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, work based learning is:

***an approach to adult education and training that emphasizes the employee as learner, and the work process itself as a source of learning. It involves methods of education and training that capture, document, formalize, and reward learning that occurs on the job. Work-based learning establishes structured expectations and competencies, and results in academic credit or industry-recognized credentials for achievement. It shares features with (and builds upon) other forms of learning associated with the workplace, including on-site classes, internships, clinical rounds or residencies, and apprenticeships. Yet it is distinguished by being continuous with the job itself, which is structured to achieve learning objectives. These objectives, in turn, are derived from the skill requirements of the job***

The *Jobs to Careers WBL* model turns the traditional process of academic learning on its head. There are several differences between traditional education programs and work-based learning. A few substantial differences include the following: (1) learning occurs onsite at the employer during the employees' regular workday; (2) curriculum is adapted to meet the skills and training needs of employers; (3) staff from the employer organization are used in addition to faculty and instructors to deliver, assess, and document learning; and (4) course credit is awarded upon documentation of mastering curriculum and competencies. Over the course of developing and implementing the *Jobs to Careers* training programs, eight core components of the work-based learning model were developed. Table 1 below identifies these components and provides examples of practices that capture the key features of the model.

1. Curriculum is embedded in the work process	2. Learning is embedded in the work process	3. Assessment is embedded in the work process	4. Coworker/Instructor Involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning objectives are extracted from the work process of the FLWs' jobs</li> <li>• Learning objectives and/or competencies are connected to positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning occurs onsite</li> <li>• Situations encountered at work are used to create learning</li> <li>• Learning experiences are developed in a way that is convenient for frontline workers' schedules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work-related competencies are consistent with academic learning objectives</li> <li>• Competencies are assessed on the job during the work process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisors and/or experienced FLWs participate in developing the learning objectives</li> <li>• Supervisors and/or experienced FLWs deliver content</li> </ul>

The first four dimensions (See 1 – 4 above) of work-based learning reflect integration of learning processes with work processes. With WBL, curriculum development, delivery, and assessment emerge from and are embedded in the work process. In practice, grantee partnerships applied these principles in many ways. For example, one community college worked with partnering hospitals to adapt existing Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) curriculum to reflect the specific practices and organization of work within the hospitals. Other educational institutions pieced together a series of classes that were most relevant to employers' skills needs and workers' likely career paths. Most educational partners delivered curriculum onsite, and some allowed supervisors and/or clinical staff to assess workers' mastery of competencies and skills.

5. Potential for career advancement	6. Rewards for engaging in the program	7. Organizational changes at the educational partner institution	8. Organizational changes at the employer worksite(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career ladders are identified and communicated to FLWs</li> <li>• FLWs have individualized plans for gaining competencies</li> <li>• FLWs have individualized plans for education keyed to position progression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry-recognized credential is associated with the learning process</li> <li>• Meeting competencies delivered through WBL results in college or continuing education credit</li> <li>• There is a wage increase or promotion associated with gaining competencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisors and/or other employees are recognized as faculty by the educational institution</li> <li>• Instructors are enlisted from college(s) to deliver learning at the work site</li> <li>• There are mechanisms by which credit for prior learning or competency assessment results in credit for FLWs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition advancement is a benefit available to FLWs</li> <li>• Educational release time is a benefit available to FLWs</li> <li>• Performance assessments are structured to explicitly acknowledge competencies gained through WBL activities</li> </ul>

The last four dimensions (5 – 8 above) reflect organizational practices that comprise the *Jobs to Careers* work-based learning model and the types of outcomes and rewards the model deemed meaningful. In terms of helping frontline workers with career advancement, some educational partners provided information on the types of health careers available and the educational pathways necessary to pursue these careers based on FLWs' education history and career interests. Educational institutions that awarded continuing education or college credit for completing *Jobs to Careers* curriculum also helped participating workers move closer towards career and education goals. Lastly, a few educational partners created positions for instructors to hold dual appointments at the employer site and educational institution. This dual appointment allowed workers to have more convenient access to educational institution staff as they engaged in coursework.

## Lessons Learned

Grantee partnerships varied in the extent to which they implemented the *Jobs to Careers* work-based learning model. Based on systematic identification of common challenges and facilitators to implementing the model, the following lessons were learned. These lessons represent key issues that educational institutions interested in frontline worker investment should attend to when designing and implementing programs based on the *Jobs to Careers* model.

### Develop Credit for Prior Learning Policies

- Credit for prior learning policies (awarding college credit for classes taken outside of traditional educational institutions, on-the-job training or simply experience at work) help workers pursuing education part-time reach meaningful milestones in a more reasonable time frame.
- Allowing workers to test out of courses by demonstrating competencies gained through work experience and reviewing workplace training curriculum for overlap with educational coursework are potential strategies for awarding credit for prior learning.

### Create Flexible Pathways to Certificate/Degree Completion

- Building flexibility into progression through certificate/degree coursework allows incumbent workers to create and pursue manageable education plans.
- Examples of flexibility include providing multiple options for bundling courses to fulfill certificate/degree requirements, articulating non-credit courses with for-credit coursework, and extending time limits for completion and expiration of credit.

### Incorporate Non-Traditional Teaching Techniques

- Collaborative learning environments are more effective for adult learners than traditional authority-oriented teaching techniques.
- Course planning, curriculum delivery, and evaluation activities should be mutual activities between the learner and the instructor.

### Offer Evening, Weekend, and Online Courses

- Finding the time to attend class is a barrier for low-wage workers, many of whom work two jobs or have family responsibilities.
- Providing classes that can be taken during extended evening and weekend hours, and online provide workers with the opportunity to complete a certificate or take a course that otherwise would not have been feasible for them.

### Cultivate Buy-in from Top-Level Administrators

- High level administrators such as deans/directors are able to push curriculum and other policy changes through educational bureaucracies, thus their buy-in is critical to making these programs work.
- Emphasizing the cutting edge, forward-thinking approach to education involved in the *Jobs to Careers* work-based learning model helps convince top-level administrators of the value of adopting the model.

### Expand Student Services to Include Coaching

- Advisers play a critical role in helping employee learners align education histories, education goals, and career goals.
  - Extending academic advising to include coaching on navigating work, education, and personal lives helps workers manage these competing demands more effectively.
  - Providing services or referral information related to childcare, transportation, and finances are examples of coaching areas especially relevant for low-wage incumbent workers.
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## The Business Case for Investing in Incumbent Worker Learners

Successful implementation of the Jobs to Careers work-based learning model requires employers to commit internal resources and leverage external resources to make systems changes and to support FLW learning expenses. For most organizations, targeting FLWs with these training and development dollars is a new type of investment. Most employers involved in the Jobs to Careers program believe that this investment has created valuable returns for their organization. The following are examples of organizational benefits as reported by administrators and staff:

I have a whole new category of instructor at the college. Folks who are still working in the field full time probably for the most part who are really current on research, current treatment models and they bring reality into the classroom. And truthfully most of our students are not “chalk and talk” students anymore...and to have that dynamic in the classroom, it’s wonderful because ...there’s a lot more give and take...The teacher can bring in “this happened in group yesterday” [and] it’s something they can process and then do better the next time so job performance is not just based on attendance or did you dress appropriately or whatever.

-Kenneth Gill, Dean of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Univ. of Medicine and Dentistry, NJ

- ❖ **Allows for better alignment of educational offerings with local workforce needs**
  - ❖ **Increases enrollment which translates into increased tuition revenue**
  - ❖ **Better integration of divisions/departments within the institution**
    - ❖ **Higher course completion rates**
- ❖ **College of choice for employers’ sending workers for continuing/advanced education**
  - ❖ **Integration of education, research, and practice strengthens academic rigor**
    - ❖ **Shared overhead costs with local employers**

The biggest benefit to this institution would be I think the relationship it builds with the employer. Because while medical assistant is one program that this institution – that’s what we’re doing with Virginia Mason. VM also employs nurses. We train nurses. VM employs surgical technicians. We train surgical technicians. If the employer has a good experience with us, and more importantly in this venture and gets an employee who’s what they need, who’s skills are good, and has a good, work ethic they’re more inclined to come back to us for our other programs because they view us as a quality provider of training good workers. So that’s, that’s the benefit for us.

-Marty Heilstedt, Vice President of Instruction, Renton Technical College

## Thematic Analysis: Incumbent Workers Versus Traditional Students

Working with adult, incumbent workers in demanding low-wage jobs was new and challenging for some of the educational institutions participating in the Jobs to Careers pilot programs. The typical community college student who is a young adult transitioning into a four-year program or a dislocated worker attempting a career transition are both different from this learner population. Low-wage incumbent workers deal with the competing demands of full-time work and family responsibilities in addition to educational requirements. The low wages and lack of consistent and flexible scheduling attached to low-skilled jobs create challenges to funding continuing or advanced education as well as fitting classes into daily schedules. Basic skills deficits (e.g., math, literacy) are also more pronounced in this population of workers given their limited formal education and the time that has elapsed since their last schooling experience.

Despite the challenges faced by low-wage incumbent workers, key informants at all levels of the educational institutions participating in the Jobs to Careers pilot programs maintained that this learner population enhanced the colleges in meaningful ways. They bring their knowledge of the practical application of the curriculum to the classroom – often using this knowledge to teach their peers who are traditional students. Key informants also observed that incumbent learners are often more motivated and focused than traditional students (particularly younger students just out of high school) and work hard to achieve their education goals despite the obstacles they face. Lastly, the work-based learning model gave faculty, instructors, deans, and other student advocates an opportunity to see the results of the educational process in real time – something that does not always happen when students simply graduate or move. Key informants noted how much they enjoyed being able to witness the psychological (e.g., greater confidence in their abilities to learn and master formal education) and material (e.g., raises and promotions) rewards that FLWs enjoyed because of the pilot programs.

This Evaluation Brief is a product of the UNC Evaluation of the *Jobs to Careers: Promoting Work-Based Learning for Quality Care* program. The evaluation project is housed at the UNC Institute on Aging and conducted in partnership with the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research and led by Co-Principal Investigators Jennifer Craft Morgan, Ph.D. and Thomas R. Konrad, Ph.D.

You can learn more about the evaluation at our website: [www.aging.unc.edu/research/j2c/index.html](http://www.aging.unc.edu/research/j2c/index.html) and more about the Jobs to Careers program at the program website: [www.jobs2careers.org](http://www.jobs2careers.org)

