

EDUCATION LAB BLOG

Education Lab is a yearlong project to spark meaningful conversations about education solutions in the Pacific Northwest.

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Workforce training: Some programs are stars, others have little effect

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More than [\\$842 million](#) in state and federal money was spent on workforce training in Washington state last year, including money for many programs run by the state's 34 community and technical colleges.

So how well do these programs do?

A [recently-released report card](#) provides some answers.

Workforce training encompasses 16 programs in Washington, including high school career and technical education, apprenticeships, worker retraining, vocational associate of arts degrees and vocational certificates, said Marina Parr, communications director for the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

One of the top-performing programs is [apprenticeships](#). Workers who complete an apprenticeship make, on average about \$63,000 a year shortly after finishing a program. They made about \$19,000 more a year than a control group of people with similar demographics who did not participate, and had an employment rate that was 9.8 percentage points higher than the control group.

Apprenticeships are rare and hard to snag, but they yield a \$91 to \$1 taxpayer return on — in other words, for every \$1 in taxpayer money spent to support the program, the employee will pay \$91 in projected additional lifetime taxes and reduced unemployment insurance benefits.

Other programs with good results:

- Vocational associate of arts degrees and vocational certificates earned at a community or technical college result in an employment rate 10.1 percentage points higher than a control group. These students made about \$29,000 a year — about \$9,000 more than the control group.

- Worker retraining, which provides unemployed workers with job retraining for a new career, results in an employment rate 7.5 percentage points higher than a control group. Students who completed training made about \$30,000 a year.
- About 86 percent of high-school students who participated in career and technical education were either in college or employed shortly after finishing the program.

Some programs didn't show much of an improvement, if any, on employability, and wages remained low.

For example, students who completed adult basic education, which includes literacy and math instruction for adults who score below the 8th grade level on those skills, did not seem to improve job prospects after the training. Private career school graduates had an employment rate that was 3.4 percent higher than a control group, but wages were still low — about \$21,000, on average, for those who completed a degree.

Students who really want to drill down into how well the graduates of specific programs fare can use [CareerBridge](#), an online tool created by the Workforce Training Board, Parr said. It shows how many students successfully graduated from programs at all of Washington's public and private schools, how many are currently employed, and how much money they're earning.

It's a good way to figure out how much you'll make after completing an education program of any kind — whether it's getting a bachelor's in psychology from the University of Washington or completing an aviation maintenance technology program at Everett Community College