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2013 Annual Report of the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program

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2013 Annual Report of the

Competitive Skills Scholarship Program

March 2014

Submitted by

Jeanne S. Paquette, Commissioner

Maine Department of Labor



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2013 Report
Of the
Competitive Skills Scholarship Program

Transmitted to:

Joint Standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development

By:

Jeanne S. Paquette, Commissioner

Maine Department of Labor

February 2014

As Required by 26 MRSA §2033(10)

Executive Summary

The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program was established in 2007 to meet businesses' demand for skilled workers and to provide funding for Maine residents to train for work in high-wage, high-growth, and in-demand occupations.¹ Funding for the program comes from the state Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund.²

This report examines whether the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) has improved the economic well-being of its participants by increasing their earnings and reducing the number who collect unemployment benefits. In addition, it provides a means to assess whether CSSP has met its goal of helping low-wage workers forge well-paying career paths.

Reported earnings from covered employment and benefits from unemployment insurance (UI) are examined for two overlapping groups, before and after participation in the program. The first group of 344 past trainees is the subject of a comparison examining short-term outcomes measured one year after leaving CSSP; the second group of 121 past trainees is the subject of a comparison examining longer-term outcomes measured three years after leaving CSSP.

One-year and three-year analyses of after-program earnings show net increases in aggregate earnings, increases in median annual earnings, and significant decreases in the share of trainees receiving UI benefits after CSSP. These positive outcomes are tempered by an increase in trainees with no reported earnings from covered employment and a persistent minority of trainees collecting UI benefits after CSSP.

Fewer than 40 percent of trainees exiting the program successfully earned a credential. This is significant because outcomes for trainees who earned a credential (completers) were better in nearly every metric than for those who did not (non-completers).

After one year, median earnings of completers were more than \$10,000 higher than the median for non-completers and approached or exceeded \$27,000, the median for all Maine workers.³ Three years after leaving CSSP, median earnings among completers were \$30,700 and among non-completers were \$19,800.

¹ High Wage In-Demand occupations are identified by the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) every two years when ten-year occupational projections are formulated. Two primary criteria are employed: (1) median wage higher than the median wage for all Maine occupations and (2) statewide projected annual job openings of 20 or greater.

² The Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund (CSSF) is financed by contributions from employers, the cost of which is offset from their unemployment insurance taxes.

³ 2009–2011 American Community Survey. From 2009 through 2011, estimated median earnings for the population 16 years and over with earnings were \$26,991.

The share of trainees with no reported earnings increased after leaving CSSP in both subgroups, but among completers, the increase was proportionally smaller and the levels were lower. Three years after CSSP, 20 percent of completers and 31 percent of non-completers had no reported earnings.

The data do not show notable differences between completers and non-completers in the percentage of trainees collecting UI benefits. Completers had slightly higher rates of UI benefit collection before CSSP (49 percent) compared to non-completers (43 percent). In both subgroups, about 20 percent of trainees collected UI benefits three years after CSSP.

This first longitudinal analysis of earnings before and after CSSP suggests that CSSP was most effective in increasing the economic well-being of the 40 percent of trainees who completed training and earned a credential. For the 60 percent of trainees who exited without earning a credential, positive outcomes measured by these data were less pronounced.

Defining for these purposes “well-paying” as exceeding the 2007–2011 American Community Survey median earnings for all Maine workers, three years after leaving CSSP, median earnings among program completers indicate that most⁴ had found well-paying jobs; median earnings among non-completers indicate the opposite, that most had not found well-paying jobs. These conclusions are based on a relatively small number of trainees who left or completed the program before 2010.

⁴ Most who had reported wages greater than zero.

Introduction

This report measures the effects of the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) over time, using available wage and benefit data to quantify outcomes related to earnings and benefits collection. Program performance is measured by an increase in earnings and a reduction in trainees who collect unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. By documenting completion rate, before and after earnings, and unemployment benefits collection, this report provides a means to assess whether CSSP has met its goal of helping low-wage workers forge well-paying career paths.

This report partially meets evaluation requirements stipulated in statute, measuring the impact of CSSP on earnings and benefit collection over time. Other stipulated factors include return-on-investment, value of total compensation including health insurance and other benefits, impact on productivity and performance for employers, and impact on meeting the demand for skilled workers. These factors require data that is not available from existing sources. A survey of past participants and better documentation and internal data collection would provide data needed to meet the requirements in statute and answer questions beyond the scope of this report.

Background Information

The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program was established in 2007 to meet businesses' demand for skilled workers and to provide funding for Maine residents to train for work in high-wage, high-growth, and in-demand occupations⁵. Funding for the program comes from the state Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund.⁶

To enroll in CSSP, individuals must meet the following income and eligibility requirements:

- Have an income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level in the four weeks before their application. After enrollment, if income exceeds 250 percent of the federal poverty level, a trainee is dropped from CSSP.
- Seek training in an occupation identified as high wage, high growth, and in demand.
- Not possess a marketable postsecondary degree.

Each trainee must enroll in an educational program that grants a degree or certification that will lead to a career in an approved occupation.⁷ A variety of post-secondary credentials meet

⁵ High Wage In-Demand occupations are identified by the MDOL every two years when ten-year occupational projections are formulated. Two primary criteria are employed: (1) median wage higher than the median wage for all Maine occupations and (2) statewide projected annual job openings of 20 or greater.

⁶ The CSSF is financed by contributions from employers, the cost of which is offset from their unemployment insurance taxes.

⁷ Approved occupations are those meeting the high wage in-demand criteria.

this requirement, including occupational skills certificates, Associate’s degrees, and Bachelor’s degrees. As a result, duration of enrollment in CSSP varies substantially, up to a maximum of eight years for a Bachelor’s degree.

CSSP provides up to \$8,000 in annual funding for full-time students and up to \$4,000 for part-time students. Funding covers tuition, books, school supplies, and other support deemed necessary for success on a case-by-case basis. In addition, CSSP may fund childcare expenses and provide a monthly stipend for participants making 125 percent of the federal poverty level. Regional CareerCenter counselors determine eligibility, enroll participants chosen by lottery, provide case and fiscal management, and track the progress of each participant.

Economic Context

The enactment of CSSP occurred just prior to the onset of the Great Recession, a downturn in which employment declined further and longer than in prior recessions. In 2012, the latest program year summarized in this report, employment levels remained 4 percent below pre-recession levels, and unemployment remained relatively high. The years from 2009 through 2012 were marked by economic contraction and prolonged and partial recovery. This is the context in which CSSP trainees entered and then left the program and sought work.

Methodology

Data analyzed in this report consist of wage records, unemployment benefits records, and participant records kept by CareerCenter staff. All data are from the Maine Department of Labor. The scope of analysis is dictated by the availability of wage records through 2012. To have a minimum of one year’s post-program earnings data for analysis, the pool of past trainees included in a one-year comparison of before and after earnings is limited to those with an exit date prior to 2012. For three years of post-program earnings—the longest history possible—the pool of past trainees is limited to those with an exit date prior to 2010.

Earnings Before and After CSSP

Trainees entered and exited the program at various dates between 2007 and 2012. Enrollment and exit dates serve as reference points from which to delineate year(s) before and after CSSP. For each individual, the “year before” refers to the four quarters prior to the quarter in which he/she enrolled in CSSP; the “year after” refers to the four quarters following his/her exit date.

Earnings data are from wage records, which are administrative records derived from quarterly reports submitted by employers of covered workers to the Maine Department of Labor’s unemployment insurance tax division. Wage records capture earnings from employment that is insured under state or federal unemployment insurance law; “covered” employment accounts

for 97 percent of all non-farm employment.⁸ The absence of reported earnings, therefore, does not necessarily indicate that an individual has no earnings; it merely indicates that he/she has no earnings from covered employment in Maine.

Annual earnings before and after CSSP are the sum of reported quarterly wage and salary earnings. Median annual earnings are calculated for trainees with earnings greater than zero, excluding those with no reported earnings. Statistics on trainees with no reported earnings are reported separately. For comparison, median earnings of trainees are measured against the median earnings for all Maine workers, \$27,000 (rounded) from 2007 through 2011.⁹

Unemployment Benefits Collected

This indicator is of interest because of CSSP's goal to decrease reliance on financial support from public funds, and because program funds are derived from employer contributions. A binary yes/no statistic for each trainee collecting unemployment insurance benefits is developed by comparing the date(s) of claim(s) in which benefits were paid with CSSP enrollment and the date(s) of last benefits paid with CSSP exit. For each trainee, yes or no is assigned for each year before and after CSSP indicating that benefits were received *at any time during each year (without regard to duration or amount paid)*. The percentage of trainees collecting UI benefits are calculated by year.

The indicator provides a general indicator of UI benefit collection but lacks the detail to indicate reliance. Subjects for future analysis include UI benefit amount and duration (to distinguish short-term recipients from long-term recipients), and whether the cessation of benefits indicates the return to full employment (end of reliance) or exhaustion of benefits (continued need for public support).

This indicator is not a measure of joblessness. Only a fraction of unemployed individuals qualify for and collect UI benefits.

Program Completion

Program completion is defined as successfully completing training and earning a credential before exiting CSSP. Completion rate is determined by calculating the percentage of trainees who exited that earned a credential. This information is collected by CareerCenter counselors.

⁸ Workers excluded from UI coverage include self-employed workers, most agricultural workers, members of the Armed Forces, elected officials; most employees of railroads, some domestic workers, most student workers and employees of certain small non-profit organizations. Earnings from these types of jobs will not appear on wage records.

⁹ 2009–2011 American Community Survey (ACS). From 2009 through 2011, estimated median earnings for the population 16 years and over with earnings were \$26,991.

Improved record keeping during the program and after exit will facilitate future analysis of outcomes by credential earned. Current records do not support such analysis.¹⁰

Upon exiting the program, each trainee is assigned an exit code noting the reason for leaving the program. The existing coding system is of questionable utility for analysis. Some codes are vague or ambiguous (such as “other—not specified”) and others were found to conflict with earnings data. Better and more complete information, particularly on trainees who exit without earning a credential, could provide valuable insight into CSSP’s attrition rates and inform efforts to improve completion rates.

In This Report

Section 1 provides an overview of the program through 2012, summarizing earnings and UI benefits data for all trainees in each of the three years before entry into CSSP and analyzing completion rate and duration in the program of those who left the program. The next sections compare earnings and unemployment benefits received before and after the program for two overlapping groups defined by exit date.

Section 2 compares earnings, and benefits data from the year before CSSP to data from the year following CSSP. The subject group consists of 344 trainees who exited the program prior to 2012. This one-year analysis provides a measure of short-term outcomes. However, the time frame restricts the duration of training to a maximum of four years from the earliest enrollment in November 2007 to December 2011, excluding most CSSP trainees engaged in four-year college degree programs.

Section 3 compares earnings and benefits data from the year before CSSP to three years after CSSP. The subject group, a subset of the group examined in Section II, consists of 121 past trainees who exited the program prior to 2010. The analysis of three years of data after CSSP provides an opportunity to measure longer-term outcomes. However, to obtain the required after-program earnings history, an exit date before 2010 is required. This time frame restricts the range of obtainable credentials to those requiring two years or less to complete, excluding many CSSP trainees engaged in two-year training or degree programs and all engaged in four-year degree programs.

Section 4 summarizes the results.

¹⁰ The database used by CSSP case managers was initially designed for use by another program and will be replaced by a database that can be customized for CSSP. CSSP managers expect that the new system will allow for improved data collection and documentation, including the ability to indicate each trainee’s target occupation and credential and more information if he/she leaves CSSP before completion.

Section 1: All Participants Through 2012

Enrollment

From November 2007 through December 2012, 852 individuals enrolled in CSSP. These include 106 enrollees identified as part of an on-going collaboration between the Maine Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services targeting eligible individuals receiving Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

More than half of the trainees enrolled in 2008 and 2009. Through 2012, 499 of 852 exited the program (59 percent of enrollees); more than half of that number exited during 2011 and 2012.

Entry and Exit by Year				
Year	ALL CSSP		SNAP subgroup	
	Enter	Exit	Enter	Exit
2007	8	0	0	0
2008	364	36	0	0
2009	112	85	1	0
2010	112	96	48	0
2011	132	127	26	14
2012	124	155	31	20

Through 2011, the exit date defining the group analyzed in Section 2, 47 percent of enrollees had exited. Through 2009, the exit date defining the group analyzed in Section 3, only 25 percent of enrollees had exited.

Earnings and Unemployment Benefits Data before CSSP

During the three years before entering CSSP, earnings and rates of benefit uptake indicate a decline in economic well-being, with the greatest changes occurring during the year prior to enrollment. Over the three-year period, the share of individuals with no reported earnings remained relatively stable, between 23 and 25 percent.

Earnings and Unemployment Benefits Before CSSP			
ALL Enrolled through 2012 N = 852	3 Years Before CSSP	2 Years Before CSSP	1 Year Before CSSP
Sum of Trainee Earnings	\$10,809,304	\$10,708,296	\$8,091,550
Median Earnings > 0	\$14,663	\$14,850	\$11,388
Zero Reported Earnings	24%	23%	25%
Collecting UI Benefits	14%	23%	47%

Year-to-year comparison shows little change in aggregate and median earnings from three years to two years prior to enrolling in CSSP, however the share of individuals collecting UI

benefits increased from 14 percent to 23 percent. One year before CSSP, aggregate earnings and median wage fell by 24 and 23 percent, respectively, and the share of enrollees receiving UI benefits more than doubled to 47 percent.

Completion Rate and Duration in CSSP

Through 2012, 499 trainees either successfully completed CSSP (earning a credential) or left the program without earning a credential. The completion rate was 39 percent. On average, those 194 who earned a credential spent longer in the program. Average duration among completers was 109 weeks (about 2 years) and the longest duration was 252 weeks, or nearly five years. Trainees who left without earning a credential spent an average of 1.8 years in the program; the longest duration was more than 4.5 years before leaving CSSP.

Credential Attainment and Duration in CSSP				
Exited 2008-2012	Number	Percent of Total Exits	Duration in CSSP (weeks)	
			Average	Range
With Credential	194	39%	109	12 to 252
Without Credential	305	61%	94	4 to 240

Among trainees who left without earning a credential, the most common reason noted in program files was “other, not specified.” This notation was made on 39 percent of non-completers (117 trainees). “Entered covered employment” was the next most common reason noted, applied to 33 percent of non-completers (99 trainees).¹¹ Another 8 percent left the program for health reasons (24 trainees).

¹¹ A number of trainees with the separation code “entered covered employment” do not in fact show covered wages during the year after leaving CSSP.

Section 2 : One Year After CSSP

This section compares earnings and UI benefit uptake during the year before CSSP to the year after CSSP by completion status (with credential or without credential). The analysis examines data from 344 trainees who exited CSSP prior to 2012. The longest duration of any trainee in this group is 193 weeks (3.7 years).

Outcomes: All Trainees

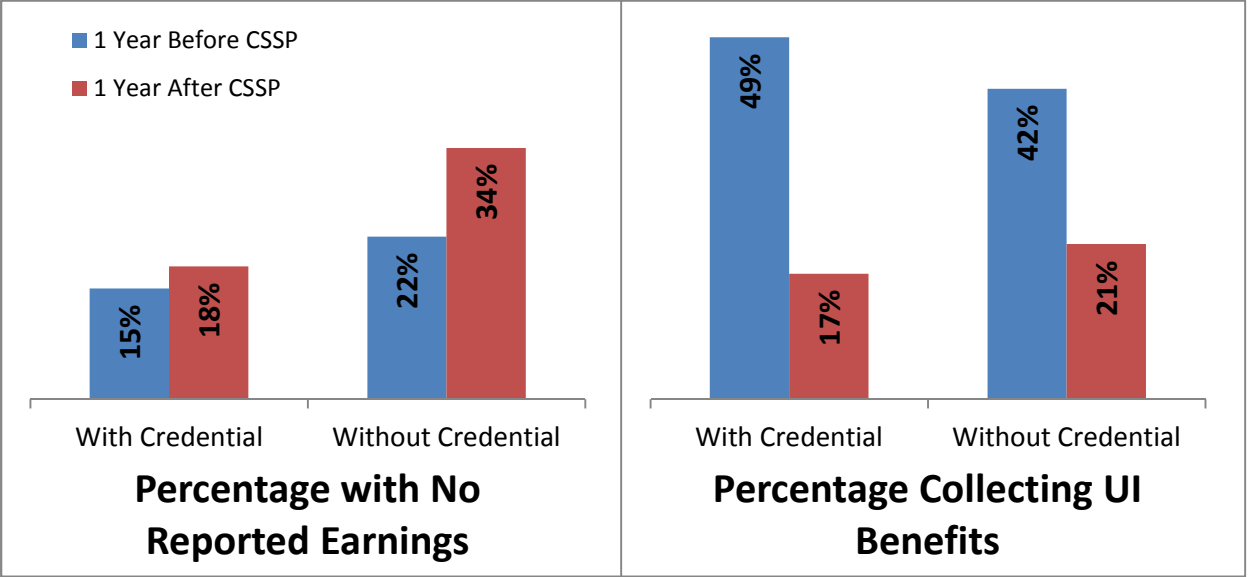
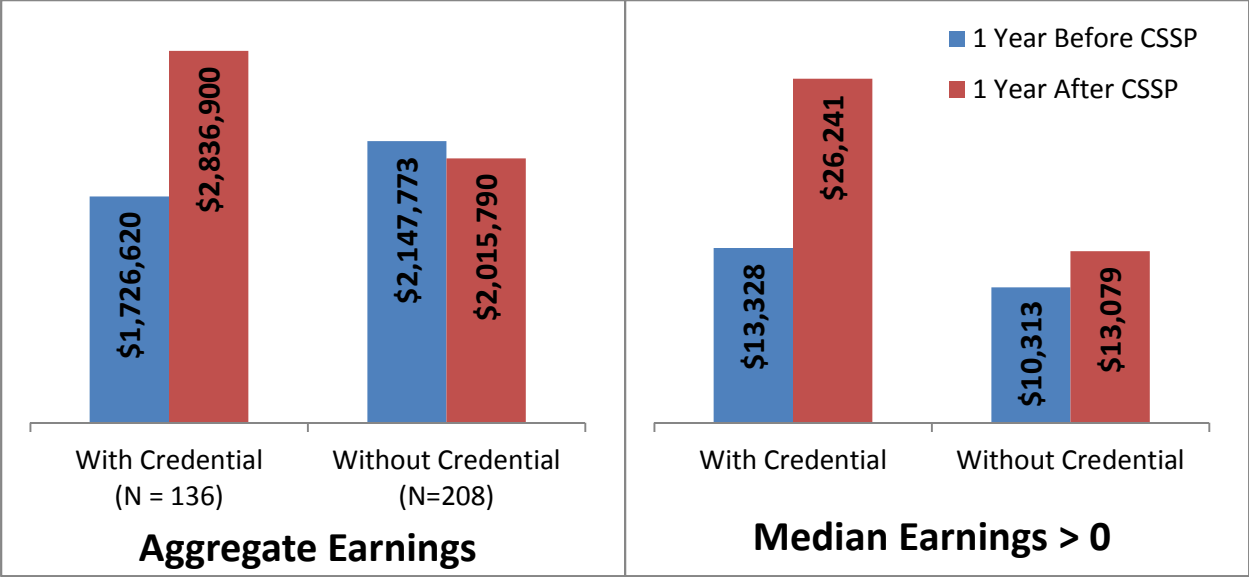
Of 344 trainees who exited CSSP before 2012, 40 percent (136) earned a credential. One year after leaving the program, outcomes were mixed:

- Aggregate earnings increased from \$3.9 million during the year before CSSP to \$4.9 million during the year after leaving the program, a net gain of \$1 million.
- Median annual earnings greater than zero increased by nearly 50 percent from \$12,200 to \$17,600.
- The share of trainees with no reported earnings increased by 9 percentage points from 19 to 28 percent.
- The share of trainees collecting UI benefits dropped from 45 percent before CSSP to 19 percent after CSSP.

While aggregate and median earnings increased and UI benefit collection dropped, the number of trainees with no reported income increased, suggesting that some trainees had difficulty finding work. In spite of the large increase, median annual earnings remained well below \$27,000, the median for all Maine workers.

Outcomes by Completion Status

Disaggregating the group by completion status highlights differences between the subgroups in the year before CSSP and indicates that outcomes were better for trainees who earned a credential than for those who did not.



During the year before enrolling in CSSP, trainees who eventually earned a credential had higher median earnings, and fewer trainees had no reported earnings. These indicators suggest that, as a group, these trainees had more success in the job market immediately prior to CSSP: more were working and their earnings were higher. A larger share of trainees who collected UI benefits suggests that more individuals in this subgroup had a prior history of steady employment that entitled them to benefits.

Comparing the year before to the year after CSSP, trainees who completed the program with a credential increased their aggregate wages by 64 percent and nearly doubled their median annual earnings from \$13,300 to \$26,400. The share of completers with no reported earnings

increased slightly, reflecting a net change of three individuals. The share of trainees collecting UI benefits fell by more than half from 49 percent to 17 percent.

In contrast, trainees who left the program without earning a credential experienced a slight decline in aggregate earnings; median annual earnings rose by 27 percent, yet, at \$13,079, remained comparatively low (less than half the median for all Maine workers). The share of trainees with no reported earnings rose from 22 percent to 34 percent, representing an increase of 25 individuals. The share collecting UI benefits dropped by nearly as much as the other subgroup.

CSSP Program	With Credential (N = 136)	Without Credential (N=208)
Average Duration (weeks)	98	76
Duration Range (weeks)	14 to 193	4 to 192
Sum, CSSP \$\$ Expended	\$1,509,504	\$1,430,580

Average duration in CSSP is 22 weeks longer among completers. Total program funds expended on each subgroup differ by \$79,000, just 3 percent of the total \$2.9 million spent on all 344 trainees examined in this section. The average investment per person per week duration was \$113 for completers and \$90 for trainees who did not earn a credential.

Section 3: Three Years after CSSP

This section compares earnings and UI benefit uptake during the year before CSSP to three years after CSSP, by completion status (with credential or without credential). The analysis examines data from 121 trainees who exited CSSP prior to 2010. The longest duration of any trainee in this group is 98 weeks, or 1.9 years.

Outcomes: All Trainees

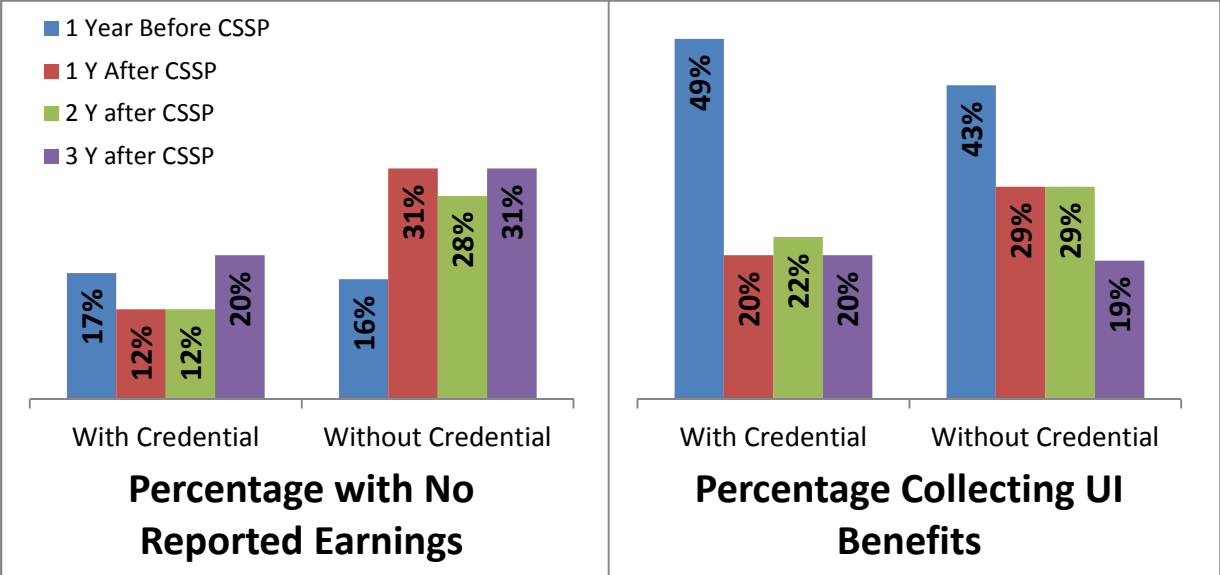
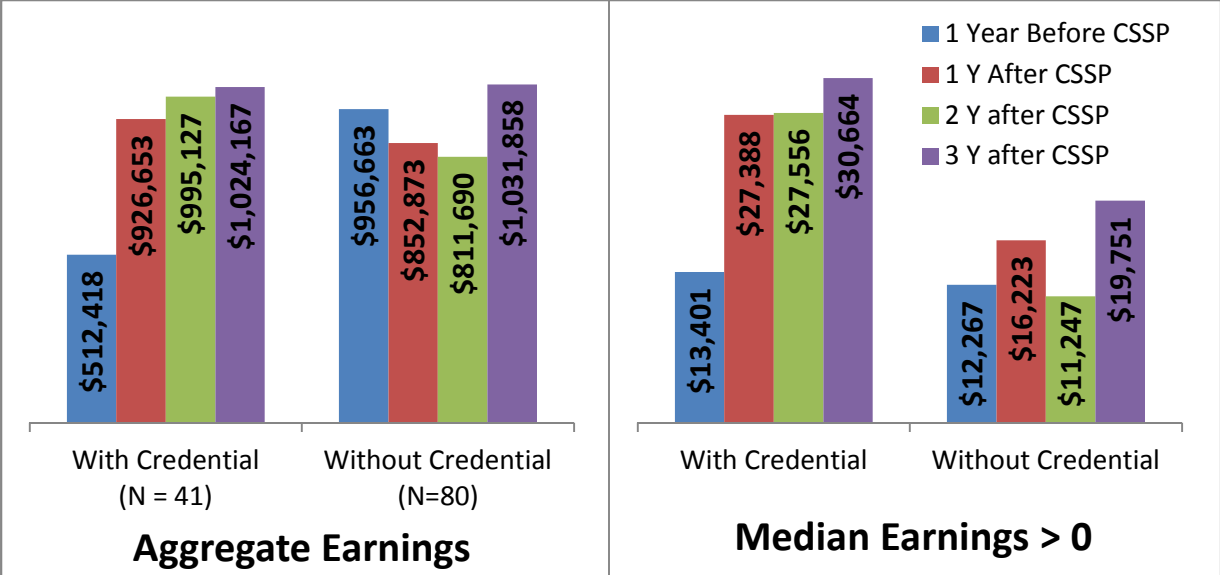
Of 122 trainees who exited CSSP before 2010, 34 percent (41) earned a credential. Three years after leaving the program, outcomes were a mix of strongly positive and some negative:

- Aggregate earnings increased from \$1.5 million during the year before CSSP to \$2.1 million during the third year after leaving the program, a gain of \$600,000;
- Median annual earnings greater than zero increased by 79 percent from \$12,400 to \$22,100;
- The share of trainees with no reported earnings increased by 10 percentage points from 17 to 27 percent;
- The share of trainees collecting UI benefits dropped from 45 percent before CSSP to 19 percent three years after CSSP.

While aggregate and median earnings increased by 40 percent and 79 percent, respectively, and UI benefit collection dropped, the number of trainees with no reported income increased, suggesting, as with the One-Year cohort, that some trainees had difficulty finding work. Three years after CSSP, median annual earnings for the group, \$22,100, remained below \$27,000, the median for all Maine workers.

Outcomes by Completion Status

During the year before CSSP, indicators reveal more similarities than differences between the 41 trainees who eventually earned a credential and the 80 trainees who did not. However, earnings outcomes after CSSP were more favorable for trainees who earned a certificate (completers).



Before CSSP, aggregate earnings among eventual completers were roughly proportional to their number, and median annual earnings were slightly higher than for non-completers; nearly the same share of trainees in each subgroup had no reported earnings. A larger share of completers who collected UI benefits before CSSP suggests that more individuals in this subgroup had a prior history of steady employment that entitled them to benefits.

After CSSP, the differences between the two subgroups are more pronounced. Among trainees who earned a credential, there is a clear upward trend in aggregate earnings, which doubled after three years. Median annual earnings doubled the first year, surpassing the median for all Maine workers (\$27,000); after three years, median earnings reached \$30,700, an increase of 129 percent from before-program levels. Though the share of completers with no reported

earnings increased to 20 percent, the percentage increase reflected a net change of one additional individual. The share that collected UI benefits decreased by more than half after CSSP, to 20 percent.

In contrast, among trainees who left the program without earning a credential, nearly one-third had no reported earnings and those who did earn wages earned considerably less than completers. After CSSP, aggregate earnings initially declined and then rose during the third year to \$1 million, an increase of 8 percent from pre-program levels. Median annual earnings rose to \$19,800, 60 percent higher than \$12,200 before CSSP, but relatively low compared to completers (\$30,700) and the median for all Maine workers (\$27,000). The number and share of trainees with no reported earnings rose from 16 percent to 31 percent, representing a net increase of 12 trainees. The share collecting UI benefits started and finished at slightly lower levels than completers, decreasing from 43 percent before to 19 percent three years after CSSP.

CSSP Program	With Credential (N = 41)	Without Credential (N=80)
Average Duration (weeks)	51	42
Duration Range (weeks)	14 to 98	4 to 89
Sum, CSSP \$\$ Expended	\$226,708	\$222,814

On average, completers spent nine weeks longer in CSSP from enrollment to exit. Program funds expended on each group differ by \$4,000, less than one percent of the total \$449,600 spent on all 121 trainees examined in this section. The average investment per person per week duration was \$108 for completers and \$66 for trainees who did not earn a credential.

Section 4: Summary of Results

One-year and three-year analyses of after-program earnings show net increases in aggregate earnings, increases in median annual earnings and significant decreases in the share of trainees receiving UI benefits after CSSP. These positive outcomes are tempered by increases in trainees with no reported earnings from covered employment and a persistent minority of trainees collecting UI benefits employment after CSSP.

Fewer than 40 percent of trainees exiting the program successfully earned a credential. This is significant because outcomes for trainees who earned a credential (completers) were better in nearly every metric than for those who did not (non-completers).

After one year, median earnings of trainees who earned a credential were more than \$10,000 higher than the median for non-completers and approached or exceeded the median earnings for all Maine workers (\$27,000). After three years, the median among completers was \$30,700 and among non-completers, \$19,800.

The share of trainees with no reported earnings increased after CSSP among both completers and non-completers, but among completers, the increase was proportionally smaller and the levels were lower. One year after CSSP, the share of completers with no reported earnings was less than 20 percent while the share of non-completers exceeded 30 percent. Three years after CSSP, the levels were little changed – 20 percent of completers and 31 percent of non-completers.

The data do not show notable differences between completers and non-completers in the percentage of trainees collecting UI benefits. Completers had slightly higher rates of UI benefit collection before CSSP and slightly lower rates after one year, registering a higher percentage point drop from before to after. In both subgroups, about 20 percent of trainees collected UI benefits three years after CSSP.

Significant questions remain:

- The data do not specify occupation, so they cannot indicate whether a trainee was working in the occupation for which he/she trained.
- Nothing is known about the employment status of trainees with no covered wages. More information is needed to relate these statistics to program goals and outcomes.
- More information and detail is needed to assess UI benefit collection and relate it to program goals and outcomes.
- More detail and information is needed about trainees who leave CSSP before earning a credential to enable future analysis of factors contributing to non-completion or to

establish other entrance protocols to ensure the provision of CSSP services to eligible individuals most likely to complete the program.

- More and better information is needed about trainees' target occupations and approved training programs.

This first longitudinal analysis of earnings before and after CSSP suggests that CSSP was most effective in increasing the economic well-being of the 40 percent of trainees who completed training and earned a credential. For the 60 percent of trainees who exit without earning a credential, positive outcomes measured by these data were less pronounced.

Defining for these purposes “well-paying” as exceeding the 2007–2011 American Community Survey median earnings for all Maine workers, three years after CSSP, median earnings among program completers indicate that most¹² had found well-paying jobs; median earnings among non-completers indicate the opposite, that most had not found well-paying jobs. These conclusions are based on a relatively small number of trainees who left the program before 2010. The wage data of trainees exiting the program after 2010 was not analyzed for this report because the amount of information available was not statistically significant.

SECTION 5: LOOKING AHEAD

Since 2007, the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) has provided upwards of 200 Maine people with the education and support services necessary to begin their journey on a career pathway leading to self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. CSSP accomplished this during the “Great Recession,” one of the most difficult times for newly trained individuals to become employed. Upon review, the Bureau of Employment Services believes that CSSP is a strong program that meets a specific need in Maine and is one of the department’s few remaining state-funded training programs, allowing flexibility to adapt it to meet our state’s specific training and employment challenges. However, like all training employment and programs, there is room for improvement.

The longitudinal study conducted during the summer of 2013 provides evidence that the 40 percent of trainees who were successful in earning their credentials/degrees through CSSP are earning more than the 60 percent of trainees who did not complete their training programs. The department’s goal is to increase the number of completers so as to extend the benefits of this program to as large a population as possible. To increase the number of successful CSSP trainees, the Maine Department of Labor plans to implement the following strategies:

¹² Most who had reported wages greater than zero.

1. Review program rules and policies and adjust them as necessary to improve program outcomes.

This statute revision process is nearly completed. A public hearing was held on the proposed rules in December 2013. We are currently reviewing the proposed changes in light of the public comment with the goal of submitting resulting changes in early 2014 for approval.

2. Once adopted, the proposed rule changes will allow us to improve program outcomes through implementation of the following strategies:

- Institute a more robust assessment of income eligible applicants to assure they are appropriate for their chosen course of study/occupation. Improving assessment prior to acceptance into CSSP will improve outcomes.
- Use CSSP funds to implement proven workforce-development strategies such as apprenticeship and on-the-job-training (OJT) programs which will allow us to meet Maine employers' need for skilled workers and result in specific hiring outcomes for participants based on their training.
- Build program and service benefits around critical sector partnerships.
- Engage business in developing industry-specific cohort-training skills academies with training partners to earn the industry-recognized credentials and skills necessary for entry level employment in Maine's high growth, high demand, high wage industries that provide robust and lucrative career pathways to Maine people.
- Lower training and support services costs and use the savings to increase the number of individuals trained and provide an improved return on investment.
- Align state and federal program investments while leveraging private and public workforce investment resources.