**Building More Comprehensive Measures of Workforce Training Success**

College success seems like a straightforward concept, right? Systems like the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office have been especially proactive at documenting college success by reporting how many students earn certificates or degrees. But if we stop at graduation rates, we may miss other important ways that community colleges strengthen both individual earnings and the state economy.

The Chancellor’s Office has created several tools that give us a more complete picture. The Salary Surfer demonstrates the sizable wage gains that career and technical education graduates earn. The LaunchBoard documents a broad range of outcomes for workforce students, including graduation, employment, and earnings gains. And the Student Success Scorecard shows outcomes for completers as well as for skills-builders—non-completing students who take one or two courses to maintain and add to skill-sets required for ongoing employment and career advancement. By examining these metrics for the full range of training pathways offered by community colleges--from single courses to one-year certificates to associate’s degrees--we’ve learned that career and technical education programs are making an even bigger impact.

Not all students come to a community college with a degree in mind. A significant number of students enroll to build discrete skills they need stay competitive in the job market, and therefore only take a few courses. Recent research by Peter Riley Bahr found that one in seven first-time students take six or fewer units—that’s two classes or less—and the majority of these students are enrolled in career and technical education. They also have extremely high course-success rates. On average, they pass 93% of their classes, which means they are mastering the content being taught. Plus, many of them see earnings gains after just 6 units. In some fields, like water & wastewater technology, returns are as high as 17%.

Some students who don’t graduate from community college are in programs that lead to third-party credentials. For example, in early childhood education programs, students take short sequences of courses aligned with state licensure exams that allow them to work in a daycare center or start their own pre-school. Students see earnings gains of 6% after 18 credits—a pretty good return on investment when you consider these students took just six courses and paid less than $1,000 in tuition.

Other, higher-wage fields see even more dramatic returns. Administration of Justice students, such as police officers who take courses at a community college to earn a Peace Officer Standards and Training certificate, see earnings increases of 20% after six classes.

Sometimes, colleges offer certificates that only require a couple of courses. For example, they might enable IT professionals to learn mobile application development or teach health workers how to manage electronic medical records. However, low-unit certificates are not counted in statewide success metrics. It’s worth tracking these outcomes because both workers and employers need short-term programs to address skills gaps. When colleges report this information to the Chancellor’s Office, it can be included in the LaunchBoard as part of a more comprehensive picture of college success.

The Chancellor’s Office Doing What MATTERS for Jobs and the Economy framework is focused on ensuring workers have the needed skills to gain and retain meaningful employment. By looking at factors like whether these students are able to secure an industry-recognized credential, improve their employment status, or increase their wages, we can build a more comprehensive understanding of college success.

You can find out more on the Doing What MATTERS website, including testing out a demo of the LaunchBoard, reading research on wage gains, and viewing another video on the earnings outcomes of various workforce pathways.