Vocational Education Accountability in Virginia: Analysis of Vocational Completers' Employment Status, Earnings and Job Satisfaction

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(ABSTRACT)

Research and analysis regarding the employment outcomes of vocational education compleers are growing in importance. States and their educational systems are increasingly confronted with the need to justify programs and funding and to provide evidence of the numbers and status of students graduated, obtaining employment, and continuing in postsecondary education. The need to review, improve, and implement effective programs, and to serve the practical needs of all students, including those in targeted populations, will continue in the future. The purposes of this study were to investigate and describe Virginia's vocational program compleers by employment status, earnings, and job satisfaction through a review of three years of follow-up data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and overall distributions, were used to identify characteristics of 9,474 employed vocational compleers, in order to provide relevant data for improving vocational education in Virginia and for use in establishing baseline data for future studies.

In looking at employment outcomes for targeted populations, this study found that employment figures resembled those of non-targeted populations, with high percentages reporting employment related to the service area completed. Vocational compleers identified as having limited English proficiency were reported in very small numbers. Earnings data indicated clearly that with each consecutive year of the three years for which data were included, vocational compleers were earning higher wages. Earnings also increased with each consecutive year for compleers from targeted populations, with vocational compleers who were academically disadvantaged or disabled receiving higher wages than compleers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Compleers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds also reported lower levels of job satisfaction and more part-time employment. Additionally, vocational compleers in all service areas reported high levels of job satisfaction.

Further longitudinal research should be conducted in order to better analyze vocational compleers’ transition to the workforce. Such research could be useful when planning and implementing policy, requesting grant funding, and instituting educational innovations.