



**PERSPECTIVES ON *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND*:
RESULTS FROM A PARTICIPANT SURVEY**
AN ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES IN *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No Worker Left Behind (NWLB) was an unprecedented offer by the State of Michigan from 2007-2010 of free tuition to low income and unemployed workers willing to go back to school and attain a market-relevant degree or credential. Participants were offered up to \$5,000 per year for up to two years worth of education or training.

The offer attracted more than 162,000 people who enrolled in *NWLB*, 50% more than the state's original goal. *NWLB* became perhaps the largest concentrated investment in adult worker retraining seen in at least a generation.

NWLB was built on the belief that large numbers of at-risk workers need to obtain new skills and/or enhance current ones to retain or win jobs in Michigan's changing economy. Implemented at a time when more than 350,000 Michiganders were unemployed and many thousands more were underemployed, *NWLB*'s intent was to connect unemployed and underemployed workers to new and emerging opportunities, and the education and training required to secure them.

NWLB offered a clear proposition to workers facing transitions – any Michigander who was unemployed or had a family income of \$40,000/year or less could enroll. To do so, they simply had to go to their local Michigan Works! Agency (MWA) office and indicate their interest in taking advantage of *NWLB*. All funding provided through *NWLB* supported participants' training and educational expenses, including books and fees.

Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) helped the State of Michigan to initially design and develop *NWLB*, and maintains substantial interest in learning how participants experienced the program itself, and whether and how involvement ultimately impacted their subsequent experience in the labor market. Previous analyses of *NWLB* have focused on other stakeholders (e.g., community colleges) or relied heavily on Federal program data to report participant outcomes.

This study explored the experiences of those who enrolled in *NWLB*, seeking insight into how *NWLB* affected participants and their families. The goals of this research and analysis were threefold:

- Learn about *NWLB* participants and their experiences in the program;
- Identify participant employment outcomes, including wage and retention rates; and
- Determine whether training helped participants attain and/or perform in their jobs.

The following report, based on survey responses from 4,231 participants, outlines the experiences of a set of *NWLB* participants and explores the implications for workforce programs aimed at training unemployed and underemployed workers.

Key Findings

Survey responses provided a wealth of information about participant experiences. Highlights include:

- **Most Respondents Found *NWLB* Valuable.** Nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that participation in *NWLB* was valuable in finding and performing in their jobs. Some (55%) indicated their *NWLB* funded training helped them find a job. Even more (58%) found their training to be helpful in performing their work.
- **Program Retention and Completion Rates were Very High.** At the time of the survey, few respondents (7%) had left their training program without completing and earning a certificate. Nearly 47% completed training, while more than 46% were still enrolled in their training program. At the time of the survey, more than 35% of respondents who completed training earned an Industry Recognized Certificate, 16% earned an Associate’s degree, and 7% earned a Bachelor’s degree.
- **Most Respondents Who Completed Training Were Employed.** Nearly two out of three respondents who completed training had found employment. Nearly 60% were earning the same or more than they had before entering *NWLB*. Those respondents who earned a Bachelor’s degree at the time of the survey were employed at a higher rate (67%) than those who earned an Associate’s degree (61% employed), an occupational license (61% employed), or an Industry Recognized Certificate (50% employed).
- **Advising and Guidance Mattered to Program Participants.** Overall, respondents appear to have recognized that case managers¹ played a critical part in *NWLB*, but individual participants experienced widely different depth and quality of supports. A significant number of respondents said that increasing advising and navigational help would strengthen *NWLB*.

Program Design

Enrollees found *NWLB* in many ways, but once at the Michigan Works! Agency (MWA), prospective participants were required to complete a skills assessment to identify whether or not they were prepared to enter *NWLB* funded training. Participants then worked with MWA staff to determine what training was appropriate, reflecting on their existing skills, knowledge and abilities as well as whether the training would result in new or enhanced competencies and a degree or other credential of value for in-demand occupations.

Local MWAs were charged with identifying training priorities for in-demand occupations within their region and case managers helped guide participants toward appropriate training.

NWLB was intended to be a “last-dollar” program, meaning that participants were expected to use traditional grant-based financial aid (Pell grants, scholarships, college-funded grants) before receiving *NWLB* funding. *NWLB* thus filled the gaps for nontraditional students, ensuring that they could enter training. MWAs were expected to work with training providers to prepare funding packages for participants that ensured *NWLB* funding was the last dollar to support their education and training expenses. Once program eligibility and funding levels were identified, MWAs were expected to co-enroll participants in all appropriate federal programs to ensure that they were able to receive *NWLB* funding and any supportive services they could.

NWLB was funded in large part by aligning multiple workforce programs in support of the retraining initiative, including Workforce Investment Act (WIA) adult and dislocated worker funding, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) monies, Jobs, Education and Training (JET) funding (Michigan’s welfare reform program), and Michigan Rehabilitative Services (MRS) funding. The state asked local workforce boards to allocate a substantially greater proportion of their funding to training (which occurred), and similarly committed state discretionary funding and state-controlled program funding to support *NWLB*.

¹ It is important to note that each Michigan Works! Agency had a different title and name for their case managers. However, the state required the MWA’s to assign an individual who performed effectively the same functions to each *NWLB* participant. We use the term “case manager” throughout this paper to refer to all such individuals, regardless of the actual titles used in particular locations.

Participant Reflections

Enrolling in *NWLB*

When asked what would most improve *NWLB*, many respondents said reducing time to entry. Nearly 45% of respondents waited more than three months after visiting an MWA office before starting their training program. They indicated the delays were a result of a combination of inefficient, confusing processes and having to wait for the start of new semesters at educational institutions.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents found their case managers helpful and valued their support. However, those with the least certainty about which careers and training programs to pursue were most dissatisfied with the support they received. They noted both the large caseloads of case managers and the need for increasing the capabilities of case managers to assist with career navigation.

Workers 45 and older who responded saw *NWLB* as a valuable, if sometimes frightening, opportunity to change careers. Some older respondents wished *NWLB* would've supported hands-on learning options, such as on-the-job training or apprenticeships, rather than only classroom-based courses.

Most *NWLB* participants started with at least a high school diploma or a GED, given the program's emphasis on attaining a post-secondary credential within two years. Many MWAs attempted to connect applicants with basic skills challenges with adult education providers in their area. Numerous survey respondents would've found opportunities to refresh their basic skills as useful, given that many were returning to school after many years away from classroom experiences.

Experience in Training through *NWLB*

Once enrolled in *NWLB* supported education, participants indicated a strong propensity to complete their programs. Just 7% of respondents had dropped out at the time of the survey, an impressive result given the competing pressures faced daily by unemployed and low-income workers. Respondents who completed the first quarter of their training were much more likely to complete the entire program; almost half of those who dropped out did so during the first quarter.

Among the nearly half of respondents who had completed training when surveyed, 35% had attained an industry-recognized credential, 16% had received an associate's degree, 14% an occupational license and 7% a bachelor's degree. Those earning certificates and licenses were likely to be enrolled in training for less than a year, while those earning degrees were more likely to be enrolled in longer-term training programs. About 82% of completers indicated they were very satisfied with their training programs.

Suggestions by respondents for improving training completion included increasing advising supports, increasing work-based, accelerated and online options, and increasing the flexibility about timing and uses of *NWLB* funds.

Experience in the Labor Market after *NWLB*

Survey respondent data suggests a connection between the type of credential attained and employment. The percentage of those earning a credential who were employed at the time of the survey ranged from 50% (industry recognized credential) to 66% (bachelor's degree).

Their responses also suggest the rate of reemployment depends on the occupational field. The highest employment results were found in transportation, healthcare nursing, engineering, computer professional and other science occupations, and education occupations.

Younger completers were more likely to have found employment at the time of the survey than had workers 35 and older. Only 41% of African Americans respondents who had completed training had found employment, contrasted to roughly 60% for other racial and ethnic groups.

Respondents found their *NWLB* supported training valuable both for finding and performing their jobs.

Of those reemployed, 40% reported they started new jobs at lower wages than at their previous ones, compared with 32% saying they were making more than before.

Respondents said *NWLB* would be improved if participants could obtain intense, upfront career counseling, using real-time labor market information to inform their training program choices.

Authors' Reflections on *NWLB*

Based on these findings and our experience in workforce development, we offer the following reflections on structuring and improving programs to train unemployed and underemployed workers:

- **Policy and program metrics drive practice.** Current federal workforce programming does not emphasize market relevant credentials and degree attainment. States that want to implement programs similar to *NWLB* must develop their own measures and metrics that reflect the goals of their programs. Careful consideration and alignment of metrics is critical to ensuring that innovative training programs are implemented successfully.
- **Flexible training programs and funding meet diverse worker needs.** By increasing the flexibility of training programs and funding to better meet student needs, programs could significantly reduce barriers to training for workers. This could include offering programs beyond the semester model, individualizing course pacing and providing experiential learning opportunities.
- **Clear, simple information about credentials' value in the market place can help participants select programs.** In order for participants to be able to make informed and efficient training choices, the value of the training outcomes must be made more transparent. Instead of focusing training on proxies to measure market relevancy (such as length of training), programs should focus on the market relevancy of degrees or credentials earned.
- **Basic skills training can help many participants succeed.** Training programs targeting unemployed or underemployed workers should consider options to include appropriate basic skills training for participants to help ensure they are positioned for success.
- **Employer engagement is critical to success.** Involving employers in all phases of an education and training initiative can inform program design, identify employer demand for workers and result in training that meets specific needs. Employer engagement throughout the entirety of a program can also improve participants' ability to find employment upon completion.
- **Older workers likely require more and/or different supports in finding employment.** Age-appropriate support can help workers overcome unique barriers to employment. These supports could include helping workers repackage their experiences after long hiatuses as they enter training and later when they are seeking employment.
- **Professional development and quality resources are critical for case managers.** Support from these "gatekeepers" is often vital to participant success. They need the skills and tools required to be effective in this role. Resources must be invested to lighten case managers' loads so that they can provide the best possible services to all participants.
- **Participants are seeking individualized and robust career navigation supports.** Career navigation should provide program participants with support in identifying good career opportunities based on their interests, skills and goals and effective pathways to pursue and achieve those goals. Robust career navigation support is critical in ensuring that training participants choose a path that both fulfills their personal aspirations and leads to suitable, secure career pathways.

This analysis investigated the experiences of survey respondents and offers useful insights about their engagement in *NWLB*. This initiative was a large-scale experiment in state investment in adult worker retraining, and other important learning could result from further research designed to better understand the impact of *NWLB* on participants' ability to enter, persist and complete training, and obtain jobs.



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

From 2007-2010, Michigan launched and then carried out *No Worker Left Behind* -- perhaps the largest concentrated investment in adult worker retraining seen in at least a generation. During that period, more than 162,000 at-risk unemployed and/or low-income workers enrolled in up to two years of free education designed to result in the achievement of credentials that would help them find employment in new careers.

A Word About the Survey Results

CSW developed and administered an electronic survey to state-identified *NWLB* participants. This sample of *NWLB* participants therefore only reflects those who a) had and shared their e-mail addresses with the state when they registered under the initiative (approximately 60,000 participants); b) still had those same e-mail addresses at the time the survey was distributed; and c) were interested in and able to respond to an internet-based survey. This is therefore not a random sample of the universe of *NWLB* participants. Readers of this report should keep these facts in mind when reviewing the findings.

NWLB was a dramatic departure from previous public workforce program efforts to train unemployed and underemployed workers. It was a deliberate strategy undertaken at significant magnitude to accelerate career transitions for at-risk workers through demand-focused retraining.

No Worker Left Behind:

- **Shifted state policy from a job search-based approach to a retraining strategy.** During the past decade, national workforce programs and policies have de-emphasized retraining, concentrating available resources instead on matching workers and available jobs. *NWLB* made retraining the central dimension of state investment. As an example of the impact, a Michigan worker whose retraining was funded by the federal Workforce Investment Act program (a major component of *NWLB* funding) was five times more likely to receive support for retraining than peers in other states.

- **Operated at large scale.** The three-year enrollment of more than 162,000 roughly tripled the number of people supported in retraining within publicly funded workforce programs in Michigan prior to *NWLB*.
- **Aligned multiple workforce funding sources in support of a unified retraining initiative.** Michigan paid for *NWLB* by blending funds from many sources behind a common strategy. The state committed general funds made retraining the top priority for federal workforce funds it controlled across several program streams, set the same expectation for locally controlled federal workforce funds, and aggressively sought and won discretionary federal grants to increase the *NWLB* funding pool.
- **Created a simple, understandable proposition.** The core proposition offered to at-risk Michigan workers was straight-forward: up to two years of free tuition that would result in a credential that would help them find employment in new careers.
- **Provoked enormous demand.** Enrollments in *NWLB* substantially exceeded state expectations, with the initial goal of retraining 100,000 being surpassed by more than 50% -- despite very little marketing. When funding reductions forced enrollment cutoffs, waiting lists around the state suggest that had more resources been available, many more at-risk Michigan workers would have enrolled.
- **Emphasized longer-term training over short-term offerings.** Michigan's policy intent was to support retraining that would help workers launch careers in new occupations. The state established policy giving preference to longer-term training in the belief that credentials of market value more often require training of a year or longer. As a result, three times as many WIA enrollees in Michigan engaged in long-term training as was the case nationally.

The Case for *NWLB*

During the first decade of the 21st Century, Michigan was battered by the loss of nearly 800,000 jobs from the state's economy – roughly 20% of total jobs – a level of loss without precedent.² The dramatic restructuring of the domestic auto industry was one of the largest factors contributing to the economic downturn. Entering 2007, with about half of that loss already having occurred and much more on the horizon, then-Governor Jennifer Granholm announced a crucial state strategy that would help as many at-risk workers as possible to transition into good new jobs.

The big idea was named *No Worker Left Behind (NWLB)* – an offer of free tuition to low income and unemployed workers willing to pursue up to two years of further education that would result in attaining a market-relevant degree or credential. Participants were guaranteed up to \$5,000 per year for up to two years to cover training and education related expenses.

NWLB was built on the belief that large numbers of at-risk workers needed to obtain new skills and/or enhance current ones to retain or win jobs in Michigan's changing economy. Two years earlier, Lt. Governor John Cherry's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth had concluded that Michigan needed to double the number of adults holding a post-secondary degree or credential in order to win and hold good jobs.³

Governor Granholm unveiled the *No Worker Left Behind* initiative in her 2007 State of the State Address. Participants began enrolling in August, 2007, and did so in large numbers through June, 2010, when funding reductions forced the state to curb new enrollments. The initial goal was to serve 100,000 participants in three years; the actual enrollment ended up being more than 162,000 people – far in excess of initial state expectations.⁴

² Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget, www.milmi.com. Job loss occurred 2000-2010.

³ Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education & Economic Growth, 2004; www.cherrycommission.org.

⁴ *No Worker Left Behind: By the Numbers*, May 18, 2011.

Policy Setting: Making Training a Top Priority for Workforce Development Funds

For more than a decade, the national trend in workforce funding has been to reduce spending on training and instead focus it on job placement assistance. *NWLB* was designed to turn that premise on its head, making training a top priority for funding across multiple workforce funding sources. For example, between April 2008 and March 2010, 63% of Michigan Workforce Investment Act funded participants enrolled in training, contrasted to 12% of WIA participants nationwide.⁵ WIA funds were the largest single source supporting *NWLB*.

NWLB also stressed long-term training as a priority, as state officials concluded that credentials requiring a year or more of learning would be far more valuable in worker reemployment and career transitions than would shorter-term training. Duration of training was used as a proxy for depth and quality of training program. As a result, 74% of WIA participants (a portion of *NWLB* participants) engaged in training of a year or longer, contrasted to just 24% nationally.

The State of Michigan set the following goals for *NWLB*:

1. Enroll more than 100,000 people into *NWLB*;
2. Raise the percentage of displaced workers who attain certificates and degrees;
3. Increase the number of participants who gain employment related to the training they undertake; and
4. Increase the percentage of participants who achieve wage increases due to their participation in the program.

Program Design⁶: Blending Service Delivery and Funding

NWLB offered a clear proposition to workers facing transitions – any Michigander who was unemployed or whose family income was \$40,000/year or less could enroll. To do so, they simply had to go to their local Michigan Works! Agency (MWA) office and indicate their interest in taking advantage of *NWLB*. All funding provided through *NWLB* supported participants' training and educational expenses, including books and fees.

Participants were required to be over the age of 18, not currently enrolled full-time in college, and must have completed high school at least two years prior to applying for funding. Workers who had recently received a notice of termination or layoff from employment were also eligible. *NWLB* was targeted towards non-traditional students, excluding those going straight from high school to college on the basis that a financial aid infrastructure already existed for those students.

Enrollees found *NWLB* in many ways. Some participants were referred from community colleges, while others were referred by community organizations, training providers or learned about the opportunity from their own research and word of mouth. Once at the MWA, prospective participants were required to complete a skills assessment to identify whether or not they were prepared to enter *NWLB* funded training. Participants then worked with MWA staff to determine what training was appropriate, reflecting on their existing skills, knowledge and abilities as well as whether the training would result in new or enhanced competencies and a degree or other credential of value for in-demand occupations.

Local MWAs were charged with identifying training priorities for in-demand occupations within their region and case managers helped guide participants toward appropriate training. MWAs were expected to collaborate with education and training providers to ensure that eligible training and education programs were employer driven and to place workers in appropriate programming. Entrepreneurial training was also permitted, as was support of basic skills development when necessary. In practice, it appears the entrepreneurship option was rarely used, and many MWAs worked with local partners to meet basic skills needs with other resources, so as to save *NWLB* funding for occupational training.

⁵ PY2008 & PY2009 WIASRD Data Book, Social Policy Research Associates for U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, issued December 2009 and December 2010.

⁶ A complete description of *NWLB* program guidelines is included in Appendix A.

NWLB was intended to be a “last-dollar” program, meaning that participants were expected to use traditional grant-based financial aid (Pell grants, scholarships, college-funded grants) before receiving *NWLB* funding. *NWLB* thus filled the gaps for nontraditional students, ensuring that they could enter training. MWAs were expected to work with training providers to prepare funding packages for participants that ensured *NWLB* funding was the last dollar to support their education and training expenses. Once program eligibility and funding levels were identified, MWAs were expected to co-enroll participants in all appropriate federal programs to ensure that they were able to receive *NWLB* funding and any supportive services they could. MWAs were allowed to determine their own payment process with training providers. Enrollees were not expected to know their eligibility for any of the many federal and state funded workforce programs. The determination of what funding sources would support an individual participant was to occur in the background through collaboration among the MWA, educational institutions, and agencies managing the various programs.

NWLB was funded in large part by aligning multiple workforce programs in support of the retraining initiative, including Workforce Investment Act (WIA) adult and dislocated worker funding, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) monies, Jobs, Education and Training (JET) funding (Michigan’s welfare reform program), and Michigan Rehabilitative Services (MRS) funding. The state asked local workforce boards to allocate a substantially greater proportion of their funding to training (which occurred), and similarly committed state discretionary funding and state-controlled program funding to support *NWLB*.

A conservative estimate is that the total cost of *NWLB* was at least \$300 million, of which roughly two-thirds came from the program sources noted above. Those base program funds were supplemented in two ways. In 2008, the state appropriated \$15 million in general funds for *NWLB* support, but those funds were not continued in subsequent years because of severe state budget reductions. The state also was aggressive in seeking discretionary federal grants for worker retraining, and won roughly \$100 million in special grants that substantially increased the funding for *NWLB*. These sources were primarily expanded TAA funding and National Emergency Grants in response to large-scale worker dislocation from the U.S. Department of Labor.⁷

To track progress on the *NWLB* initiative’s four goals, the state (in consultation with the MWAs) added a handful of required data fields to the program reporting information systems supporting management of the federal funding sources involved. Those changes provided the state with consistent information about enrollment, completion and credentials, but less clear data about post *NWLB* attainment.



⁷ Levin, Andrew, Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth, *No Worker Left Behind* Enters Year Three, June, 2010.



LEARNING FROM *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND* PARTICIPANTS

CSW helped to initially design and develop *No Worker Left Behind*, and maintains substantial interest in learning how participants experienced the program, and whether and how involvement ultimately impacted their subsequent experience in the labor market. Previous analyses of *NWLB* have focused on other stakeholders (e.g., community colleges), analyzed policy implications and lessons from the *NWLB* initiative, or relied heavily on Federal program reporting data to track participant outcomes.⁸ This research and analysis was designed to explore the experiences of those who enrolled in *NLWB*, and gain insight into how *NWLB* affected participants and their families.

The goals of CSW's research and analysis were threefold:

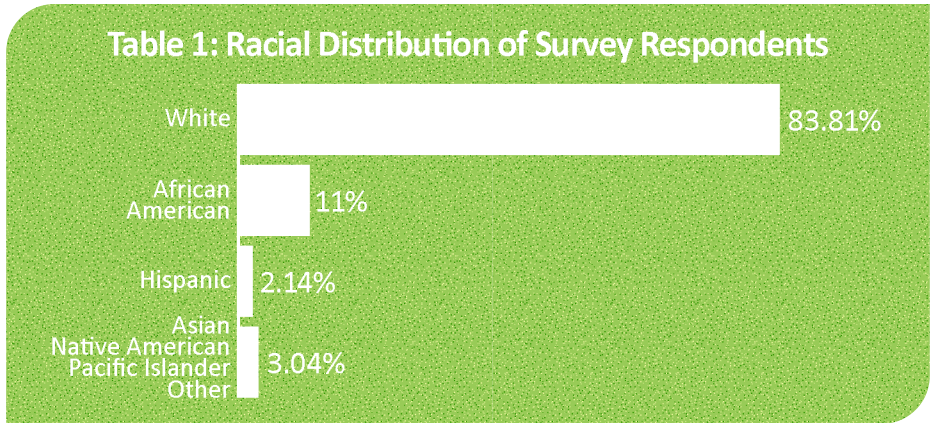
- Learn about *NWLB* participants and their experiences in the program;
- Identify participant employment outcomes, including wage and retention rates; and
- Determine whether training helped participants attain and/or perform in their jobs.

All survey participants were identified through the State of Michigan's workforce program reporting database, which aggregates participant information collected by local MWAs. The survey was distributed to all participants in the database who had provided an email address to their local MWA — approximately 60,000 in all. Participants were able to respond to the online survey from December 6, 2010 through January 1st, 2011. Of the 60,000 who received the survey, 4,321 participants responded. Not all respondents answered every survey question, so some of the specific answers represent small sample sizes. A full description of the survey instrument and analysis methodology can be found in Appendices F and B, respectively.

None of the following findings have been weighted against the full *NWLB* population and therefore cannot be extrapolated to describe the entire *NWLB* population. However, they do provide insight into what many participants' experiences were in *NWLB*. All survey responses were personal to respondents' experiences in the program. Where possible, illustrative state reporting data is included to provide some information on the overall *NWLB* population.

⁸ Previous analyses of *NWLB* include the following: 1) Hillard, Tom (2011) "Leaving No Worker Behind: Community Colleges Retrain the Michigan Workforce — and Themselves" Jobs for the Future. 2) Good, Larry (Jan 2011) "Michigan's *No Worker Left Behind*: Lessons Learned from Big Picture Workforce Policy Change" National Skills Coalition. 3) State of Michigan (2010) "*No Worker Left Behind* Outcomes: August 1, 2007 – March 31, 2010". 4) Levin, Andrew S. (June 2010) "*No Worker Left Behind* Enters Year Three Success and Challenges."

Table 1: Racial Distribution of Survey Respondents



The resulting report is a description and analysis of the survey responses. While the survey did contain a number of quantitative questions, we ultimately sought a more qualitative understanding of participant experiences. This report is not intended to serve as a rigorous outcomes evaluation of the *NWLB* program, but rather as an assessment and synthesis of participants’ experiences through the program and subsequently in the labor market.

NWLB Participant Characteristics

In this section, we describe who enrolled in *NWLB*, what subset of that group responded to our survey, and what we learned about program enrollment from these responses.

NWLB enrolled an unprecedented number of people in training. The enormous interest in *NWLB* may indicate a critical shift in Michiganders’ perceptions of the value of education and willingness to reenter training. There is an extensive body of literature that indicates many dislocated workers can be intimidated about returning to school. Given the many barriers to education – work, time, money, and a state culture that historically valued a high school diploma but not postsecondary degrees – the sheer volume of interested people flocking to enroll in the *NWLB* program was surprising. Whether it was the rampantly growing unemployment rate, the availability of significant funds to pay for training, or some combination of these and other factors – under *NWLB*, adults enrolled in postsecondary education at a rate that seemed to contradict previous dislocated worker literature and represented a willingness to overcome the opportunity costs associated with going to school.

NWLB attracted more than 160,000 participants from across the state, with varying ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, levels of education, work experience, and careers. According to state reporting data, the prototypical *NWLB* participant was a white, 34-45 year old high school graduate living in a metropolitan area.

Survey Respondents

The electronic survey received 4,321 responses. Of these respondents, half were male and half were female. The majority of respondents (79%) were over 35, with an average age of 45. Respondents to the survey were also overwhelmingly white (84%); 11% were African American.

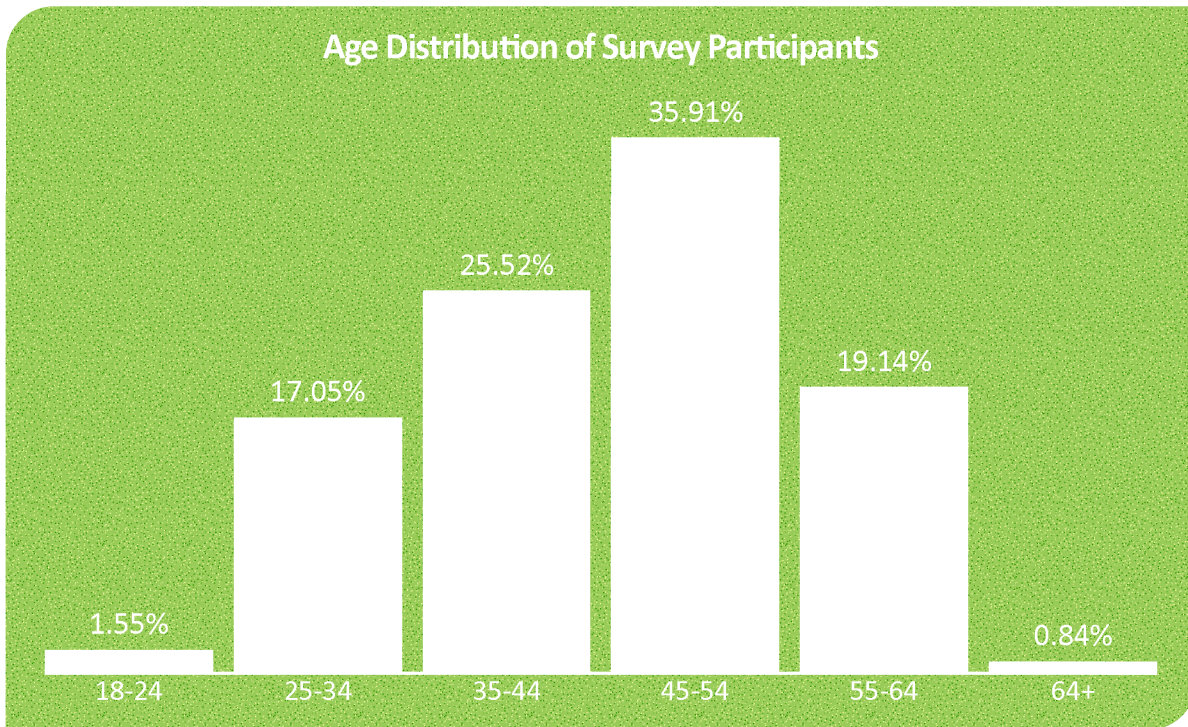
NWLB survey respondents were concentrated in metropolitan areas. In fact, nearly half were from Southeast Michigan, the largest metropolitan area of the state. Table 2 identifies the distribution of respondents across the state.

Table 2: Survey Respondents’ Distribution

Region	Percentage
Southeast	46.37%
Mid-Michigan	19.86%
West Michigan	15.39%
Southwest	8.40%
Northeast	4.49%
Northwest	4.14%
Upper Peninsula	1.34%

The geographic distribution of survey respondents appears to roughly align with the patterns among overall *NWLB* enrollees.⁹ A significant proportion of participants in *NWLB* were concentrated in the largest metropolitan areas in the state.

The average age of survey respondents was 45, older than traditional postsecondary students and slightly older than the overall *NWLB* participant population.¹⁰ Prior to implementing *NWLB*, many workforce development experts predicted the training support would be most valued by younger workers. The data suggests the *NWLB* offer attracted a substantial number of midlife workers needing to change jobs and careers.



⁹ *No Worker Left Behind By the Numbers* report, updated March 16, 2011 by the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth indicates the primary variance in total enrollment from the survey respondents was that a higher proportion responded in Southeast Michigan and a lower proportion responded in Mid Michigan.

¹⁰ Average age of U.S. community college students is 29 — American Association of Community Colleges web site; the average age in the overall *NWLB* population was roughly 35 — 2011 State of Michigan workforce management information system report.



PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS ON *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND* ENROLLMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

The following sections describe respondents' experiences with enrollment, participation and completion of training through *No Worker Left Behind*.

NWLB Marketing & Enrollment

Michigan Works! Agencies operate the state's one-stop workforce centers, providing residents access to a wide variety of Michigan's public workforce development services. The MWAs provide access to unemployment insurance and employment support services such as resume building and job search support, as well as support in some cases for training and education. In general, anyone looking for work can seek help through their local MWA.

While people learned of *NWLB* through multiple sources, including educational institutions, family and friends, and the state itself, MWAs appear to have been the primary source of information. Nearly 50% of respondents indicated that they learned of the initiative from their local MWA. Once an individual learned about *NWLB*, certain core enrollment components were required by the state, including an eligibility assessment and the assignment of a case manager, both of which occurred at the MWA.

When asked what would most improve *NWLB*, many respondents said reducing time to entry by streamlining enrollment. Nearly 45% of respondents waited more than three months after visiting an MWA before starting their training program. As one respondent stated, "The process of getting approved needs to be done sooner than what it is. It took 3-4 months to complete everything."

Survey respondents indicated that some aspects of the process were confusing and inefficient, which they felt often unnecessarily delayed their start time. For example, some respondents recalled having to submit a great deal of paperwork, and also indicated that they received confusing or inconsistent information about enrollment

"The entire start up process needs to be optimized. For example, I was asked to return with a copy of my Driver's License and birth certificate. When I returned, they had a questionnaire, and wanted a copy of my High School transcripts. I ended up having to return back and forth four times. Providing a complete list of requirements would have saved a lot of run-around, and busy work."

-NWLB participant

requirements both across and within MWA locations. Many respondents said that they were required to return to the MWA multiple times with additional documentation.

Some suggested that an online enrollment process would have helped applicants avoid both the need to travel and the time required in waiting for meetings with busy case managers. While each local MWA had a different approach for assessment, orientation programming, and paperwork, there was a general sense among survey respondents that these could have been accelerated and substantially streamlined. An example of frustrations in this regard is illustrated by a respondent who said, “Make it easier for everyone to get into. I had to visit four different Michigan Works offices to find [a case manager] who would work with me. Every other office ignored me.”

Table 3: Length of Respondent Wait Time

Wait Time	Percentage
I did not wait	12.94%
0-3 months	42.85%
4-6 months	23.17%
7-9 months	8.82%
10 months – 1 year	6.67%
More than 1 year	5.56%

Once participants enrolled in *NWLB*, most had to wait for the beginning of the next semester to start their training program - typically one to three months. While many participants did not feel that this wait time was a significant barrier, others found it prohibitive, citing the need to start training as soon as possible due to familial and financial obligations. Delays attributed to waits to meet with a case manager were cited by some participants as making it difficult to complete needed training while eligible for time-limited income supports, such as Unemployment Insurance or Trade Adjustment Assistance income support. One respondent illustrated this frustration, noting “Just add more case workers so that there isn’t such a long wait. Had I been able to enter the program immediately after I became unemployed, I would have been able to receive unemployment and go to school. Now there will be a period where I will have to look for a job in addition to carrying a full load.”

Respondents expressed conflicting thoughts about whether the program should have been better publicized. Some felt that more promotion would have resulted in *NWLB* reaching more participants. Others believed that better communication would have helped to manage expectations about the waiting lists that became associated with enrollment in some regions. Additionally, some respondents did not receive as much tuition support as desired, or received it later than expected and so felt that the state had engaged in false advertising. Participants who were dissatisfied in this regard often asserted that the state should not have promoted a program that did not have sufficient funding.

Case Management & Career Navigation Support

Job loss can be demoralizing and challenging. Many *NWLB* participants were likely already deeply frustrated, scared, and unsure of new options. For recently unemployed workers, it is critical to effectively identify existing competencies and how best to apply them to new employment opportunities. At a time when respondents were most vulnerable, they reached out to MWA staff for support and assistance.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents found their case managers helpful, both in selection of training and in career advising. However, individual participant experiences with case managers varied widely. Judging from survey responses, variability in the quality and depth of support provided by a participant’s case manager was seen as an important influence on participant success.

As the face of *NWLB*, case managers were the initial and primary point of contact for participants. They introduced applicants to the program, determined eligibility, administered assessments, guided participants in selecting training, and provided referrals to supportive services. Effectively, case managers acted as the gatekeepers— determining who was in and who was out – and served as the ongoing touchstone for participants throughout their involvement in *NWLB*.

Table 4: Respondent Evaluations of Case Manager Helpfulness

Rating	Helpfulness Deciding Training	Helpfulness Deciding Career
Excellent	34.10%	33.63%
Good	30.19%	31.02%
Fair	22.78%	23.22%
Below Average	6.81%	6.30%
Unsatisfactory	6.13%	5.83%

Participants were required to complete at least one assessment before entering the program. MWAs were allowed to determine which assessments participants were required to complete, but most included an assessment of basic skills. While *NWLB* did not have a basic skills requirement, many of the eligible training programs did, limiting who could enroll in specific courses.

One of the most critical junctures in *NWLB* beyond enrollment was the selection of a career path and related training program of study. Such selection includes consideration of which jobs are in demand, which training options lead to those jobs, and the relative quality and credibility of the available training programs.

More than 60% of respondents rated case managers' helpfulness in choosing both career goals and training programs as "good" or "excellent". Respondent comments suggest that many of those who had independently identified which specific careers or training programs interested them before seeking *NWLB* support were more readily able to obtain and apply advice and support from their case managers.

But those respondents that were not as certain about which careers or training programs were most suitable or interesting to them and those who were looking for more career counseling were often dissatisfied with the support their case managers provided. Many respondents reflected that they did not believe this was the result of case managers' unwillingness or disinterest in supporting career navigation needs.

Rather, dissatisfied respondents believed that case managers did not have all the necessary information about jobs that were in demand, the quality of those jobs, or the required training to obtain the jobs, to be able to provide quality career counseling services. Those respondents felt that case managers needed more training on both career options and training programs, as well as the specific regulations and requirements of the *NWLB* program.

Respondents also observed that many case managers simply had too many individuals on their caseloads and thus were not able to provide the level of support desired. To this point, several described never meeting with their case managers, or not having their phone calls and messages returned. A more in-depth analysis of career and training information in relation to program and employment outcomes can be found in subsequent sections of this report.

"Good case workers definitely help. My current case worker is great and has been a great help. The case worker I originally had wasn't so much help and I almost didn't get to start my training because of her."

-NWLB participant

Older Worker Participation in *NWLB*

A majority of 45 and older respondents expressed enthusiasm about participating in *NWLB*, but many were admittedly anxious or less enthused about having to go back to school. Indeed, entering training required overcoming significant anxiety for many of the older workers in this survey. Some older respondents indicated that they would have strongly preferred hands-on training options, such as on-the-job training or apprenticeships, rather than traditional “school” settings. The qualitative survey data seems to indicate that worries and stress about returning to school were shared by a significant number of respondents both young and old, but were particularly prominent among older workers.

In order to address the uneasiness associated with returning to school after many years, some participants suggested using tests or study courses to help prepare applicants to re-enter training. While some MWAs and community colleges offered such courses, not all did. Some respondents suggested having courses to make new technology more accessible. One respondent stated, “I need to learn about Microsoft Word in order to type papers.”

“I lack confidence and would have rather done two internships /apprenticeships with different employers rather than the last semester of school in a classroom/lab setting”

- 52-year-old participant

While many of the survey respondents were nervous about reentering a classroom setting, a few did express feelings of confidence. When answering why he felt ready to go back to school, one individual stated, “[I] already had 30 years experience as a carpenter.” Such a range of responses seems to reflect that, while many older and/or dislocated workers are quite likely to feel trepidation at the prospect of returning to a “school” or training setting, others are able to see such training as a more natural progression of their life and work experience.

In spite of the need to overcome personal apprehension and the requisite time required to undertake training, many older workers saw significant value in participating in training in order to further their careers. Some of the older respondents indicated that they had been working in the same field for years without relevant certification. In spite of their lengthy experience, they needed to return to school to earn the appropriate credentials to find new employment or advance in their chosen careers.

While some older workers viewed participation in *NWLB* as an opportunity to further themselves in their current careers, other respondents saw it as an opportunity to explore careers and jobs they otherwise would not have been able to pursue. For example, one 66-year-old participant offered, “I was happy to finally be getting further training in an area that I had been volunteering in for many years and that I would finally be able to help all children more.” These workers viewed *NWLB* as a chance to both transition into new employment and broaden their career options.

NWLB and Basic Skills

Most of the participants enrolled in *NWLB* had at least a high school diploma or GED and very few were enrolled in basic skills courses. While a high school diploma was not an explicit prerequisite, most “in-demand” training programs required participants to demonstrate mastery of basic skills in order to enroll.

All participants were required to complete an assessment, often including an evaluation of basic skills. Unfortunately, many workers in Michigan do not have a high school diploma and/or the basic skills necessary to enter their programs of choice.¹¹ Many *NWLB* participants were dislocated workers and/or workers returning to school after long periods in employment where they were not required to use basic reading, writing, and math skills. While the MWAs attempted to use other funding sources to serve these individuals, many of them were

¹¹ According to a 2009 report from the Michigan Council on Labor & Economic Growth, one out of three workers in Michigan had low basic skills. In 2009, more than 800,000 individuals in Michigan over the age of 25 lacked a high school diploma.

effectively ineligible for any training through *NWLB*. Some respondents suggested being able to participate in refresher courses to review basic skills would have been helpful. Others expressed a general need for basic skills instruction and help determining which programs they could be successful in or how to prepare for programs for which they weren't yet qualified.

Numerous respondents also felt frustration that some local MWAs did not provide funding for prerequisite or refresher courses. This was a varied experience across the state, because some MWAs provided funding for prerequisites while others did not.

“I think there should be training for those people who have been out of school for a long period of time, such as “computer training” Excel, PowerPoint, Word, Access, Graphs, also to refresh on their math skills.”

-NWLB participant





PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE IN TRAINING THROUGH *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND*

Training Completion and Degree/Credential Attainment

No Worker Left Behind provided \$5,000 per year for up to two years for training that would result in meaningful credentials in “high-growth, high demand” occupations. Participants were able to choose from a range of approved programs, including those at four-year universities, community colleges and proprietary training providers. Each training provider and the programs it offered to *NWLB* participants had to be approved by the local Workforce Investment Board to ensure that it was considered “high growth, high demand” in alignment with local employment and industry needs. Approved training programs were placed on the Career Education Consumer Report (CECR) from which participants could select a training course of study in their field of interest. While participants were able to enroll in any approved training they desired, the state prioritized longer-term training programs over short-term programs.

At the initiation of *NWLB*, the state did not establish definitions for acceptable credentials. However, for the purposes of this survey, respondents were asked to indicate which of seven credentials they were working to earn: High School Diploma, GED, Associate’s Degree, Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, Occupational License, and Industry Recognized Certificate. Detailed descriptions of these categories and selected responses can be found in Appendix D.

Table 5: Respondent Credential Attainment

Degree Obtained	Number of Participants	Percent Earning Degree
High School Diploma	1	0.05%
GED	0	0.00%
Associate Degree	327	16.29%
Bachelor Degree	143	7.13%
Master Degree	74	3.69%
Occupational License	283	14.10%
Industry Recognized Certificate	711	35.43%
No Degree	135	6.73%
Other	333	16.59%

Nearly 50% of respondents indicated they were obtaining either an occupational license or an industry-recognized credential. It is important to note that survey respondents often appeared unclear about the value of credentials, including their relative demand in the local labor market, whether employers had validated the credential, and what type of credential their own training program would result in upon completion. This confusion about credentials was evident in survey responses to questions about the types of credentials participants had sought and/or attained. Respondents were often unclear about how to classify their own credential. For example, many respondents would not initially categorize their own credential as an “Industry Recognized Certificate” or an “Occupational License”, but would then subsequently provide a response clearly describing a recognized industry certificate. Not surprisingly, respondents did have an easier time identifying Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees.

Table 6: Respondent Training Completion

Training Completion	N	Percentage
Completed training	2007	46.5%
In training	1994	46.2%
Left training	319	7.4%

NWLB endeavored to connect low-income and/or unemployed workers with training and educational opportunities. Given the constraints and challenges that many of these workers face in their daily lives, completion rates for training programs serving these populations are typically quite low. However, of those who responded to the survey, few (7%) had dropped out of their training program without earning a credential. Ultimately, at the time of the survey, 35% of respondents who had completed training had earned an Industry Recognized Certificate, 14% earned an Occupational License, 16% earned an Associate’s degree, and 7% earned a Bachelor’s degree.

Not surprisingly, survey findings also showed that respondents who had already completed training were more likely to have been enrolled in shorter-term training. Indeed, more than half of those who had already completed training at the time of the survey had enrolled in training lasting less than a year. It may be that those still in training at the time of the survey represent a higher ratio of long-term training participants that had not yet completed their programs.

Survey responses also show a relationship between length of training and the type of credential attained. Those earning Industry Recognized Certificates and Occupational Licenses were likely to be enrolled in training for less than a year, while those earning Associate’s or Bachelor’s degrees were likely to be enrolled in longer term training programs. These findings are not unexpected since most Associate’s and Bachelor’s programs are longer than a year.

Respondents who completed the first quarter of their training were much more likely to complete their entire program, indicating that momentum mattered in reaching completion. In fact, almost half of those who left training did so during the first quarter of their program. Those who left training didn’t necessarily do so because they disliked being in some form of training. While most indicated that they did not plan on returning to the same training program (61%), nearly half of those who left training said that they would potentially return to a different training program (46%).

About 82% of respondents who completed training appeared to be quite satisfied with their training program, compared with 48% of non-completers. Conversely, 52% of non-completers were at least somewhat dissatisfied while only about 19% of completers were displeased.

Respondents who reported leaving their training program cited a wide range of reasons, noting issues or challenges with finances, family commitments, employment, and the training programs themselves. Financial difficulties were most frequently mentioned as obstacles to completing training. While *NWLB* funding was available to help participants cover the costs of training, survey respondents noted that the ordinary costs of living – particularly for those foregoing employment during training – remained burdensome. One respondent described these challenges by noting, “I still had to max out my [loans] and I’ve had to work full time to be able to pay my rent, my bills, books and the remainder of my tuition. The \$5000 a year helps, but it’s only a third of my expenses.”

Table 7: Portion of Training Completed For Non-Completers

Training Completed when Left Training	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Quarter	147	46.08%
Half	81	25.39%
Three-quarters	91	28.53%

Even individuals who reported receiving financial support for living expenses described having a difficult time. One respondent neatly summed it up by noting, “Unemployment runs out and you have to go back to work.” Despite reported concerns about the financial burden associated with staying in training, it does ultimately appear as if *NWLB* funding, in combination with other postsecondary funding sources including institutional grants and scholarships, was able to cover the cost of training programs for most participants. In fact, three out of four respondents did not have to borrow money in order to pay for their training program.

Table 8: Respondents’ Satisfaction with Training Program

Training Rating	Completed Training		Left Training		Percentage Completed
	N	%	N	%	
Excellent	907	45.19%	63	19.75%	93.51%
Good	736	36.67%	91	28.53%	89.00%
Fair	255	12.71%	80	25.08%	76.12%
Below Average	73	3.64%	24	7.52%	75.26%
Unsatisfactory	36	1.79%	61	19.12%	37.11%

Participants Found *NWLB* Valuable

Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they found *NWLB* worthwhile and beneficial. About 80% of respondents indicated that their training was a positive experience for them, while 65% indicated their training was a positive experience for their family. Many respondents stated that the program worked well for them, described the value of their training, and/or noted that it was overall a valuable experience. One respondent offered, “It’s really an amazing opportunity.” Respondents indicated that *NWLB* allowed them to gain skills and improve their education. Nearly 25% indicated that they improved themselves and gained increased self-confidence. Others found value in the program because it helped them earn a new job or gain a new career opportunity.

When asked whether *NWLB* was valuable to their family, survey participants offered a variety of responses. Some mentioned increasing job skills, self-improvement, and encouraging their family members to seek additional support and education. Others indicated that *NWLB* was not valuable for their families, saying that it increased their stress, took away from family time and increased their financial burdens.

Table 9: Portion of Training Completed For Non-Completers

Value to Me	N	Percent
Did Not Help Me	53	14.5%
Helped in Some Aspects and Did Not Help in Others	17	4.7%
Increased skills/education	126	34.6%
Gained Self-Improvement/Confidence	88	24.2%
Helped with New Career/Job Opportunities	80	22.0%

“I think it’s a valuable program especially for a person like me who had no prior education and now is living on a single person’s income.”

-*NWLB* participant

Suggestions for Improving Training Completion

Increase Support in Selecting Programs

Respondents provided a variety of suggestions for improving *NWLB* based on their experiences, many of which touched on program design and training related issues. A full description of respondent suggestions is available in Appendix C.

As noted above, most respondents said they were satisfied with their training providers. However, many indicated that they would have appreciated more support in selecting quality programs. Some recommended that local MWAs screen potential providers more closely and offer student reviews of programs. For example, one respondent argued that local MWAs needed to “research schools and their programs to make sure this money is being well spent. I made sure my money was well spent by learning what wasn’t being taught on my own, but most do not do that.”

Table 10: Portion of Training Completed For Non-Completers

Value to Me	N	Percent
Negative Impact (Less Time with Family, Stressful More Financial Burden)	75	24.8%
Helped in Some Aspects and Did Not Help in Others	30	9.9%
Increased Skills/Job Opportunities (better financial future, hope to gain employment)	79	26.2%
Self-Improvement (Positive Outlook for Future, Good Example)	64	21.2%
Proud/Supportive, Encouraging	54	17.9%

Increase Work-Based, Accelerated, and Online Training Options

Many respondents indicated that they wished they could’ve used *NWLB* support for work-based, experiential learning, such as on-the-job training, an apprenticeship or internship, or other training with a hands-on component. They felt applied learning including work experience would improve their ability to find and retain employment.

Respondents found it difficult to access funding for non-traditional training programs, such as accelerated or online learning opportunities. For example, respondents expressed interest in accelerated programs that would have resulted in the same degree in less time. One respondent argued, “The office refused to authorize any online training, even when the cost was significantly lower – I could have completed additional training [at a] reduced cost.”

“Help individuals find externships to extend training time and gain experience. I have tried finding externships on my own but it is impossible to get an HR representative to take me seriously when asking for one without the backing of a school or company.”

-NWLB participant

Offer Greater Flexibility About Timing and Uses of *NWLB* Funds

A vocal minority of respondents were frustrated by *NWLB* funding levels and rules. For example, one respondent stated, “My vouchers have been difficult to process based on lack of familiarity by my school. Perhaps they should be printed with references to a website that explains how to redeem the funds.” Some individuals stated that they had received less funding than they anticipated; others reported never receiving any funding and some indicated that they were not approved for funding for their second year or continued training. Those that were impacted suggested that it was typically due to program design (such as overall funding running out) or bureaucratic issues at the local MWA (e.g., difficulty getting funding to a specific training provider).

Some respondents that were interested in longer term training programs wished funding would have continued beyond the two-year limit. One respondent summed it up as follows: “It’s nice having an Associate’s degree but it seems everyone is now looking for a Bachelor’s degree.”

Some respondents wished *NWLB* would’ve given them more flexibility with respect to how they used the funding, time limits, and required class loads. Some participants said they were unable to complete their program in the anticipated timeframe due to familial or other constraints. *NWLB* participants who were unable to complete their training within two years were allowed up to four years to finish, but no additional funding was offered beyond the \$10,000 maximum. It is possible that students either did not understand this or training wasn’t approved or offered at the local level with this flexibility. The reality for many participants returning to school was that balancing new classes, family, and work made it difficult for them to complete programs at expected paces.

While many respondents requested additional or restructured funding to meet their educational needs, some who had completed a training program for less than \$10,000 would have liked to be able to apply the remaining balance to future training. One respondent suggested creating “a process to continue the program if the total funding for the participant has not been used.” It seems these respondents felt they had been promised \$10,000 for education and training and that they should be able to apply that amount to as much training as they wanted to take.

“I have been taking classes consistently since I began my training. However, I can only handle 10-12 credits/semester since I work full-time. I am at the end of my 2 years and will be giving back at least another semester’s worth of funding.”

-*NWLB* participant



PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE IN THE LABOR MARKET AFTER *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND*

As a state training program, *No Worker Left Behind* was explicitly intended to help participants gain the skills needed to find or create jobs that would lead to family sustaining wages. At a time when Michigan was facing extreme economic challenges and job loss¹², *NWLB* worked to alleviate skill mismatches and prepare workers for new employment opportunities. The following section analyzes what respondents said about how *NWLB* affected their employment experiences, including potential factors influencing their employment after training completion.

Table 11: Percentage of Respondents Employed After Training

Employed After Training	Completed Training	Left Training
Yes	57.75% (1159)	57.68% (184)
No	42.25% (848)	42.32% (135)

Obtaining Employment

Training completion alone does not appear to have been a determining factor in whether or not respondents retained or attained employment. Virtually the same percentages of respondents who left training and who completed training (about 58%) were employed at the time of the survey. As noted earlier, many of those who left training indicated that they did so because of a new employment opportunity. Responses suggest that the type of training and associated market relevancy did affect their employment. Those results are discussed below.

Credential Type and Employment

As noted earlier, respondents completed a variety of degrees, ranging from Industry Recognized Certificates to Master’s degrees.

There appears to be some connection between length and/or type of training and the resulting credential. Those respondents receiving Associate’s or Bachelor’s degrees were in training longer than those receiving Industry Recognized Certificates. And while it is not possible to equate length of training with respondents’ employment outcomes, those respondents with certain types of credentials or degrees were more often employed (see Appendix F). For example, respondents who completed a Bachelor’s degree were employed at higher rates than those who only completed an Industry Recognized Certificate or those who completed training but did not earn a degree or credential.

¹² Broader economic challenges at play during *NWLB* must be noted, as Michigan lost more than 400,000 jobs during this time.

Table 12: Credential Attainment and Associated Employment Outcomes

Credential Obtained	Number of Respondents	Percent Earning Credential	Percent of Those Earning Credential Employed at the Time of the Survey*
Associate Degree	327	16.29%	60.81%
Bachelor Degree	143	7.13%	66.43%
Master Degree	74	3.69%	55.13%
Occupational License	283	14.10%	61.48%
Industry Recognized Credential	711	35.43%	50.45%
No Degree	135	6.73%	58.96%
Other	333	16.59%	56.02%

**Statistically significant relationship between credential attained and employment status at the 0.05 (p-value of 0.001). Due to some low cell size, a two-sided Fisher’s exact test was used. In addition to credential attained, employment status was statistically associated with age, gender, race, and region. These variables were tested independently meaning when testing one variable and employment status, no other variables were controlled for.*

As indicated in the chart below, some occupational fields, such as transportation and healthcare nursing, had much higher rates of employment than the average rate of employment. Alternatively, some fields had much lower rates of employment. For instance, other healthcare professionals (including LPNs, physical therapists, and other healthcare occupations) had a lower than average rate of employment. (A full description of the fields of study is included in Appendix G.) Any connection between field of study and employment outcomes underscores a need frequently identified by respondents and mentioned earlier in this report – more support choosing fields of study and identifying related training.

Employment and Age

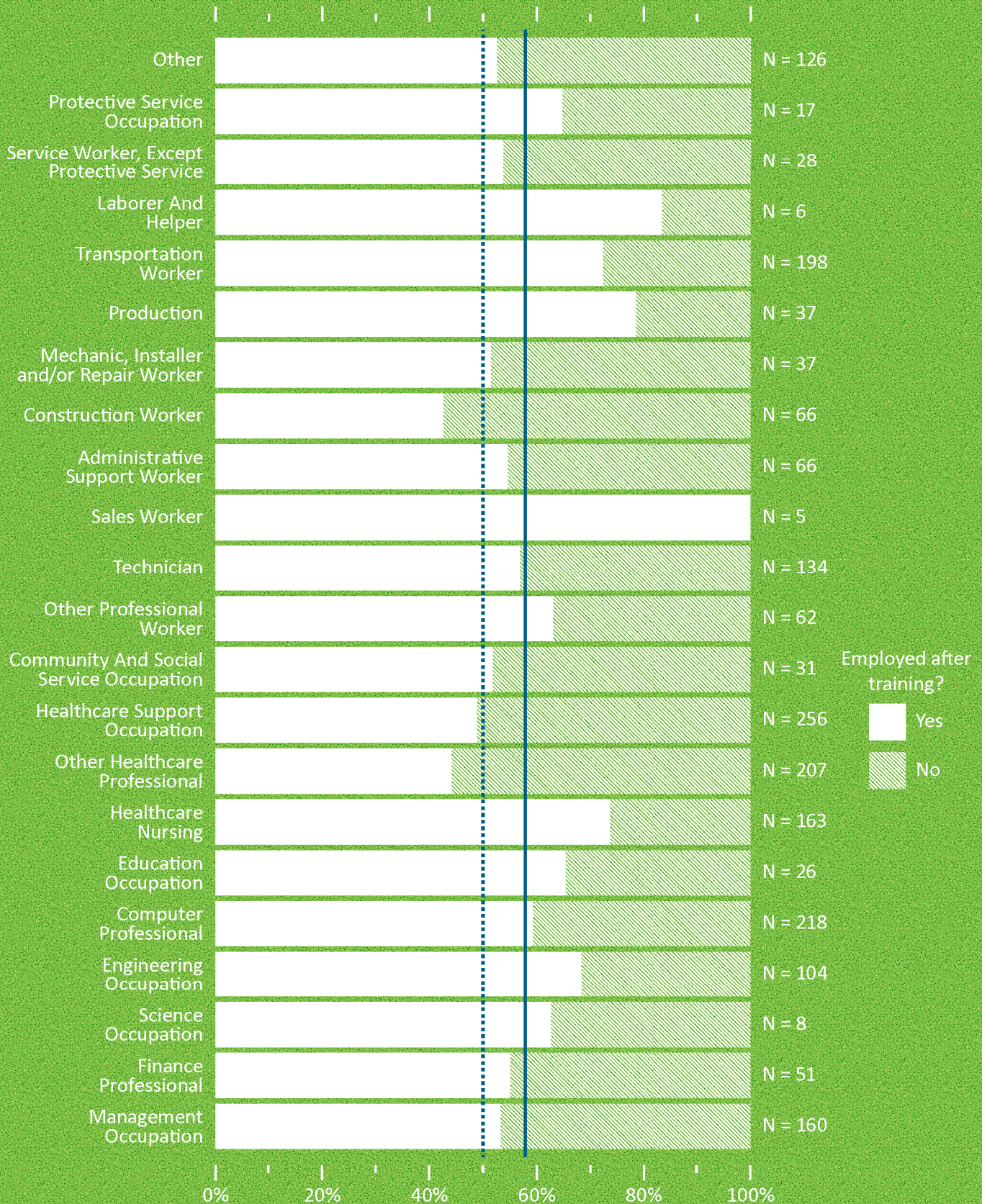
When comparing respondents age 35 and older who completed training with younger respondents who completed training, younger respondents were more often employed. There were likely a variety of factors at play in these outcomes, most of which are difficult to definitively isolate and analyze. Some of these factors might include training and degree choices, length of training, choices about employment opportunities, and/or possible age discrimination.

Older respondents were more likely to complete short term training than younger respondents. And when length of training was isolated with age and employment outcomes, younger workers were more often employed than older workers, despite the length of training. Respondents offered a variety of explanations for this phenomenon, but many indicated that they believed employers discriminated against older workers. One respondent noted “A program isn’t going to help if there isn’t an employer who will hire an older nurse.”

Table 14: Employment Rates by Age

Age Category	Percentage Employed*
18-24	67.65%
25-34	70.06%
34-44	59.84%
45-54	57.02%
55-64	48.01%
64+	33.33%

Table 13: Credential Attainment and Associated Employment Outcomes



The dark line represents the employment rate of all participants who completed training. Given the small sample size of some of the industries (for example, sales) no statistical analyses were performed to determine if there is a significant difference between field of study chosen and employment. The sample sizes are identified for each field as "N".

Ethnicity and Employment

African Americans were less often employed after training as compared with their white counterparts. As with age, there are likely a variety of factors influencing differential outcomes among respondents of different racial groups, including discrimination and choices about field of study and training program.

Overall, respondents were much more vocal about the influence of age in their training program and employment than that of race or ethnicity. Respondents didn't articulate their experiences or provide explanations about how ethnicity might have influenced employment rates.

Table 15: Employment Rates by Race

Age Category	Percentage Employed*
White	59.7%
African American	41.14%
Hispanic	58.14%
Asian	60.61%
Native American	42.86%
Pacific Islander	33.33%
Other (multiple)	56.00%

Experiences in Employment

Overall, respondents indicated that participation in *NWLB* was valuable for employment. They cited their training experience as helpful in both finding and performing their jobs. They overwhelmingly indicated that *NWLB* training helped them obtain a job, and many cited feeling more able to move into alternative career paths or obtaining new skill sets as a result of involvement in *NWLB*. Beyond affecting their subsequent ability to attain a job, many of the survey respondents noted that *NWLB* helped them in the actual performance of their job. Some respondents indicated that while they felt they already had the competencies and experience necessary to perform their jobs before *NWLB*, they had lacked the specific credential needed to get employment.

Table 16: Respondents' Evaluation of Training Helpfulness in Finding a Job

Training Helped Find Job	Percentage
Yes, for all jobs	55.31%
Yes, some jobs	27.86%
No	26.83%

Table 17: Respondents' Evaluation of the Helpfulness of Training in Their Jobs

Training Helped Find Job	Percentage
Yes, for all jobs	58.24%
Yes, some jobs	20.36%
No	21.40%

Training and Earnings

At the time of the survey, most respondents had not experienced an initial increase in their wages following participation in *NWLB*. In fact, 40% of respondents reported wage decreases post-participation in *NWLB*, as compared with 32% saying they'd received wage increases. But these kinds of wage adjustments are not uncommon in worker retraining programs. It is not surprising that many respondents were required to accept a wage reduction if they were starting a new career in a new field. Still, this result underscores the need to support decisions about training programs and credential attainment with good career and labor market information.

Table 18: Respondent Wages Post-Training

Pay Post-Training	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less in all my jobs since completing training	417	35.98%
Less in some and same in others	53	4.57%
Same in all my jobs since completing training	221	19.07%
More in some jobs and less in other jobs	99	8.54%
More in some and same in others	24	2.07%
More in all my jobs since completing training	345	29.77%

Employment and the Broader Economic Context

It is impossible to ignore the fact that *NWLB* participants were emerging from training in a dismal job market. This was clearly reflected in respondents’ experiences, as they repeatedly highlighted the need for more jobs in Michigan. One respondent emphatically stated, “Jobs!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You have to have work for trained people to do.” These respondents expressed appreciation for the program and the training they received, but frustration with the overall economic landscape and the lack of opportunities for finding employment. Other respondents said they found value in their training, but they were still competing with a large number of job applicants. Some felt that *NWLB* participants should be given priority in hiring from local employers or that employers should recognize the value of participation in the program. One respondent suggested, “Provide incentives to Michigan companies to hire *NWLB* individuals. Incentives would entice companies to hire, also reducing unemployment as well.”

While *NWLB* explicitly included entrepreneurship training and some state leaders repeatedly emphasized this opportunity, it was not clear that many respondents were enrolling in entrepreneurship programs. None of the survey respondents indicated that they were in a program to start their own business; yet, respondents indicated that if given the opportunity, they would participate in entrepreneurship training. It is likely that respondents experienced variance among the local MWAs offering of entrepreneurship training and while it was clearly allowable, entrepreneurship training certainly was not explicitly offered to all participants. One respondent stated, “since I fell into the not [hirable] area of life, I need to be shown creative ways to earn a living [such as] how to start a business.” For some of those respondents who had difficulty finding employment, training that could potentially lead to starting a business might have been a viable alternative path to earning family-sustaining wages.

Respondent Suggestions for *NWLB* Improvement

When asked how *NWLB* could be improved, more than 16% of participants offered suggestions related to increasing employer connections and developing jobs (Appendix C). The following section contains more detail about respondents’ suggestions for improvement.

“I had a career counselor in addition to the program. He helped me choose my career path before entering the *NWLB* program. I had to do a lot of work on my own to figure out what to do. *NWLB* helped me target a job that was high demand. The additional career counseling help was extremely important in my decision making.”

-*NWLB* participant

Provide Real-time Labor Market Information

The range and complexity of factors influencing employment outcomes underscores the essential need for quality, up-to-date labor market information. Respondents shared stories of frustration in choosing occupations, career paths, and related training programs. Respondents expressed concern that they were not able to determine which occupations had job openings at the start of their training program. One respondent suggested providing participants with “A discussion of the possibilities of jobs and salaries on graduation...also a better way to assess what program might have been better for me.” This was a common sentiment, as respondents felt they were unaware of the employment opportunities that would realistically be available upon completion of training.

Provide Intense, Upfront Career Counseling

While the quality and depth of career counseling reported across local MWAs varied, it was clear that good support in making tough choices is essential to training and employment success. As described earlier, respondents felt strongly that case manager support was critical to effectively enrolling in the program and navigating the bureaucracy. Respondents also expressed a desire for specialized career counseling. One respondent suggested that the program needed, “better screening of what you want to ‘be when you grow up’ and looking ahead to see that your training will be something you can USE no matter what. My counselor didn’t spend very much time with me at all.” As one respondent stated, “I believe there needs to be more direction for those who are changing their career paths and for those who are uncertain of what they would like to do in the future. Help them to discover their talents and weaknesses and how they are best suited for particular positions.”

In choosing a training program that would help them meet employment requirements, respondents were often even unsure of the appropriate questions to ask. One respondent noted a need for “helping the older American understand the programs and all they [entail] better. Most don’t know what questions to ask.” Moreover, some respondents cited that they were able to receive a certification, but still did not meet the qualifications for their chosen career path. Some passed their training program, but did not pass their license test, or their licensing was not included as part of the training program. For these respondents, the training program did not help them gain both the skills and meet all the qualifications they needed to become employed in their chosen field. These respondents suggested that better identifying the real requirements for employment and guidance for gaining both the skills and the relevant licensures would be helpful for finding and retaining employment.

Respondents also described a need for strong support in searching for employment. While the local MWAs provide job search support, respondents had varying experiences. Many respondents noted this was a necessary and critical component of the program. Beyond training, they cited the need for help repackaging their skills and entering new fields of employment. Requests for related services included resume building, job search support, job placement, and interview support.

Provide Strong Supports and Connections with Employers

Respondents also indicated that the *NWLB* program needed to help participants make better connections with employers, in particular so that they had better opportunities for employment after training. For example, one respondent said *NWLB* “Need[s] to find out exactly what employers are looking for in their employees in order to assist *NWLB* candidates select the best training programs.” Some respondents appear to have assumed that participation would result in a direct placement into employment and expressed frustration that this was not the case.

While most programs did not have direct employment placement opportunities, some did, and respondents who completed these programs were largely satisfied with their experiences. For example, one respondent offered, “With my program, there were positions available to those who complete the courses. It’s nice when there [are] jobs available to those who finish a course.”



AUTHORS' REFLECTIONS ON *NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND*

No Worker Left Behind was an unprecedented training proposition for unemployed and underemployed workers, offering a large number of workers a guaranteed opportunity to return to school to earn a credential in a high demand or emerging occupation during exceedingly challenging economic times. Many aspects of *NWLB* appear to have worked well. Participants identified a number of components that frustrated some, and offered insights about potential improvements. While this report does not constitute an outcomes evaluation of *NWLB*, the survey findings provide valuable insight into how participants fared and their reflections on their experiences.

Analysis of participant responses highlight the multiple and complex factors influencing the extent to which, and in what ways, *NWLB* successfully resulted in getting people employed in high demand and emerging occupations. These factors likely include, but are not limited to, the degrees participants sought, the industries, and fields of study they chose and a whole host of other variables.

Based on the survey responses and our experience and expertise in workforce and economic development policy, we offer the following thoughts and recommendations to inform future training strategies targeting unemployed and underemployed workers.

Entering and Enrolling in Training Programs

The first contact with potential *NWLB* participants was a critical opportunity to influence choices. It could determine whether individuals would enroll in the program, what training they would seek and shaped their overall experience. Our survey respondents repeatedly underscored the importance of their first meetings. Whether it was their orientation session, the process of completing paperwork and assessments, or their first individual meetings with case managers, these initial encounters influenced respondents' longer term perspectives of the entire program.

Ensure Effective Professional Development and Availability of Quality Resources for Case Managers

Case managers were effectively the gatekeepers for *NWLB*, determining who was eligible and what training and employment supports they received. From our survey results it was clear that case management service quality and intensity was highly variable in MWAs across the state. *NWLB* was an incredibly complex program that required an extensive amount of "behind-the-scenes" legwork to create a smooth and easily accessible experience for participants. Yet many case managers had far too many clients and appeared not to have received the professional development necessary to understand and implement a program like *NWLB*.

Standardized quality tools and professional development are critical for enabling case managers to create a participant experience that fosters training and employment success. Making those investments would improve the ability of case managers to provide quality services to all participants.

Provide More Individualized and Robust Career Navigation Supports

At a time when many respondents were entering uncharted territory, often in a state of crisis and uncertain of their future, they were presented with opportunity and choices that felt overwhelming for many. Unfortunately, respondents also often felt they had insufficient information with which to make good decisions. Choices ranged from identifying emerging career fields and occupations, to selecting appropriate quality training programs. But many participants said that the information that was available to them was often out-of-date, incomplete, or too complex to understand without assistance.

It is reasonable to assume that the level of career navigation support required will vary depending on participant need. But many *NWLB* participants responding to this survey clearly were looking for support from knowledgeable staff in identifying quality career opportunities based on their interests, skills, and goals. Robust career navigation support is critical in ensuring that training participants choose a path that fulfills their personal aspirations and leads to quality and secure career pathways.

Use Meaningful Metrics to Drive Program Implementation and Success

NWLB set goals beyond those associated with the individual federal programs whose funding paid for the program. In many respects, federal measures do not align with the goals of *NWLB*. For example, the Workforce Investment Act performance measures have steered many to design strategies that invest little in training. Michigan designed additional reporting requirements that were intended to track progress toward the *NWLB* goals, but achieved varying success in collecting relevant data from MWAs. In fact, part of the impetus for this survey was the scarcity of meaningful data.

Until federal workforce legislation is reformed to align with the goals of programs emphasizing market relevant credential and degree attainment, states endeavoring to implement similar programming must develop their own measures and metrics that reflect the goals of the program. Metrics drive program foci and implementation; as long as metrics only reflect federal training program requirements, local providers will tend to focus only on the federal requirements. Careful consideration and alignment of metrics is critical to ensuring that innovative training programs focused on market relevant credential attainment are implemented successfully.

Completing and Succeeding in Training Programs

The type, quality and appropriateness of a training program substantially define a participant's experience under an initiative like *NWLB*. They help determine whether participants are able to complete training, how successful they are going to be in their training programs, and whether participants will be able to find employment post-training. *NWLB* had a high rate of program completion, much higher than many other large training initiatives targeting unemployed or underemployed workers. While our survey did not ask participants about their training providers, it did shed significant light on factors aiding participants in completing *NWLB* funded training.

Invest in Basic Skills Training to Help Participants Succeed

Basic skills training was an allowable activity under *NWLB*, yet virtually no respondents earned basic skills credentials (like a GED or high school diploma). Much of this is likely due to the fact that *NWLB* required participants to select training for "high-growth and emerging occupations" and basic skills programs do not typically lead directly to employment. The intent was that those with basic skills gaps be referred to adult education providers for remediation before returning to their MWA to take advantage of *NWLB*. Because most of the training programs available had pre-requisites that included a basic skills credential, such as a high school diploma or GED, *NWLB* was effectively unavailable to many low-skilled Michiganders, limiting the number of individuals that could participate in this publicly funded program.

Training programs targeting unemployed and underemployed workers should consider options to include a stronger focus on appropriate basic skills training for participants to ensure they are prepared to succeed. It was clear that for some, basic skills preparation determined if, and with what success, participants would complete their training programs. Investing in basic skills programming is a support that can greatly improve both access to and success in training programs.

Make Training Programs and Funding More Flexible to Meet Diverse Worker Needs

Unemployed and underemployed workers are a diverse group. They have varied fields of interests, previous knowledge, and experience. Even more pronounced are their unique responsibilities, living situations, and work requirements. Yet many of the available training programs through *NWLB* were structured to meet traditional student needs. For some respondents, this was exactly what they were looking for, but for many others, the rigidity of the training programs and the inflexibility of the funding hampered their experiences. Increasing the flexibility of training programs and funding to better meet worker and student needs could significantly reduce these barriers. The following describes three avenues to increased flexibility, all of which were mentioned by survey respondents as approaches that would have improved their ability to succeed.

▪ Beyond the Semester Model

Nearly 45% of respondents had to wait more than three months after visiting an MWA before starting their training program; many had to wait for the following academic semester to begin before being able to enter their program. For dislocated or underemployed workers, being constrained by the traditional academic calendar often is out of synch with their need for gaining needed skills and credentials as quickly as possible, and gaining resulting employment before savings, unemployment compensation, or other supports run out. By offering accelerated, more intensive programs and offering more frequent cohort start dates or open-entry programming, training programs could reduce the financial burden and stress for participants and lead to more efficient use of public funding.

▪ Individualized Course Pacing

Sometimes, the structure and delivery of training programs did not meet respondent needs. Some respondents described programs covering content so quickly they could not keep up with the course material. Others felt their courses were moving far too slowly and they thought they could have completed their training in half the time. Each participant had unique learning needs, yet, each was expected to complete training in the same manner and timeframe. Many respondents suggested that if there were either online courses or other self-paced course options, they would have taken advantage of those sorts of opportunities. While these more flexible modalities may not work for every participant, they do provide some with the ability to diminish opportunity costs, more successfully complete courses and reduce training time and stress.

▪ Experiential Learning

Many participants had extensive experience in their previous fields and other jobs, but were still required to take basic technical or classroom based courses. Older respondents in particular expressed interest in alternative types of education, including apprenticeships, internships, or other experiential training structures to allow them to build off of their previous experience. Unfortunately, survey responses indicate these opportunities were not available to many participants through *NWLB*. Making available funding flexible enough to allow interested participants to find training experiences beyond the traditional classroom may reduce training anxiety and increase accessibility. Further, increasing the flexibility of funding to cover prior learning assessments or to provide credit for experience could accelerate the time required for participants to complete training.

Make the Market Value of Credentials Clear to Program Participants

As mentioned earlier, participants were faced with choosing from a multitude of training options and related credentials. However, the complexity and variety of credentials available is often far too much for participants and even case managers to understand, making well-informed and data-driven decisions difficult. Based on our survey responses, respondents understood when they were working toward Associate's and Bachelor's degrees. But those seeking other sorts of credentials had a harder time identifying what they were working toward. It seems many did not know what was meant by "Industry Recognized Certifications" or "Certificates of Completion." So while these credentials have some meaning to employers and educators, there is a disconnect when it comes to making the market value of those credentials evident to workers and students. In order for participants to be able to make informed and efficient training choices, the market relevancy of credentials must be more transparent and available.

Obtaining and Retaining Quality Employment

The overall goal of *NWLB* was to provide participants with the skills and training to help them find or retain quality employment. The primary requirements for enrollment were either unemployment or underemployment and identifying training in a high demand or emerging field or occupation. Over half of our survey respondents had completed training and commented on their employment outcomes and experiences finding employment. Some respondents found employment that was closely aligned with their training. Others had yet to find employment. And still others found employment in completely unrelated fields.

Meet Labor Market Demand with Market Relevant Credentials

NWLB encouraged participants to enroll in longer term training, assuming that longer term training was a proxy for a market relevant credential. Based on our survey results it is not apparent that length of training is an adequate proxy for market relevant credentials. Instead, the degree or credential coupled with a close alignment with employer demand may be a better focus for selecting training that will lead to good jobs.

Instead of focusing training on proxies to measure market relevancy, such as length of training, programs should focus on the degree or credentials earned and their market relevancy.

Make Employer Engagement an Integral Part of Training Programs

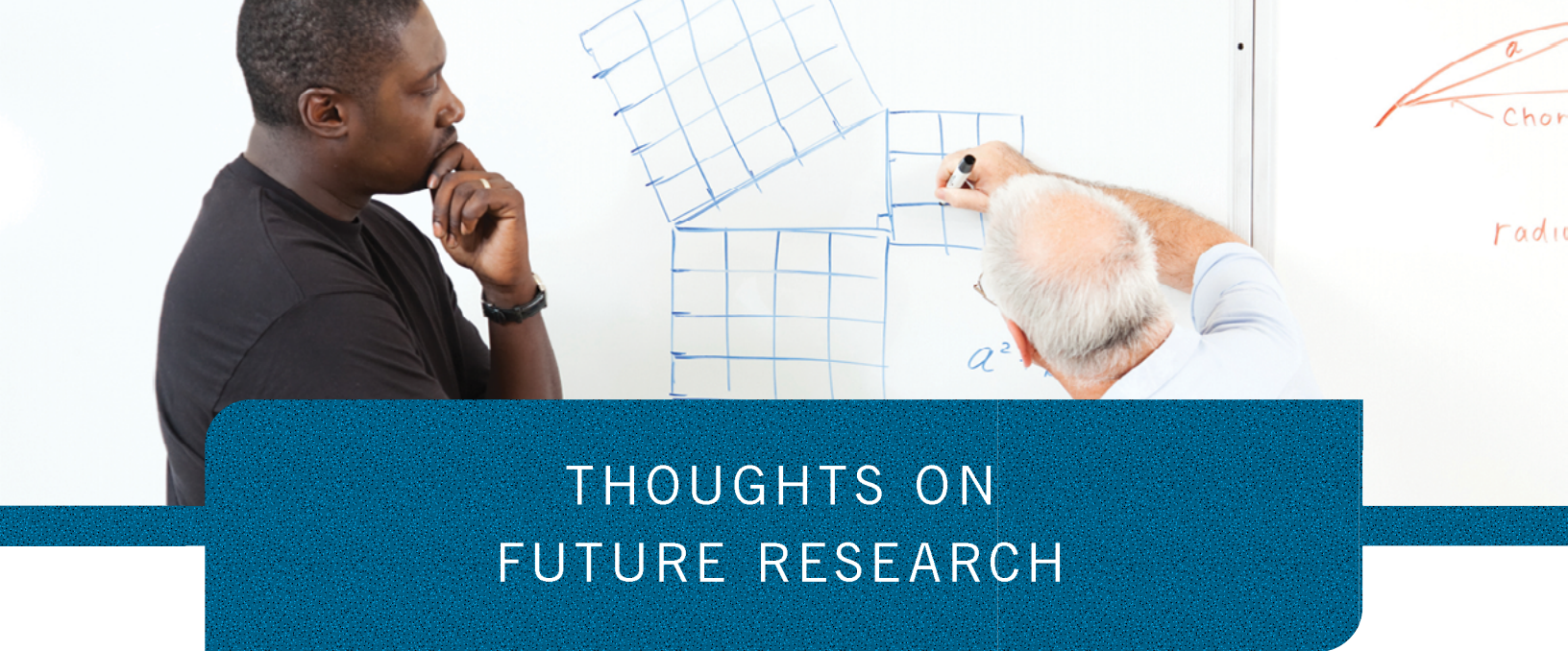
Many respondents expressed frustration that there was not a job available at the end of the training, and wished employers were more involved in the program.

Based on the survey responses and our experience, deeper employer engagement is essential to program participants successfully preparing for and transitioning into available jobs. Employer engagement can help inform program design, provide real-time labor market information and prepare workers in ways that meet specific needs. Working to engage employers throughout the entirety of the program can ensure that participants are better able to find employment upon completion of a training program.

Customize Supports for Older Workers

NWLB was open to any unemployed or low-income worker over the age of 18 who was not enrolled in college. Respondents represented a wide age range, with more than half over the age of 45. Still, a higher percentage of older survey respondents were not finding employment. These participants were quite vocal about their perceptions that age both hampered their training experiences and made it hard to find good employment. They often spoke of their anxiety, feeling discriminated against, and/or the challenge of making long-term training choices with fewer working years available.

Age-appropriate support can help these workers overcome unique barriers to employment. The supports could include helping workers repackage their experiences as they enter training and seek employment after long hiatuses, specialized counseling to help build confidence, resume help that eliminates age identifying information, and opportunities to earn credit for prior learning.



THOUGHTS ON FUTURE RESEARCH

Thoughts on Future Research

This analysis investigated the experiences of survey respondents and offers useful insights about their engagement in *NWLB*. This initiative was a large-scale experiment in state investment in adult worker retraining, and other important learning could result from further research designed to better understand the impact of *NWLB* on participants' ability to enter, persist and complete training, and obtain jobs.

Future *NWLB* research could usefully focus on the following:

NWLB Results and Impact

No analysis has as yet been done about the final results of the *NWLB* initiative. Given the scale of *NWLB*, undertaking outcomes and impact research would provide valuable learning to inform public workforce investment policy. That research could include:

- A comprehensive compilation of the results for the full universe of *NWLB* enrollees.
- A study of the longitudinal outcomes and impact of the *NWLB* investment, examining both labor market and social benefits.

Post-Secondary Enrollment

More than 162,000 adult learners enrolled in *NWLB* over four years – an impressive number that exceeded state expectations by 50%. Substantial anecdotal evidence indicates that a much larger potential enrollment could've been realized with additional funding. Further research about why *NWLB* was an attractive proposition to so many working age adults would make an important contribution to the national discourse about substantially increasing adult enrollment in post-secondary education. Specific questions to explore could include:

- What gap in the student financial aid market did *NWLB* fill?
- What aspects of *NWLB* design were central to participant decisions to enroll in retraining?

Completing Training Programs

Most of the participants who entered *NWLB* completed their programs and attained credentials. That appears to be an impressive result for an initiative targeted at adult learners. Further investigation of what contributed to that can help inform public policy regarding post-secondary completion. Some specific questions worth exploring include:

- What aspects of the program (or their personal situation) were most influential on participants remaining in their program?
- What supports most helped participants complete their training programs? How can more of these supports be made available to more program participants?
- How did the community colleges and MWAs identify and communicate the market value of programs and credentials to participants and what improvements are needed?

Finding and Retaining Employment

Because no analysis has as yet been undertaken to examine the employment outcomes for the full universe of *NWLB* enrollees, research about those results would greatly inform the dialogue about the relationship of worker retraining and reemployment when large scale retraining is supported. Specific questions to explore include:

- Do dislocated worker training programs geared towards obtaining market relevant credentials shorten the length of time workers are unemployed?
- Were there differential employment outcomes across specific federal programs that were part of *NWLB*? For example, were individuals who were WIA Incumbent Worker eligible more likely to retain quality employment than JET eligible participants?
- How did *NWLB* impact employment retention in a volatile labor market?
- What impact does length of training have on employment?
- What supports were most helpful for *NWLB* participants to enter and remain successful in the labor market?
- What was the impact of the various credentials attained by *NWLB* participants on their ability to obtain related employment?
- How were local employers impacted by *NWLB*? Did *NWLB* make finding and retaining skilled employees easier for local employers? How did this affect their ability to be competitive?

Program Administration

Michigan asked the Michigan Works! Agencies and the educational institutions to combine several funding sources – each with its own requirements – to manage *NWLB* as a unified initiative with uniform rules. It would be useful to examine how that worked in practice, given substantial policy debates about whether federal legislation should combine multiple programs. Some specific questions worth exploring include:

- Were participant program experiences and program administration different based on specific federal program eligibility? What other factors influenced these differences?
- What challenges did agencies encounter in managing *NWLB*? What proved to be successful?



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