Evaluation of the Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy (CCCA) Pilot

Detailed Report of the Implementation Analysis

November 2021

Submitted to:
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About This Report

The **CCCA Pilot Evaluation** conducted qualitative and quantitative studies of the **Cascades Jobs Corps College and Career Academy** (CCCA) pilot operating from 2017 to 2019. Findings from the evaluation are reported in four parts:

- Final Report

- Detailed Report of the Implementation Analysis

- Technical Appendix

- An Implementation Brief *(Working Together: A First Look at Lessons from the Cascades College and Career Academy and Other Job Corps Partnerships with Community and Technical Colleges)*

This is the Detailed Report of the Implementation Analysis, prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)'s Chief Evaluation Office and Employment and Training Administration by Abt Associates and MDRC under Contract Number DOL-OPS-16-U-00069. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.

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Suggested Citation

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Table of Abbreviations

AS	Associate in Science Degree
AT	Advanced Training
ATA	Associate in Technical Arts Degree
CCCA	Cascades College and Career Academy
CEO	Chief Evaluation Office
CEP	College Education Program
CIS	Center Information System
CMA	Certified Medical Assistant
CMAA	Certified Medical Administrative Assistant
CNA	Certified Nursing Assistant
CNC	Computer Numerical Control
CPB	Certified Professional Biller
CPC	Certified Professional Coder
CTR	Career Transition Readiness
CTS	Career Transition Services
CTT	career and technical training
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
GED	General Educational Development test
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
IT	information technology
MIT	Multimedia & Interactive Technology
NCTA	Northwest Career & Technical Academy
NOJC	National Office of Job Corps
NSC	National Student Clearinghouse
OASIS	Outreach and Admissions Student Input System
OBS	on-board strength
PNW	Pacific Northwest (Idaho, Oregon, and Washington)
SVC	Skagit Valley College
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014

1.   Introduction

From February 2017 through June 2019, 488 students from the Pacific Northwest (ages 16-21 with at least a sixth-grade level of competency in reading and math) enrolled in Job Corps' **Cascades College and Career Academy (CCCA)**, a Job Corps pilot focused on enrolling students in college to prepare for a career in healthcare or information technology (IT). This *Detailed Report of the Implementation Analysis* is part of the final report of an evaluation of that pilot. It addresses in detail the research question: *How was the CCCA model implemented?*

This opening chapter proceeds as follows. Section 1.1 places the pilot in context. Section 1.2 describes the pilot. Section 1.3 provides an overview of the evaluation. Finally, Section 1.4 describes the structure of the balance of this report.

1.1   Context for the CCCA Pilot

Established in 1964 as part of the Great Society initiatives and currently authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), Job Corps offers free education and job training for disadvantaged, low-income youth ages 16 to 24. A program of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Job Corps focuses on youth who have left school but want additional preparation for their desired career. The program has approximately 120 locations throughout the continental United States and Puerto Rico. At the time the pilot was launched, it had an annual enrollment of about 50,000.

> ### Some Notes on Language in This Report
>
> We refer to youth who applied to the Cascades pilot—whether or not they complete the application—as "applicants."
>
> We refer to those youth who were accepted into the program and whom the evaluation randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group as "students" or "study members"—whether or not they actually participated in any way or received any services (e.g., some students randomized to treatment never came to the site).
>
> There are slightly more men (60%) than women study members. The discussion refers to either as *they*. Unless we specifically so note, "they" and "their" should be understood as referring to any study member, regardless of gender, without suggesting any implications about differential patterns by gender.

The conventional Job Corps model provides integrated academic, career, technical, and support services to youth—almost all on site and provided by Job Corps staff. Such services include career planning, on-the-job training, job placement, residential housing, food service, driver's education, health and dental care, a bi-weekly basic living allowance, and a clothing allowance.

A seminal random assignment evaluation of Job Corps, conducted between 1994 and 2003 (Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell 2008), found that Job Corps had statistically significant and favorable impacts on earnings for older youth (ages 22-24 at application). Impacts were smaller for younger youth (ages 16-19 at application; Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell 2006, 2008). These findings held at a 20- year follow-up (Schochet 2018; Manoli and Patel 2019).

Because most Job Corps students are ages 16-21 at application to Job Corps, DOL sought to understand whether a different approach to career training designed for younger youth could improve impacts for them. That search led DOL to develop and fund the Cascades pilot. [1]

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[1]   The discussion here and in the next sub-section is based on the Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy request for proposals (#DOL-ETA-16-R-00010) and related amendments and attachments accessible

1.2   About the CCCA Pilot

To develop a program model that could increase earnings for younger Job Corps students (ages 16 to 19), the National Office of Job Corps (NOJC) developed a concept for an alternative pilot for Job Corps that

> *aims to provide career pathways programming as defined in WIOA to include expanded and intensive academic instruction, career pathways technical training, and non-cognitive skills training in two industry sectors, Healthcare and Information Technology. It will test innovative approaches designed to assist at-risk youth to complete rigorous academic and technical training programs, qualify for employment opportunities in in-demand occupations that pay a living wage and provide opportunities for advancement, enroll in and successfully complete postsecondary education, and develop workforce and independent living skills needed for self-sufficiency.* [2]

To understand the potential of this model with younger students, in September 2015 DOL issued a request for proposals to competitively select an operator of the new program for Job Corps. Known as the Cascades College and Career Academy, the new pilot program was to operate at the Job Corps center in Sedro-Woolley, Washington. To summarize, that pilot intended to provide career pathways programs in two industries—healthcare and information technology—that connected academic, career training, and social skills training with industry-recognized credentials, a secure job, and/or advances into community college and employment.

1.2.1   CCCA Pilot Implementation Chronology

In June 2016, DOL awarded the contract to develop, implement and operate the CCCA pilot to Adams and Associates, Inc., an organization that runs 12 other Job Corps centers across the country. According to its contract, Adams was to

> *provide training to ensure students attain relevant skills with job market value; industry-recognized academic, technical, secondary, and postsecondary credentials; employment within in-demand occupations leading to self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement; and/or enrollment in postsecondary education, including registered apprenticeships, leading to long-term attachment to the labor force.*

The first pilot students arrived at the Cascades center on May 16, 2017. DOL paused enrollment in May 2019 and ended enrollment on June 30, 2019. Pilot students who were still enrolled after June 2019 continued receiving pilot services.

1.3   About the CCCA Pilot Evaluation

On May 11, 2016, DOL's Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) awarded a contract to Abt Associates and its partner, MDRC, to conduct the **CCCA Pilot Evaluation**. Cascades applicants were randomly assigned to a group in which they were offered pilot services or a group in which they were not offered. This experimental research design, where random assignment determines that some may access the program (the "treatment" group) and some may not (the "control" group), ensures there are no systematic pre–random assignment differences between the groups. Thus, any post–random assignment differences in sample member outcomes can reasonably be attributed to the CCCA pilot program or to chance. As a result, differences in average outcomes between the treatment group and the control group are a strong estimate of the impact of CCCA.

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at https://www.fbo.gov, as well as the successful proposal in response to that solicitation (Adams and Associates 2015, 2016).

[2]   The quote is from the Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy solicitation (#DOL-ETA-16-R-00010).

The CCCA Pilot Evaluation's *Final Report* (Klerman et al. 2021) presents the results of three interrelated analyses. The **Participant Flow Analysis** documents the flow of students into and through the Cascades pilot, with comparisons (where feasible) to other Job Corps centers and the students' experiences there. The **Service Contrast Analysis** estimates the impact of being offered a slot in the Cascades pilot. The experimental **Impact Analysis** examines the short-term outcomes (education, credentials) as well as early results on longer-term outcomes (earnings, broader measures of well-being) for those Job Corps students offered CCCA pilot services (treatment group) relative to what their outcomes would have been if they had not been offered pilot services (represented by the control group).

The evaluation's **Implementation Analysis** describes how CCCA delivered these services, noting (when feasible and appropriate) differences between Cascades pilot and other Job Corps centers, and discusses perceived challenges encountered in operating the pilot. Though the *Final Report* includes some high-level insights from this analysis, this *Implementation Report* presents detailed results.

The main limitation of this analysis is that the CCCA model was fielded at only one center, Cascades. Thus, the analysis often cannot disentangle what implementational achievements and challenges were unique to the Cascades center versus issues that would be universal to any center implementing this version of Job Corps. However, when an issue does seem to be linked to a site-specific challenge (such as the need to do far more extensive construction than expected before opening), this is noted.

1.3.1 Data Sources

Qualitative Field Work

For the Implementation Analysis, the evaluation primarily draws on qualitative data collection, including phone calls and site visits, completed between May 2018 and June-July 2020 at the Cascades center and at four similar Job Corps centers.

- **Pilot implementation visits.** The evaluation team conducted three visits to the Cascades center. Research activities for the two visits conducted in May 2018 and August 2019 included interviews with key center staff and partners, observations of classes and other service delivery components, and focus groups with pilot students. A third COVID-era visit, conducted remotely in May 2020, included interviews with key center staff and partners, as well as focus groups with pilot students. In total, the evaluation team interviewed about 20-25 key center staff and partners as many as three times, spoke with about 35-40 students through the focus groups, and observed about 5-7 classes or other service delivery components.

- **Conventional Job Corps center visits.** To understand how the pilot might have differed from services and operations at other Job Corps centers, the evaluation team conducted visits to four conventional Job Corps centers. The visit to the Treasure Island Center (California) in January 2018 included a tour of the center and an interview with the center director. The visits to the Clearfield (Utah), Guthrie (Oklahoma), and Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) centers in June and July 2020, after the onset of COVID, were conducted remotely and included interviews with about 20-25 key center staff and partners, as well as focus groups with about 10-15 students. Each of these later three centers had a partnership with a technical/community college, similar to the CCCA model.

All-Center Job Corps and CCCA-Specific Administrative Data

For its Implementation Analysis, the evaluation also uses data from a system maintained by the NOJC's Job Corps Data Center and a data system specific to Cascades:

- **National Job Corps Management Information System** for all Job Corps students includes information from the application, time in Job Corps, and on activities while in Job Corps. To understand how Cascades students differ from students at other Job Corps centers, the evaluation used these data to compare Cascades students to (1) other Cascades-eligible students; (2) other Job Corps

students from the Pacific Northwest (Idaho, Oregon, and Washington); and (3) all other Job Corps students.

- **Cascades Management Information System** tabulated details of activities of students at Cascades that are not recorded in the national Job Corps data.

1.4   The Structure of This Report

This report proceeds in six sections. Section 2 provides a brief overview of the Cascades pilot. The following four sections further describe key pilot components and elements as implemented: The Cascades Pilot Recruitment and Enrollment (Section 3), The Cascades Pilot Culture (Section 4), and The Cascades Pilot Services (Section 5). When applicable, each section provides information about the initial vision for the pilot component or element, including how the pilot was to have differed from the conventional Job Corps program.[3] Section 6 summarizes findings and considerations for future efforts.

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3   See Appendix A in the evaluation's *Technical Appendix* (Herr et al. 2021) for additional detail about the vision for the Cascades pilot.

2. Overview of the Cascades Pilot

This section provides background on the Cascades pilot. Section 2.1 provides background on the conventional Job Corps program. Section 2.2 describes the initial vision for the Cascades pilot. Section 2.3 describes how the pilot was actually implemented.

2.1 Conventional Job Corps

The conventional Job Corps program provides general education classes; career and technical training (CTT); and career readiness, life skills, and stabilizing and supportive services (such as physical and mental health services) in a structured residential setting. After completing the conventional program, students can apply to continue participating in Job Corps for a third year to earn advanced credentials through the Job Corps Advanced Training (AT) program or College Education Program (CEP).[4]

2.2 The Cascades Pilot Vision

DOL, NOJC, and Adams proposed an alternative vision of Job Corps that responded to emerging literature on youth development and disconnected youth.[5] The envisioned pilot was a **three-year residential program** that would partner with local colleges, service providers, and employers to implement a **career pathways education and training approach** that led to **advanced credential attainment** in **healthcare and IT**. The design was analogous to completing an AT or CEP program in addition to the conventional Job Corps program.

Given prior Job Corps evaluation results showing impacts for younger-age students were less favorable than for older students, the pilot intended to focus on—and enroll only —students ages 16 to 21 at entry.[6] Consistent with its college-focused approach, the pilot design called for applicants to demonstrate eighth-grade reading and math skills at program entry. The design also called for components and practices (such as cohort enrollment) to create a culture that would better engage the students.

2.3 The Cascades Pilot as Implemented

The Cascades pilot began enrolling applicants in February 2017, and students began arriving at the center in May 2017. Enrollment in the pilot was paused in May 2019 and the last pilot study students arrived at the center in June 2019.

During the course of its operation, the Cascades pilot implemented some program components approximately as initially intended and some in ways quite different from the initial vision:

- The pilot implemented CTT pathways in the IT and healthcare industries. In an attempt to increase the likelihood that students would leave the program with a credential that was valuable in the labor market, the pilot incorporated opportunities for students to earn stackable credentials.

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[4]   The AT program and the CEP program (formerly known as Advanced Career Training) offer a small percentage of Job Corps students the opportunity to complete an advanced CTT program or to enroll in a higher education institution to earn credits towards a college degree. A limited number of centers also offer the Other Training Program, which allows a very limited number of Job Corps students to enroll in college instead of a conventional CTT program. For more information about how Job Corps partners with colleges see Grossman, Olejniczak, and Klerman (2021).

[5]   Appendix A of the evaluation's *Technical Appendix* (Herr et al. 2021) provides more details about the vision for the Cascades pilot and reviews and cites much of the applicable emerging literature on youth development and disconnected youth.

[6]   See Schochet et al. (2008).

- Compared to conventional Job Corps, the pilot gave students additional time in the program along with opportunities to earn advanced credentials and college credits.

- In preparation for and during college, the pilot provided considerable academic and non-academic support to students.

- The pilot worked to create a different Job Corps center atmosphere and a culture that—relative to conventional Job Corps centers—gave students more opportunities to build responsibility.

- The pilot provided only limited career readiness and employment-related services due to delays and challenges.

Exhibit 2-1 further illustrates the main service differences between the Cascades pilot as implemented and the conventional Job Corps model.

Exhibit 2-1   Comparison of Cascades Pilot Services and Conventional Job Corps Services

	CASCADES PILOT	CONVENTIONAL JOB CORPS
Participants	• Ages 16-21 • Sixth-grade competence in math and reading • Interested in college	• Ages 16-24
Enrollment	• Cohort enrollment	• Open enrollment
Orientation	• Orientation (two-week, group)[a]	• Individualized Career Preparation Period services[b]
Secondary Education	• General Educational Development Test (GED) • High school diploma (combination of in-person and online instruction, with credits also earned at college or partner)[c] • Basic and remedial education	• GED • High school diploma (typically online instruction) • Basic and remedial education
Career and Technical Training (CTT)	• Foundations[d] course • CTT (provided at Job Corps center, college, or partner) • Advanced CTT (provided at Job Corps center, college, or partner)	• CTT (typically provided at Job Corps center) • Advanced CTT (only offered through the AT program at a limited number of Job Corps centers)
College	• Courses towards transferable college degrees (provided at college)	• Offered to only a limited number of students through the College Education Program or other training program
Additional Academic Support Services	• College Readiness[e] • Supplemental college support • Evening Studies (Evening & Weekend Enrichment)[f]	• Evening Studies

Life Skills Activities	• Activities included as part of several program components:
	  • Orientation
	  • Foundations
	  • Evening Studies
	  • College Readiness
		• Career Success Standards as part of the Career Preparation Period services[g]
		• Evening Studies

Employment-Related Services	• Career Readiness • Work-based learning • Placement services	• Career Readiness • Work-based learning • Placement services
Support Services	• Residential • Counseling • Healthcare • Transportation assistance	• Residential • Counseling • Healthcare • Transportation assistance

[a]   Orientation was an introduction to the pilot program that included assessments and life skills activities and incorporated some aspects of the conventional Job Corps Career Preparation Period services. Orientation was completed as part of a pathway-specific cohort.

[b]   Career Preparation Period services are individualized conventional Job Corps services that introduce and prepare students for the program. Services include academic and soft skills assessments, counseling, career planning, and job readiness skills.

[c]   The pilot dually enrolled students in need of a high school credential so that they could earn high school credits from college courses.

[d]   Foundations was an industry-specific introductory CTT course that introduced students to the pathway and taught students skills such as study skills and financial literacy. Foundations incorporated some aspects of the conventional Job Corps Career Preparation Period services.

[e]   College Readiness was a six-week, part-day module that assessed and prepared students for college.

[f]   Evening Studies (Evening & Weekend Enrichment) provides additional life skills instruction and academic support. Evening Studies was not part of the conventional Job Corps program when the pilot was designed and launched but was incorporated during pilot implementation.

[g]   There are eight Career Success Standards that students are evaluated on as part of Job Corps' Career Preparation Period: workplace relationships and ethics, interpersonal skills, personal growth, independent living, career and personal planning, communications, multicultural awareness, and information management. More detail on these can be found in the *Job Corps Policy and Requirements Handbook* (DOL/OJC 2016).

A series of both internal and external factors negatively affected the pilot, resulting in the incomplete implementation of envisioned service components and elements. As with any new program, the Cascades pilot needed time to fully operationalize its components, services, policies, and procedures. One major challenge that contributed to delays was the need for the pilot to implement a newly designed program while operating out of a Job Corps center that had previously shut down and required a complete build-up both physically and operationally.[7] For instance, delays in center repairs and enhancement led to student arrival delays and other ongoing challenges. Additionally, some pilot components, as described below, took several months to develop and operationalize as the pilot evolved in response to challenges and made ongoing improvements.

Thus, students experienced slightly different versions of the pilot depending on when they attended the program. Pilot implementation can be characterized by four phases: Start-Up, Mature, Legacy, and COVID. Exhibit 2-2 illustrates the relationship between key implementation dates and the four implementation phases.

- **Start-Up Phase** (May 16, 2017–January 22, 2018). During the first nine months of the pilot, the number of students at the center was much smaller than expected. The Cascades pilot center, which had the capacity to serve 300 students at a time, averaged only 54 students in residence each month (18 percent of capacity). As such, the pilot focused on refining outreach and recruitment strategies to increase enrollment. Additionally, the center had staffing challenges, and several of the program components were underdeveloped. At the same time that the pilot was enrolling students, it continued to develop the facilities, design and redesign certain aspects of the pilot program, establish policies and procedures, hire staff, and finalize the details of the services and the service provider partnerships. For example, while students participated in Orientation, Foundations, and secondary education services, the pilot was still renovating classrooms, developing the IT pathway curriculum, staffing the IT pathway department, and working out the details of its critical partnerships with the college and other service providers. Additional services that were still in development during this phase included the Adult Basic Education services, Evening & Weekend Enrichment services, career readiness services, and employment-related services such as work-based learning and placement services.

- **Mature Phase** (January 23, 2018–June 30, 2019). By the start of this phase, most of the key pilot services, components, and practices were operational. However, there were exceptions as the pilot staff continued to hone the program (as do all pilots). For example, the pilot staff solidified key partnerships and further developed services, including the career pathway occupational tracks and curriculum and other academic and non-academic support services. The pilot staff also formalized and began implementing a College Readiness module that students were required to participate in concurrent with the Foundations course and prior to college enrollment. College Readiness included academic assessments and support, as well as life skills assessments and skill-building activities, to ensure that students were prepared for college. Additionally, the pilot administrators continued to staff more departments. Some services, such as Evening & Weekend Enrichment, Career Readiness, and employment-related services such as work-based learning and placement services, were still in development during this phase. A few of these services remained underdeveloped throughout later phases of the pilot. The average number of students on center each month was 186, or 62 percent of capacity—notably higher than during the Start-Up Phase.

- **Legacy Phase** (July 1, 2019–March 20, 2020). In May 2019, DOL and NOJC suspended enrollment in the pilot. As of July 2019, the pilot staff began recruiting and enrolling students in a conventional

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[7] Although Adams operated other Job Corps centers, the pilot could not use existing systems, policies, and procedures developed by Adams due to proprietary concerns and instead needed to build its own.

Job Corps program, which included an expanded set of CTT options, using the standard Job Corps eligibility. Students who had already enrolled in the pilot and arrived at the center before July 2019 continued to receive pilot services. The pilot staff sought to maintain fidelity to its services previously offered (such as Foundations, College Readiness, and college), but the transition led to both intended and unintended changes. The early-termination news, combined with non-pilot conventional Job Corps students sharing the center, meant that the pilot center culture changed. Additionally, the pilot staff made other slight changes during this phase resulting in some services, components, and practices (such as those related to post-separation services) more closely resembling a conventional Job Corps program. The average number of pilot students on center each month during this phase was similar to the Mature Phase (180 students). However, the total number of students at the center was larger (an average of 264 students each month) because non-pilot conventional Job Corps students were also at the center.

- **COVID Phase** (March 21, 2020–December 31, 2020). In March 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic caused NOJC to institute a seven-and-half-week break for all Job Corps students.[8] Following this break, the pilot staff reengaged its students and transitioned to remote learning for the next seven months. Students remotely participated in a more limited array of pilot services during this time—without the residential and support services previously afforded to them. As needed, the pilot staff provided students with resources such as laptops and wi-fi hotspots, but some students still had challenges engaging in pilot services. As a result, some students "paused" their participation in the program, and others resigned from Job Corps. In November 2020, some students began returning to the Cascades center even though college services remained remote. On average, about 130 pilot students engaged with the pilot each month during this phase. About 30 pilot students still had their engagement on pause as of the end of December 2020.

Exhibit 2-2   Key Implementation Dates

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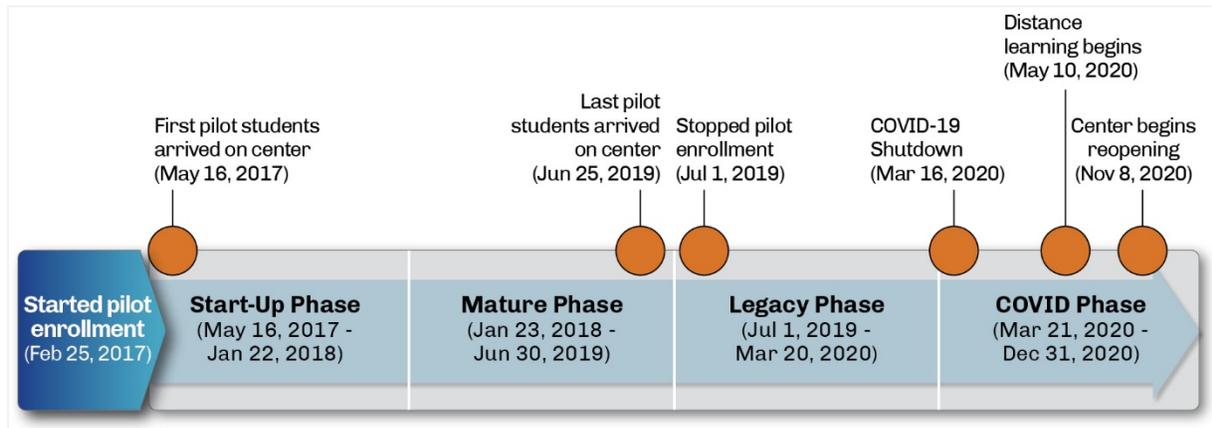
[8]   Job Corps made exceptions to allow some students for whom there were safety concerns to remain at the center during this time.

3.   Cascades Pilot Recruitment and Enrollment

This section describes how the Cascades pilot recruited and enrolled students. In many ways, pilot recruitment and enrollment practices were similar to conventional Job Corps, but there were several essential differences. The section first details the pilot eligibility criteria and how applicants moved through the enrollment process. The following section describes students' arrival on center. The section ends with a discussion of enrollment challenges (i.e., where applicants dropped off) and modifications made to the pilot to remedy those challenges.

3.1   Enrollment Eligibility Criteria and Procedures

- **The pilot's eligibility criteria required applicants to be ages 16-21 and score at a sixth-grade level or higher on a math and reading academic assessment. Students also were screened for their interest in attending college.**

The Cascades pilot had different eligibility criteria than a conventional Job Corps program. Conventional Job Corps has 13 standard eligibility criteria that consider the applicant's income, age, barriers, education and training needs, and disqualifying convictions.[9] The pilot design included all standard Job Corps eligibility requirements except those related to age. Conventional Job Corps accepts applicants ages 16-24, and the pilot limited eligibility for enrollment to age 21.

Unlike the conventional Job Corps program, the pilot design called for applicants to also demonstrate eighth-grade math and reading skills. Thus, the pilot administered the standard Renaissance Star 360 academic assessment. However, as implemented the pilot did not set the minimum score requirement at the eighth-grade level. Instead, the pilot considered applicants eligible if they obtained at least a 758 scaled Renaissance Star Math® score and an 830 scaled Renaissance Star Reading® score. These scores were equivalent to grades 6.8 and 6.9, respectively.[10,11] In fact, on average, applicants who met both the math and reading requirements scored at grade 8.7 for both.

Pilot recruitment and enrollment staff first gauged an applicant's general interest in the Cascades pilot through conversations and interviews. If an applicant seemed interested and was age-eligible, staff provided additional details about the pilot and how it differed from conventional Job Corps. The applicant then completed career exploration activities as well as the math and reading assessments. If the applicant met the eligibility requirements and confirmed interest in college and in healthcare or IT careers, staff randomly assigned the applicant to the treatment group or control group. However, because of the additional processing time that background checks required, staff did not always wait for the background check results prior to random assignment. Additionally, applicants also had to pass a Cascades pilot center health and wellness department review after random assignment but before being offered admission.[12] Thus, a few of those randomly assigned to the treatment group were denied access to

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[9]   See Exhibit 1-1 of the Job Corps Policy and Requirements Handbook (DOL/OJC 2016).

[10]   These scores are equivalent to how a typical student (based on a national norming study) would score towards the end of their sixth-grade year on the content presented to them, according to the Renaissance Star score conversion table.

[11]   None of the staff interviewed knew the details of the decision to lower the academic assessment score cutoffs versus those originally planned.
       http://hollandrti.weebly.com/uploads/1/6/8/1/16819326/star_reading_technicalmanual.pdf.
       https://www.wtps.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=37941&dataid=46216&FileName=STAR%20Math%20Manual.pdf

[12]   Every Job Corps center has a health and wellness department that assesses whether that center has the necessary resources to support an applicant. An applicant's medical and mental health background must demonstrate that

Cascades after random assignment for not meeting the background check eligibility or passing a wellness check.

3.2   Enrollment Results

- **About 19 pilot students arrived at the pilot center each month, totaling 488 students—more than half of whom (*n*=282) enrolled in the IT pathway. The pilot had slower than expected enrollment and never filled the Cascades center to capacity.**

The Cascades pilot randomly assigned 1,154 applicants, 653 in the treatment group and 501 in the control group.[13] Of the 653 treatment group members, the pilot denied 3 entry based on the health and wellness review and an additional two applicants formally withdrew from consideration while under review.[14] The pilot also denied one applicant due to a disqualifying criminal conviction.[15] As a result, 647 treatment group members were offered admission (i.e., assigned an arrival date).

Between May 2017, when pilot students began arriving, and June 2019, when DOL ended pilot enrollment, 488 students arrived at the Cascades center. On average, about 19 pilot students across both pathways arrived at the center each month. The pilot scheduled students to arrive in pathway-specific cohorts.

As illustrated in Exhibit 3-1 below, the IT cohorts had more students than the healthcare cohorts, especially during the Start-Up Phase—a monthly average of 11 students for IT and 8 students for healthcare. In total, more of the students who arrived at the center (about 57 percent) arrived in an IT pathway cohort. The pilot center had capacity to serve 300 students at a time, but the pilot never reached that threshold (i.e., never achieved what Job Corps refers to as full "on-board strength").

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the student can independently (with guidance) participate in the program. For example, a department may recommend an applicant for denial if they have unmanaged mental health issues. The department made recommendations for denial, but the regional Job Corps office made the final decision.

[13]   Tabulations derived from monthly reports generated from the Cascades Management Information System. During the majority of the Start-Up Phase, applicants had a 75 percent chance of being randomly assigned into the treatment group in order to allow the pilot to get students on center quicker. Starting in September 2017, and for most of the Mature Phase, applicants had a 50 percent chance of being randomly assigned into the treatment group.

[14]   The pilot recommended eight applicants for denial. The regional office upheld three of them.

[15]   A disqualifying conviction could be murder, child abuse, or crimes involving rape or sexual assault.

Exhibit 3-1   Number of Students First Arriving by Track and by Month
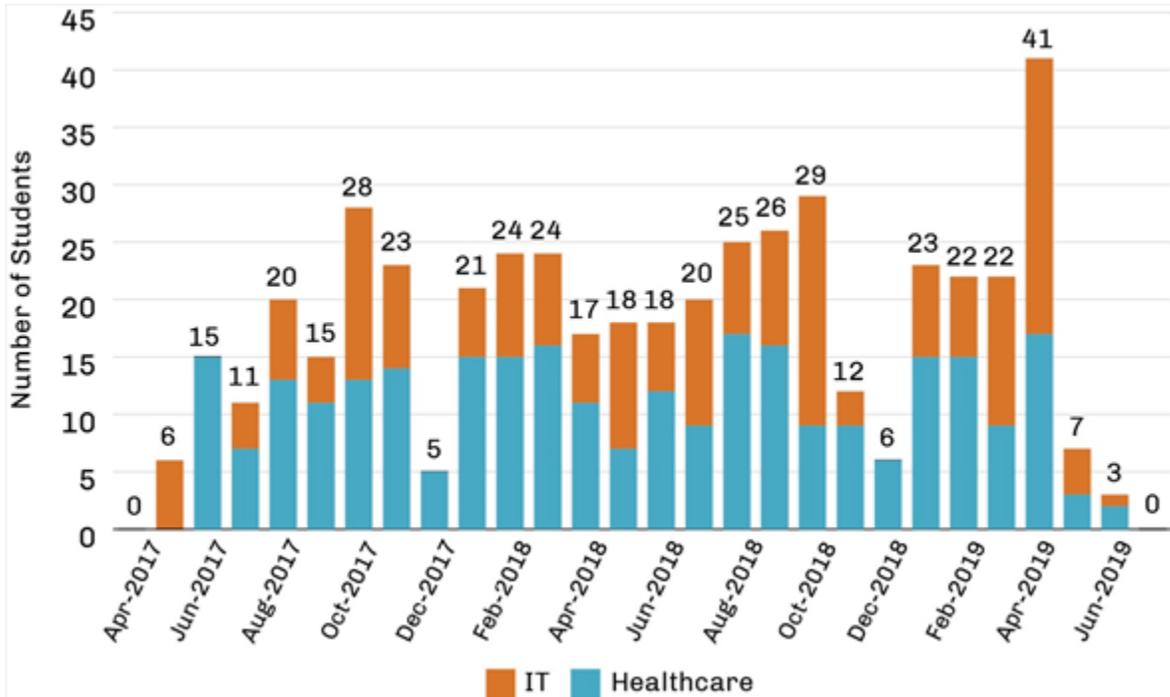
NOTES: Exhibit 3-1 includes only first arrivals, meaning if a student departed the center but later returned, that return arrival is not counted here. The sample size is 481 total students. Healthcare and IT designation occurred at random assignment; however, 24 students switched pathways before or after arriving at the center; and an additional 7 students withdrew from the study.
SOURCE: Arrival data reported by pilot staff via monthly Performance Measurement Reports provided to the evaluation team.

3.3   Enrollment Challenges and Modifications

- **Staff suggested the academic assessment was a barrier for some applicants. They said many who met the sixth-grade math and reading requirement had to take the assessment multiple times to do so.**

About a third (34 percent) of the applicants who attempted the assessment never met the sixth-grade requirement—even after retaking the assessment multiple times. Staff said many students met the requirement for either math or reading but not both. Among the applicants who did meet the criteria, at least one staff member estimated about 30 to 40 percent had to retake the assessment more than once.[16] Additionally, an unknown number of applicants likely declined to apply to Cascades because they did not want to take the assessment.

- **Staff suggested that early requirements to use only standardized Job Corps marketing and advertising may have limited the pilot's ability to reach the target audience. They also suggested it may have led to higher ineligibility rates, because of the pilot's more restrictive eligibility criteria.**

More than one staff member suggested the initial restrictions NOJC placed on pilot marketing and advertising compounded the recruitment and enrollment challenges. For instance, NOJC required the pilot to use conventional Job Corps branding rather than develop something unique to the pilot. In particular, NOJC required the pilot to use the standardized Job Corps center website and to rely on national social

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[16]   Star Assessment data indicate that that those who met the sixth-grade requirement for both math and reading did so, on average, after 1.2 attempts.

media campaigns (rather than establishing pilot-specific accounts). More than one staff member suggested that these limitations—especially those regarding social media—hindered their ability to reach young adults who might not have considered Job Corps but would perhaps have been interested in the program offered by the pilot. Conversely, at least one staff member suggested that applicants to Job Corps who had not specifically applied to the pilot but were approached by pilot recruitment staff were less likely to be interested in the pilot's college aspect, given the conventional Job Corps model they were interested in.

- **The Cascades pilot modified marketing and outreach strategies, expanded the recruitment catchment area, and adjusted services to reach likely eligible students.**

The pilot staff continually sought out new and additional methods and opportunities to reach a broader audience of potential eligible and interested applicants. For example, the staff conducted focus groups with pilot students to learn about their enrollment experience. Eventually, in late 2017, the pilot staff began gaining approval to use pilot-specific marketing and advertising materials, such as flyers and a billboard. These materials included pilot-specific information such as its age criterion and the opportunity to earn college credits. Pilot recruitment and enrollment staff also had the flexibility to provide pilot-specific details when conducting outreach and recruitment activities in-person or over the phone. For example, throughout the enrollment period, staff recruited out of offices located in and around cities, such as Seattle. Staff set up tables at street fairs and college fairs to talk directly to high school students and gauge their interest in college. These staff also contacted alternative high schools, homeless shelters, and foster care centers to request they identify and refer potential students. Additionally, the pilot encouraged their college partner, Skagit Valley College, to identify and refer students who might need additional support.

Initially, the pilot staff only recruited from Washington State. In July 2017—about five months after the start of enrollment—NOJC expanded the catchment area to include Idaho and Oregon. Staff from an existing Job Corps recruitment and enrollment contractor, Dynamic Educational Systems, Inc., helped the pilot recruit from all three states. However, the contractor enrolled fewer than 18 percent of applicants to the pilot. Later that year, the pilot also added a Pre-Nursing track to the healthcare pathway in hopes that it would attract more applicants.

- **Lower than expected monthly recruitment rates affected enrollment cohort sizes. Additionally, enrolling students in cohorts increased lag times between acceptance and students' scheduled arrival dates, which may have contributed to drop-off prior to center arrival.**

The pilot originally planned to have a 20 to 25 student IT cohort and a 20 to 25 student healthcare cohort arrive on center every month. However, low enrollment forced the pilot to temporarily reduce each pathway's cohort arrival frequency. To allow the pilot more time to build up cohort sizes, the pilot decided to have pathway cohorts arrive every other month (e.g., IT one month and healthcare the next). After a few months, the pilot returned to having one cohort of each pathway arrive each month, regardless of size. As a result, the cohort sizes were smaller than originally planned.

About 25 percent of the 647 treatment group members offered admission (i.e., assigned an arrival date) never arrived at the Cascades center to participate in the pilot. About another 11 percent instead enrolled at a Job Corps center other than Cascades.[17] While some members chose to postpone their arrival date, others changed their minds or lost interest and did not show up to the Cascades pilot center despite having a scheduled arrival date. These instances of no-shows suggest that perhaps the longer lag times between

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[17]   A total arrival rate of 86 percent at any Job Corps center. Comparatively, about 66 percent of applicants admitted to conventional Job Corps arrived at any Job Corps center during the same period.

being offered admission and students' scheduled arrival date as part of a cohort may have allowed more time for a student's circumstances to change, thus increasing the likelihood of drop-off.

The pilot's average lag time was longer than the average lag for conventional Job Corps programs with open enrollment. During the pilot's Start-Up Phase, the pilot averaged a 2-month lag, compared to 1.6 months for conventional Job Corps centers during the same period. However, as the pilot increased enrollment during its later phases, the average lag was closer to the average for conventional Job Corps programs during the same period (1.9 months versus 1.5 months).

4.   Cascades Pilot Culture

The Cascades pilot's design envisioned a different kind of Job Corps center. Whereas conventional Job Corps centers are very structured with standardized rules and policies, the vision for the Cascades pilot was to create a different culture by implementing various alternative services, components, policies, principles, and procedures. This section describes the Cascades pilot culture and the implementation of aspects that shaped that culture. Also noted are challenges in achieving the pilot's goals in this area.

4.1   Enrolling a College-Oriented Student Population

- **The Cascades pilot eligibility criteria and the selected career pathway industries resulted in academically skilled students with college aspirations participating in the pilot services. However, the criteria also reduced the diversity and maturity of those students compared to participants in conventional Job Corps centers serving the full 16-24 age range.**

The pilot's eligibility criteria, advanced education and training component, and selected career pathway industries affected the center culture by changing who applied and was subsequently admitted to participate.

Unlike conventional Job Corps students, pilot students had to meet academic enrollment eligibility criteria. Only 66 percent of the applicants who attempted the math and reading assessment met the cutoff for both. Those who met both cutoffs tested, on average, at the eighth-grade level—despite the pilot setting its math and reading assessment criteria at the sixth-grade level (rather than the anticipated eighth-grade level). The pilot's advanced education and training component also resulted in applicants who had a goal to attend college. Thus, the applicants admitted had high aspirations, which aligned with the pilot's high expectations of sending students to college for advanced certifications and college credits.

Relatedly, more than one staff member observed that these same aspects that shaped who applied for the pilot contributed to a lack of diversity among pilot students. For example, and by design, the age criterion for the pilot meant a younger student population, which staff said led to a lack of older peer role models for the younger students and a lower maturity level overall. With regard to the academic enrollment eligibility criteria, more than one staff member suggested that English language learners and applicants of color were disproportionately challenged in meeting the assessment cutoffs. The pass rates of pilot applicants who took the academic assessments support those staff observations. For example, Hispanic applicants had a 58 percent pass rate, compared to the 69 percent pass rate of White non-Hispanic applicants (Exhibit 4-1).[18]

Exhibit 4-1   Star Assessment Pass Rates of Pilot Applicants, by Demographic Characteristic

	Failed Math and Reading	Failed Only Math	Failed only Reading	Passed Math and Reading
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	23%	9%	6%	62%
White	14%	12%	5%	69%
Other	23%	11%	8%	58%
Hispanic (of any race)	24%	11%	7%	58%

NOTE: Row may not total to 100% due to rounding of decimals.
SOURCE: Demographic data from the application system within the National Job Corps Management Information System and Renaissance Star Assessment data. N=2,546 (includes students recorded as taking the Star Assessment for Cascades Job Corps Center); N=214 Black, N=1,756 White, N=576 Other, N=373 Hispanic (of any race).

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[18]   See Section 4.1 of the CCCA Pilot Evaluation *Final Report* (Klerman et al. 2021) for details on pilot student characteristics.

More than one staff member suggested that the limited number and types of pathways offered by the pilot also affected the culture by appealing to certain types of applicants more than others. For example, staff said IT and healthcare in particular seemed to attract more students from urban rather than rural areas. Staff also reported that Cascades applicants preferred virtual recreational activities (e.g., video games and role-playing strategy games such as Dungeons & Dragons) rather than the type of physical activities (e.g., basketball) typically popular at other Job Corps centers.

- **The Cascades pilot's college and career pathway focus may have attracted students who embraced longer-term goals.**

By design, the pilot's career pathways approach further shaped the culture. Relative to conventional Job Corps centers, this career pathways approach set an implicit expectation that students would participate in the program longer and obtain more advanced credentials and college credit. The pilot design encouraged students to actively participate in developing an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). During ILP sessions, the student and a team of staff discussed the student's academic and non-academic interests, short- and long-term goals, and strengths and weaknesses. The ILP sessions began during the student's first two weeks at the center. Subsequent sessions convened every 60 days, with additional staff members joining as the student progressed through the pilot services. ILP sessions within the first eight weeks focused on helping the student choose an occupational track within their previously selected pathway—IT or healthcare—and on identifying goals and next steps.

More than one staff member suggested that most students enrolled in the pilot because they had a goal to attend college. As such, more than one student indicated that they embraced the three years the pilot would give them to complete the program as a commitment to stay and get as far as they could in college. Staff suggested that students stayed longer at Cascades than in conventional Job Corps programs not only because they could but also because the pilot instilled these higher expectations via the career pathways. Many students suggested they would stay for three years, and many also indicated their interest in continuing college after they completed the pilot.[19]

4.2   Building Community and Responsibility

- **Enrolling students in cohorts helped build a sense of community and mutual support, as did peer mentoring and student groups. Despite these supportive facets of the pilot, more than one student said they faced mental health challenges such as depression or knew other students who did.**

The pilot vision suggested enrolling students in cohorts to encourage cohesion and support, and more than one student suggested that it worked as hoped. Cohort enrollment helped form a culture of community that fostered student support for one another. For example, spending the first six weeks at the center with the other students in their cohort provided students with opportunities for bonding. Pilot staff also encouraged the formation of student groups such as a Queer/Straight Alliance, as well as other support groups and academic and recreational clubs. In addition, staff urged older students to mentor the younger students through a peer mentoring program.

Many students interviewed described the strong peer support systems as critical to their success. Several students said they sometimes had difficulty saying goodbye to cohort members who left early, implying they had established close connections. At least one other student was more negative about cohort enrollment, apparently because they did not get along with the other students in the cohort. However, staff used this challenge as a teachable moment—not everyone will always get along with others at college or

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[19]   See Section 4.2 of CCCA Pilot Evaluation *Final Report* (Klerman et al. 2021) for further discussion on student length of stay in the pilot.

work, but everyone needs to find a way to be successful together. Additionally, more than one student said they heavily relied on fellow students for mental health support. In part, students suggested that this was because of a perceived lack of access to adequate mental healthcare services from the pilot.

- **To encourage student engagement and build responsibility, the pilot adopted a human-centered-design approach and took a restorative justice approach to behavior management that was less punitive than conventional Job Corp centers—though success in implementing this approach to achieve the pilot design goal was limited.**

The pilot design included a directive to seek out and embrace student input and thereby give students a voice in center decisions. The pilot implemented this directive, and as a result, it helped create a culture supporting open communication. In addition to the conventional Job Corps Student Government Association, the pilot encouraged students to help shape the center and its activities, services, rules, policies, procedures, and aesthetics. For example, the pilot staff conducted student interviews and focus groups, had suggestion boxes, created student committees, and held town halls. Through these forums, students provided input on the dress code; asked for and received flexibility to establish residential dorm cleaning schedules; and provided feedback about the lack of nonscheduled time, which led to the addition of independent study periods. However, the pilot faced some challenges implementing a human-centered-design approach.[20] Most staff seemed to understand the concept, but some misinterpreted it as giving students anything they wanted, which at least one staff member suggested resulted in too little structure.

The pilot's behavior management approach was designed and implemented to avoid a rigidly punitive culture. Conventional Job Corps centers not only are governed by many rules but also are expected to punish or expel students if they do not strictly follow the rules. For example, all Job Corps centers must implement a zero-tolerance policy enforced with expulsion for violence, drugs, and alcohol-related offenses.[21] The pilot was required to implement the zero-tolerance requirement, but had the flexibility to implement less restrictive and less rule-based policies.

The pilot retained the necessary structure to guide and support the students, but it implemented a restorative justice approach to behavior management.[22] First, pilot staff acknowledged and rewarded good behavior with both verbal and written affirmation as well as awards. Second, the pilot staff used coaching and mediation as a first step whenever possible, rather than immediate and automatic punishment. If the student did not remedy bad behavior as a result of coaching, then staff recorded an additional infraction. After two minor infractions, the student appeared before a panel of their peers. After assessing the issue,

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[20] "Human-centered design is a problem-solving approach that places the experiences and opinions of those receiving services at the very center of the process, encouraging program staff members at all levels to center around a shared perspective when collaborating to improve services. This approach can also empower participants to have a say in how services are shaped to better serve them" (Vasquez 2020). https://www.mdrc.org/publication/process-maps-many-voices-help-make-change

[21] The type of punishment students receive in a conventional Job Corps program depends on the severity of the infraction. Infractions that are deemed most severe (Tier I) result in immediate expulsion with a zero tolerance policy. Infractions that are deemed to be moderately severe (Tier II)—such as cheating, vandalism, plagiarism, and bullying—may result in expulsion with the option of re-admission after one year. Less severe infractions (Tier III)—such as using profanity, not performing assignments, and violating the dress code—can result in progressive interventions. If a student has more than four minor infractions in a two-month period, the level of the next incident is elevated and a Fact-Finding Board is convened. For additional detail, see the *Job Corps Policy and Requirements Handbook* (DOL/OJC 2016).

[22] Restorative justice is an alternative to a traditional punitive disciplinary approach. It focuses on repairing relationships damaged due to behavior and includes a continuum of practices that range from formal (e.g., restorative conferencing) to informal responses (e.g., peer mediation) (Wachtel and McCold 2001; Morrison, Blood, and Thorsborne 2005).

the student panel helped identify actions to remedy it and then supported the student as needed. Five minor infractions resulted in termination from the program—especially if there were public safety concerns. At least one staff member, however, questioned the effectiveness of the behavior management system given some staff's misinterpretation of the human-centered design approach. They believed students were not being held accountable for behavior that could affect their employability.

- **The Cascades pilot implemented policies that helped build a culture to increase professionalism and responsibility, but later curtailed freedoms.**

Pilot staff embraced the idea that the pilot was preparing students for a career and not just a job. As such, the pilot strived to emulate a professional IT or healthcare workplace environment—especially in the classroom. For example, instead of the standard Job Corps uniform policy, the pilot's dress code aimed to teach students how to dress appropriately in the workplace.

Compared to a typical college environment, the Cascades center was highly restrictive but relative to conventional Job Corps centers, the pilot was less restrictive. The pilot let students move around the Cascades center more freely. In part, this effort was an attempt to emulate how students might move around a college campus. For example, the center provided wi-fi—a rarity at a conventional Job Corps center. Wi-fi allowed the pilot students who checked out a loaner laptop to choose from various places around the center campus to complete their work. The pilot also trusted students to attend classes at the college campus, where there was less oversight than at the Job Corps center.

Though some of the pilot's alternative policies appear to have helped to create a different culture and to build responsibility, other policies appear to have been less successful. The pilot staff initially allowed students to access the dorms throughout the day and had more flexible policies regarding when and how often students could leave the center. However, in reaction to negative incidents that occurred related to these policies, the pilot staff replaced the policies with substantially more restrictive ones. These policy changes frustrated students because they felt punished as a result of the actions of a few. Staff and students suggested that such changes led some students to leave the pilot early. In retrospect, one staff member suggested that starting with less restrictive policies and then retracting privileges was particularly jarring for the students. They speculated that the backlash might not have occurred if they had started with tighter restrictions and then loosened them based on good behavior.

In Spring 2019, almost two years into the pilot, two key staff positions—Center Director and Healthcare Pathway Manager—turned over within a short period. Staff referred to this as an opportunity for a "reset," using it to increase transparency, structure, and accountability. The pilot staff modified rules and policies to be more concrete and more equally applied across students and situations. Soon after, in July 2019, the pilot started also operating a conventional Job Corps program, which further prompted these types of changes.

4.3   *Creating a Professional and High-Quality Environment*

- **The Cascades pilot took steps to create a sense of professionalism and expertise among staff, but low salaries and a lack of development opportunities resulted in limited success.**

The pilot designers envisioned creating a different culture through its staffing practices, which called for higher staffing standards. For example, staff were to be credentialed experts in their subject area, have experience in the field (healthcare or IT), and receive continued professional development. However, the pilot did not offer higher wages than those at conventional Job Corps centers. At least one Job Corps staff member suggested that Job Corps' salaries were lower than other employers that hire the type of staff the pilot wanted, and they believed that this may have contributed to the pilot's hiring challenges and high staff turnover.

Additionally, professional development opportunities for staff were limited or scarce—even compared to some conventional Job Corps centers. Pilot staff received some training, but not all received formal instruction. For example, pilot staff suggested that CTT instructors, in particular, would have benefited from classroom management training. Staff cited scheduling and lack of funds as the most significant barriers to providing formal instruction and professional development. Further challenging staff expertise was the pilot's goal to hire a mix of staff with and without previous Job Corps experience. Staff believed this likely contributed to the gap in knowledge about conventional Job Corps policy and procedures— helpful knowledge even when seeking to implement alternatives.

- **The pilot aimed to create high-quality facilities to support pathways and foster student engagement. Delays in upgrades, though, held back program implementation.**

High-quality pilot center facilities and systems contributed to a different campus culture. For example, classrooms had comfortable chairs and tables. Some classrooms also had small study nooks with lounge chairs, and others had couches and even a self-serve coffee bar. Moreover, the pilot design called for the center facilities to be upgraded to include access to high-speed internet (including wi-fi), computers, and the latest software. Classrooms were to have the latest "smart" technology such as interactive whiteboards and Skype capability. However, students, especially IT students, had to contend with slow network speed issues that continued throughout the pilot's first year. Additionally, other planned upgrades and renovations planned were delayed or deemed too expensive. For example, the renovations of space formerly used for skilled labor training programs (such as carpentry labs) into classrooms and computer labs wired for internet and network access were delayed and ultimately implemented in stages throughout the pilot implementation period. More than one staff member and more than one student suggested that these delays caused challenges for the IT pathway.

5.   Cascades Pilot Services

This section describes the pilot's principal education and training services and other components. The section begins by summarizing how students generally progressed through the services, from Orientation to Career Transition Services, followed by a description of each service or component along with any related modifications, challenges, and improvements.

Exhibit 5-1   Pilot Service Flow
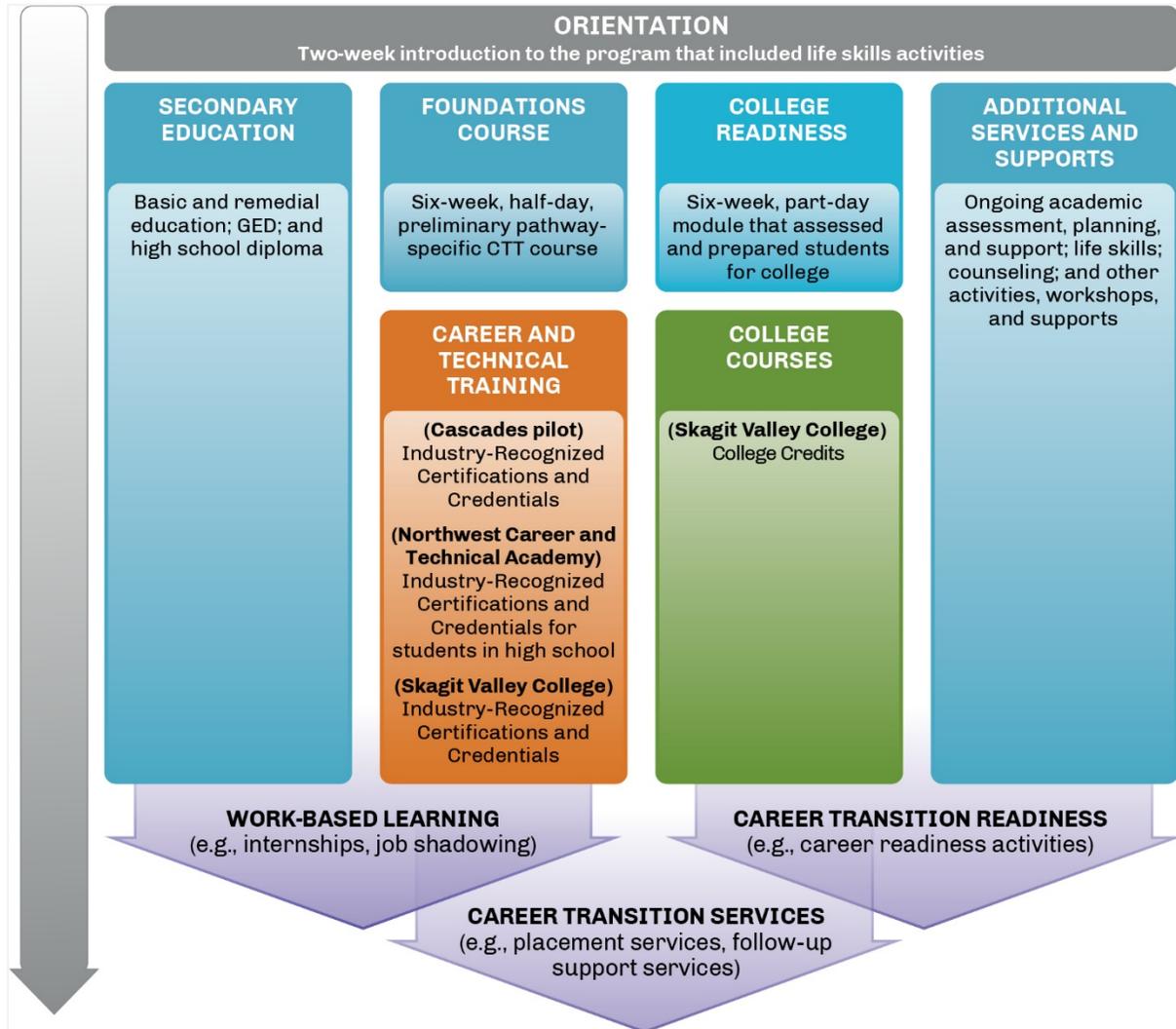
KEY: CTT=Career and Technical Training.
SOURCE: Authors' own illustration.

As illustrated in Exhibit 5-1, students arriving at the pilot center first completed Orientation, followed by a mixture of secondary education classes, a pathway-specific Foundations course, and College Readiness activities. Depending on interest and pathway, the students then followed one of several education and skills training routes that usually included a combination of CTT courses and college courses. Students in the Cascades pilot went to college much sooner than is possible at a conventional Job Corps center. Towards the end of students' time in the program, the model allowed them to participate in work-based learning activities, such as internships or job shadowing. Students could also receive Career Transition Readiness services, such as job readiness activities and other services meant to help prepare them for

post-program life. After finishing the program and leaving the pilot center ("separating"), students could receive Career Transition Services, which included placement services and other follow-up support services.

5.1   Orientation

- **Staff reported that the Cascades pilot Orientation was longer and more substantive than a conventional Job Corps center orientation, and students completed it as a cohort.**

Pilot students completed the Orientation as part of a pathway-specific cohort and received a pathway-specific introduction to the Cascades pilot. Described by staff as a "soft-landing," the two-week Orientation acclimated students to the center environment before they began other services. The first week covered topics such as socio-emotional intelligence, team building, and relationship building. It also included aspects of the conventional Job Corps' Career Success Standards activities.[23] The second week prepared students for education and training services. Following Orientation, the same cohort of students went on to begin the CTT Foundations course.

5.2   Secondary Education

- **Similar to conventional Job Corps, the Cascades pilot offered both General Educational Development Test (GED) and high school education services—though high school was a combination of online and in-person instruction.**

The pilot did not require applicants to have a high school diploma or equivalent before center arrival, in line with standards for conventional Job Corps programs. All Job Corps centers provide access to secondary education services. Most have GED programs at the center in addition to high school diploma services through online programs or partnerships with local school districts. Pilot staff provided GED services on center, but unlike conventional Job Corps, the pilot partnered with the Skagit Valley School District to provide a combination of online *and* in-person high school courses at the Cascades center through the Washington Connections Academy program.[24] Following Orientation, students enrolled as needed in secondary education.

- **Some Cascades pilot students dually enrolled in high school and college in order to take advantage of funding opportunities and to earn both high school and college credit from the same courses.**

The pilot staff often encouraged students to enroll in high school courses in addition to GED courses and college courses because Washington students enrolled in high school qualify for college funding through the state's Open Doors Youth Reengagement program.[25] Dual high school and college enrollment allowed students to start college before finishing high school and earn both high school and college credit from the same courses. However, staff at the Connections Academy high school program said the use of Open Doors funding caused complications because the more funding the pilot used to support college

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[23]   Conventional Job Corps students create a plan and complete assessments and activities to meet eight Career Success Standards: workplace relationships and ethics, interpersonal skills, personal growth, independent living, career and personal planning, communications, multicultural awareness, and information management (DOL/OJC 2017)

[24]   Washington Connections Academy is a free K-12 online public school. https://www.connectionsacademy.com/washington-online-school

[25]   Open Doors Youth Reengagement provides postsecondary funding to high school students (ages 21 and younger) for approved college courses, along with case management and career services. https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/reengaging-reducing-dropouts/open-doors-youth-reengagement

coursework, the less was available to run and staff its high school program (see Section 5.4.3 for more information on funding).

- **The Cascades pilot provided general academic support to students who may have had a high school credential but still needed to increase their basic education skills in order to succeed in CTT and college.**

Though average math and reading scores among students entering the pilot were at the eighth-grade level (8.7), some students entered with as low as sixth-grade skills. Regardless, the pilot sought to help students to reach a 10th-grade reading level and a 12th-grade math level as a program milestone before enrolling in certain CTT or college courses. After several months of hiring challenges, the pilot placed students with lower math and reading assessment scores into basic education courses to better prepare them for or to support them during their CTT and college courses. This practice was similar to the TABE® testing and classes in conventional Job Corps.[26]

5.3   College Readiness

- **Cascades pilot students who enrolled in college without additional academic and non-academic support beforehand performed poorly.**

More than pilot staff member suggested that the academic assessment minimum score eligibility requirement did not result in a pilot student population with fewer academic barriers and challenges than typical Job Corps students. Even though pilot students scored at the eighth-grade level on average, they were also younger than conventional Job Corps students.[27] The pilot initially sent these younger students, some of whom were ages 16 and 17, to college two months after starting the pilot.[28] Pilot staff said these younger pilot students lacked sufficient maturity for the college's less structured environment and needed more guidance and preparation services than older students to succeed. However, more than one staff member also said pilot students of all ages had similar challenges at college.

The pilot staff initially relied on Skagit Valley College's First Quarter Experience course to gauge a student's readiness for college.[29] However, even students that passed this course did not always perform well in future courses. The pilot staff obtained valuable feedback about pilot students due to the formal and informal systems of communication established as part of the college partnership.[30] The college staff said that pilot students lacked study skills, life skills, and maturity, which affected their progress and caused behavioral issues in class. Staff reported that the pilot also learned that students were sometimes stressed and overwhelmed—perhaps because they were not fully aware of or prepared for the commitment that college requires. They said students seemed unable to organize themselves, turn assignments in on time, and follow instructions. Some students would complete their work but sometimes, for one reason or another, not turn it in. As a result of not passing the First Quarter Experience

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[26]   Conventional Job Corps requires students to remain enrolled in TABE classes until their scores meet a stipulated threshold.

[27]   Conventional Job Corps student scored at approximately the seventh-grade level in comparison (see Exhibit 3-2 in CCCA Pilot Evaluation *Final Report* (Klerman et al. 2021).

[28]   Nationally, fewer than 6 percent of college students in 2019 were younger than age 18 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center 2019, Table 6).

[29]   All Skagit Valley College students had to complete a college orientation course called College and Career Success Skills (or First Quarter Experience) that taught, for example, study skills. https://www.mysvc.skagit.edu/cat_search3.asp?crs=305&cat=2020&highlight=

[30]   Open and regular communication is critical when supporting Job Corps students at college (Grossman, Olejniczak, and Klerman 2021).

college course, at least one student left the pilot early. At least one staff member suggested that these types of failures could have discouraged students from ever going back to college in the future.

- **The Cascades pilot eventually developed a formal College Readiness module to provide students with substantial academic and non-academic preparation and support before they enrolled in college.**

In response to early challenges and considerations, the pilot staff designed and began implementing a College Readiness module in September 2018—about 15 months after the first students arrived (Mature Phase). College Readiness was a six-week, part-day module that assessed and prepared students for college. Students completed writing assignments and teamwork activities; learned about self-advocacy and growth mindset; and worked to build time management skills, conflict resolution skills, and note-taking skills. Students also practiced completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), enrolling in college, and navigating the college's learning management platform. As part of College Readiness, students took the required college placement exam at the pilot center. Based on the exam results, students who needed to participate in remedial education courses did so at the pilot center rather than at the college. Offering remedial education courses at the pilot center saved the pilot some additional college costs for courses that did not accrue college credit towards a degree—though staff said about 15 percent of such students took remedial courses at the college.

Using a set of metrics that included academics, class attendance, class participation, behavior, hygiene, and socio-emotional capability, a team of pilot staff assessed and monitored student progress. Staff also worked with students to set goals as necessary to strengthen their skills. At the end of six weeks, the staff team designated each student as either (1) ready for college, (2) ready for college but with extra monitoring and support, or (3) in need of continued College Readiness activities to address deficiencies.

5.4   Career and Technical Training (CTT) and College

- **The Cascades pilot career pathways offered early credential attainment, led to advanced credentials, and included college.**

The pilot had a unique Job Corps approach to providing education and training services to its students. First, as designed, the pilot was a specialized center with focused career pathways in two high-demand industries—IT and healthcare—whereas conventional Job Corps centers offer a wider variety of CTT programs. Second, as designed, the pilot offered all students the opportunity to earn advanced credentials. Conventional Job Corps programs offer only CTT programs leading to entry-level certifications with the option to apply for a third year to participate in an advanced program (e.g., AT or CEP). Third, as designed, both pilot career pathways offered a series of entry-level and advanced courses leading to industry-recognized credentials, starting in the CTT Foundations course (although, staff suggested that not all of the credentials offered necessarily led to in-demand occupations with a living wage). Last, whereas a conventional Job Corps center traditionally provides most or all of the education and training services on center, the pilot, as designed, offered services through a local college and a local skills training service provider. As such, pilot students attended college as a standard part of the pilot program. As designed, pilot students were sent to college to take college-level courses to obtain advanced-level college certificates or credits towards a college degree.

The remainder of this section describes the IT and healthcare education and training career pathway services, along with any challenges and improvements to the pilot design as implemented.

5.4.1 Foundations Course

- **Foundations gave Cascades pilot students the opportunity to begin earning credentials early in the program—though the pilot staff had to revise the IT Foundations curriculum multiple times during the Start-Up Phase in response to student feedback and final exam challenges.**

Foundations was a six-week, half-day, preliminary, pathway-specific CTT course that sought to motivate and engage the pilot students. As a training strategy, all CTT pathway instructors sought to create a workplace environment and required students to act as if attending class was their job. The course introduced students to the specific occupational tracks that students could pursue within the IT or healthcare career pathways. Students learned foundational pathway knowledge, basic academic skills, technical vocabulary, and other useful skills, such as study skills and financial literacy. For example, healthcare Foundations introduced students to human biology, anatomy, and physiology, as well as "mathematics for health professionals."

Students also obtained credentials during Foundations. Healthcare students completed First Aid, CPR, Bloodborne Pathogens, and HIV training during Foundations and IT students earned Microsoft Office certifications. IT students also earned the CompTIA[31] Fundamentals certification after passing the Foundations final exam.

In response to feedback from early IT cohorts, pilot staff adjusted the IT Foundations course to include additional discussions about the specific occupational tracks, so that students could make better-informed decisions about which track to pursue. The pilot staff also modified the CompTIA Fundamentals course material to address challenges that IT students in the early cohorts had with the final exam.

5.4.2 Education and Training Partnerships

- **The Cascades pilot's relationship with Northwest Career & Technical Academy was valuable but not without challenges. Despite some initial challenges, the pilot built a strong and positive relationship with Skagit Valley College.**

The pilot established education and training partnerships to offer students advanced credentials, including the opportunity to earn college credits. The pilot partnered with Skagit Valley College (SVC), a local community college; and with Northwest Career & Technical Academy (NCTA), a high school CTT program affiliated with SVC.[32] The pilot also partnered with Microsoft to offer students the ability to earn Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Outlook, etc.) certifications.

The partnership with NCTA encountered philosophical and logistical challenges. First, NCTA staff noted differences of opinion regarding student discipline, in that NCTA staff did not agree with the pilot's zero-tolerance policies. Second, NCTA staff experienced communication challenges with pilot staff. The NCTA staff reported they would have liked more collaboration among all of the pilot's partners. Third, NCTA only had one program enrollment period per year for a limited number of pilot students. This posed a challenge because the pilot had several cohorts begin during the year and had hoped to send more students to NCTA. The pilot attempted unsuccessfully to get NCTA to increase the number of slots and program cycles. Staff reported that some pilot students who initially enrolled in NCTA were not a good fit and did not finish the program, causing the pilot to lose valuable spots. To avoid this issue going forward, the pilot staff teamed up with NCTA staff to implement an interview screening process starting in in fall of 2018—about 15 months into the pilot.

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[31] CompTIA (Computing Technology Industry Association) is a non-profit organization that offers professional IT certifications.

[32] NCTA requires that its students also be enrolled in high school.

The pilot also experienced some challenges partnering with SVC. For example, college and pilot staff both indicated early communication challenges but said they eventually established regular and effective communication strategies. The pilot also remedied challenges regarding pilot student college advising. Both the pilot and the college had advisors, which sometimes led to overlapping or conflicting guidance. As such, the pilot staff established expectations and roles with the college to avoid these issues. As discussed further below, the pilot had some additional challenges specifically related to the availability of college IT pathway services, but these too were resolved.

5.4.3   Funding Partner Education and Training Services

- **The Cascades pilot's reliance on outside funding sources led to program management complications and imposed additional requirements on students.**

The pilot provided access to SVC and NCTA education and training services by using the state's Open Doors Youth Reengagement ("Open Doors") funding, federal Pell grants, and the pilot's Job Corps operating funds. To pay for NCTA, the pilot used the Open Doors funding available to students age 21 or younger enrolled in high school. Pell grants were a common source of funding for pilot students' college courses, but Open Door and pilot operating funds were also used.

To pay for students' college, the pilot first relied on Open Doors funding whenever possible to cover approved courses that counted towards high school credit. As applicable, the pilot also required students to apply for and use up any Pell grant funds. The pilot covered any remaining costs from its own operating budget. The pilot anticipated that most students would use Open Doors funding or Pell grants; however, not all students needed or wanted to enroll in high school, and not all students qualified for Pell grants. This led to unplanned increases in pilot expenses.[33]

Additionally, the college noted complications coordinating with the pilot regarding the multiple funding sources. The pilot eventually decided to create a Financial Aid Coordinator position. This position had offices at both the center and at the college campus and helped the pilot and students navigate the financial aid process.

The multiple funding sources had implications for the students, as well. For example, if a student did not qualify for Open Doors funding or Pell grants, the pilot was more likely to restrict the type or number of courses the student could take. Pell grants also required students to maintain a minimum number of credits per term—sometimes making students take more courses than was ideal. Finally, some students expected the pilot to pay for college and wanted to preserve their Pell grant eligibility, making them reluctant to complete the FAFSA or leading them to revoke the pilot's access to their grades.

5.4.4   Information Technology Career Pathway

- **The Cascades pilot IT pathway entailed completing courses both at the center and at partner organizations. The pathway also offered supplemental certificate programs—such as Microsoft Office Specialist certifications—to increase the marketability of IT students.**

As depicted in Exhibit 5-2, IT pathway students pursued one of two occupational tracks: Game and Web Development or Network Technician.[34] Students worked to earn a variety of stackable certifications, including CompTIA Fundamentals, Microsoft Office certifications, Adobe certifications, and CompTIA Computer Information Systems certifications (A+, Network+, Security+, Linux+). For some certifications (e.g., Microsoft and Adobe), students worked independently at the center. For others, such as the CompTIA Computer Information Systems certifications, students took courses at either the center or the

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[33]   Pilot staff estimated that the total quarterly college costs paid for with pilot operating funds ranged from $35,000 to $150,000.

[34]   Lack of interest led the pilot to eliminate a third occupational track, Computer Support Technician.

college, depending on availability and scheduling. These skills training courses were typically self-paced. As a result, students could and often did work independently. Students also enrolled in general education courses at the college towards earning an Associate in Technical Arts (ATA) degree.

The IT pathway was not linear and did not strictly dictate the order in which students completed courses following Foundations. For example, an IT student could have gone straight to the Game and Web Development program at SVC following Foundations. Alternatively, an IT student could have enrolled in courses at the center. However, if the student was pursuing a high school diploma, staff encouraged the student to enroll in the NCTA Multimedia & Interactive Technology program instead because students still earned college credit from completing an NCTA course. Staff preferred the NCTA option, rather than the SVC option, because NCTA was a high school program that offered a structured environment and in-person instruction, and the NCTA staff had more experience working with younger students.

Exhibit 5-2   Information Technology Pathway Occupational Tracks

Track (Occupation)	Certification/Degree	Provider
Game and Web Development (Game Designer, Web Designer)	CompTIA Fundamentals	Cascades pilot
	Microsoft Imagine Academy Microsoft Office Specialist certifications (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook)	Cascades pilot
	Adobe certifications	Cascades pilot
	CNC (Computer Numerical Controlled) Machining; 3-D printing	Cascades pilot
	CompTIA Computer Information Systems certifications (A+, Network+, Security+, Linux+)	Cascades pilot or Skagit Valley College
	Multimedia & Interactive Technology (MIT) program → ATA	Northwest Career & Technical Academy
	Game and Web Development "Certificate" → ATA	Skagit Valley College
Network Technician (Network Technician/ Engineer)	CompTIA Fundamentals	Cascades pilot
	Microsoft Imagine Academy Microsoft Office Specialist certifications (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook)	Cascades pilot
	CompTIA Computer Information Systems certifications (A+, Network+, Security+, Linux+)	Cascades pilot or Skagit Valley College
	Network Technician "certificate" → ATA	Skagit Valley College

KEY: → ="leading to." ATA=Associate in Technical Arts.
SOURCE: Authors' own illustration based on qualitative field work.

- **The Cascades pilot IT pathway confronted delays and challenges related to the facilities, staffing, pathway design, and service provider partnerships—especially during the Start-Up Phase—which were compounded by increased enrollment into this pathway.**

From the start, interest and enrollment in the IT pathway outweighed interest and enrollment in the healthcare pathway. Within the IT pathway, enrollment skewed toward the Game and Web Development track. This uneven enrollment had implications for the IT pathway as it worked to overcome its challenges. For example, the increased number of IT students arriving at the center exacerbated challenges such as the lack of IT classroom space and computer labs and sluggish internet speeds. At the same time, the IT pathway also struggled with delays in hiring staff and staff turnover.

The pilot staff continued to make updates to the design and structure of education and training for the IT pathway's occupational tracks during the Start-Up Phase. One issue the pilot staff remedied was the need for supplemental certifications to increase student employability. Though the *Game Development* portion of the Game and Web Development occupational track was very popular with pilot students, jobs in this

field were highly competitive, opportunities were limited, and entry-level positions were extremely demanding yet low paying. As such, more than one staff member reported they would not have advised the pilot to implement the *Game Development* portion had they been part of the earlier planning discussions. To make students pursuing the Game and Web Development track more marketable, the pilot added Adobe, 3-D printing, and CNC Machining certifications. To further enhance students' employability, the pilot also began partnering with Microsoft at the beginning of 2018 (the Mature Phase) to become a licensed Microsoft Office training provider. This gave the pilot the ability to offer all IT students the opportunity to earn supplemental certifications

The pilot staff also further developed service provider partnerships during the Start-Up Phase. Specifically, the IT pathway remedied early challenges with the college. For example, the IT pathway's occupational tracks did not fully align with SVC's existing IT programs. The SVC local campus did not have the necessary computer lab space (where students could practice taking apart and putting computers back together) or the ability to offer the IT certification exams. Because the pilot anticipated enrolling moderate numbers of IT students at SVC (as many as 60 students a term), the pilot staff encouraged the college to expand its IT program. For instance, the pilot wanted the college to offer additional in-person classes at the local campus. In response, the college requested that the pilot demonstrate it had the enrollment numbers. Early enrollment challenges. however, prevented the pilot from immediately doing so.[35]

Until SVC expanded its IT program in fall of 2019, pilot students participated in the classroom portion of the online courses as a group at the college campus with just an online instructor, or at the Job Corps center where, in addition to the online instructor, pilot staff could provide immediate in-person assistance as needed. Students completed the lab portion of the course at the Cascades center. Both pilot staff and students, however, preferred that students take in-person courses with in-person instructors, as students found online instructors to be less accessible. When SVC did seek to hire an in-person instructor, it had challenges filling the position. As a temporary solution, the pilot IT pathway manager also taught classes at the college as an adjunct professor. SVC eventually became invested in the partnership and began building out its IT program.

By fall of 2019—more than two years after the start of the pilot—about half of the IT courses that pilot students took at SVC were available in-person; the rest continued to be available online only.

5.4.5   Healthcare Career Pathway
- **Although students enrolled in college in addition to completing CTT at the Cascades pilot center, staff suggested that the healthcare pathway's close resemblance to the conventional Job Corps program previously offered at the Cascades center may have made its implementation less challenging.**

As depicted in Exhibit 5-3, healthcare pathway students followed one of two occupational tracks: Pre-Nursing (Certified Medical Assistant and Certified Nursing Assistant) or Medical Administrative Specialist (Certified Billing and Coding Specialist).

Students began skills training at the Cascades center, earning CPR and other basic certifications during the healthcare Foundations course. Students then completed a 10-week Health Care Core course to earn the Certified Medical Administrative Assistant (CMAA) credential. After CMAA, the occupational tracks split. Pre-Nursing students completed the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) course; some students also then obtained the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) credential to increase their employment options. Students in the Medical Administrative Specialist track pursued the Certified Professional Biller (CPB)

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[35]   A promising practice is to ensure agreement on the number of students the college will serve (see Grossman, Olejniczak, and Klerman 2021).

and the Certified Professional Coder (CPC) certifications after earning their CMAA certification. These were all instructor-led group courses and were all taught by pilot staff at Cascades—with one exception of the CNA credential offered through SVC. Staff reported that a few high school students had the opportunity to earn the CNA certification from NCTA instead. Some students also earned Microsoft Office certifications.

At the same time, or upon completing the skills training courses, pilot students enrolled at SVC to earn college credits. The Pre-Nursing track prepared students for a Nursing degree, but all healthcare students had the opportunity to enroll in college. Moreover, students did not necessarily need to be interested in Nursing as the same prerequisite courses also could have prepared students for healthcare occupations such as Surgery Technician, Dental Hygienist, and Veterinary Technician.

Exhibit 5-3   Healthcare Pathway Occupational Tracks

Track (Occupation)	Certification/Degree	Provider
Pre-Nursing (Certified Medical Assistant and Certified Nursing Assistant)	CPR and First Aid certifications	Cascades pilot
	Microsoft Imagine Academy Microsoft Office Specialist certifications (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook)	Cascades pilot
	Certified Medical Administrative Assistant (CMAA)	Cascades pilot
	Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) license	Cascades pilot
	Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) license	Northwest Career & Technical Academy or Skagit Valley College
	Associate in Science (AS) degree in Pre-Nursing or Biology	Skagit Valley College
Medical Administrative Specialist (Certified Billing and Coding Specialist)	CPR and First Aid certifications	Cascades pilot
	Microsoft Imagine Academy Microsoft Office Specialist certifications (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook)	Cascades pilot
	Certified Medical Administrative Assistant (CMAA)	Cascades pilot
	Certified Professional Biller (CPB) certification	Cascades pilot
	Certified Professional Coder (CPC) certification	Cascades pilot
	Associate in Science (AS) degree in Pre-Nursing or Biology	Skagit Valley College

SOURCE: Qualitative field work.

The healthcare pathway did not face as many challenges as the IT pathway. For example, much of the healthcare curriculum was well established because most of the Cascade pilot's CTT healthcare courses closely resembled what conventional Job Corps centers offered. Additionally, because the former Cascades center had provided a healthcare program, the healthcare classrooms and facilities required only minor upgrades or renovations. The healthcare pathway staff were also in place early and remained relatively stable. The Healthcare Pathway Manager position turned over in Spring 2019, however; and a CTT class had a long-term substitute instructor.

The healthcare pathway also required a few modifications as it matured. For example, within the first six months, the pilot added the Pre-Nursing track. Additionally, in mid-2019, the healthcare pathway shifted from independent, self-paced instruction to group instruction. As a result, staff said, student performance improved.

5.5   *Additional Services and Supports*

In addition to the academic planning, academic improvement plans, and counseling that all Job Corps centers typically provide, the Cascades pilot, as designed, was to provide support services to ensure

students were successful in college. Specifically, the pilot provided students with added structure, support, and resources before and during college.

- **The Cascades pilot added structure to the unstructured college environment by implementing special policies and protocols, as well as having a pilot staff member at the college to monitor students.**

The pilot staff reported that many students (especially the younger students) struggled with the lack of structure and accountability that comes with attending college. When students were on the college campus, the pilot was unable to monitor them as closely as it did when they were at the Job Corps center. The pilot addressed this challenge in several ways. For example, the pilot implemented policies and protocols to ensure students were safe and well-behaved not only when they were at the college but also when traveling to and from the college. The pilot as designed envisioned a Job Corps staff member located at the college to support the pilot students and act as a liaison between the college and the pilot, but the pilot as implemented had to narrow the position's focus. In practice this staff member spent the majority of their time ensuring pilot students' punctuality and attendance at classes. Pilot staff suggested that it would have been beneficial to have more of them co-located at the college.

- **Cascades pilot staff closely supervised student progress to help identify challenges and offer support. Staff suggested that access to students' college grades and frequent communication with students and college staff were important for this purpose.**

Students had access to tutoring and support at the pilot center as well as at SVC, where some students could access its Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program.[36] Nevertheless, students did not always seek out or take advantage of these supports and resources. To monitor students' progress and help identify when students might need additional academic support, the pilot typically received each student's interim grade and final grade from the college.[37] Thus, to obtain more frequent interim progress reports, alerts, and sometimes even more grades, the pilot also attempted to use its access to the college's learning management platform. However, not all instructors provided grades or alerts through that system. As a result of infrequent progress updates, pilot staff did not always find out if a student had academic challenges after the pilot received a favorable interim grade. Sometimes the pilot staff did not find out a student had needed support until they received the student's final grade—and by then it was too late to provide the needed support. In response, the pilot staff decided to increase its communication with students.

By mid-2018, the pilot began implementing a more proactive approach: Pilot staff worked to establish relationships and informal lines of communication with the college instructors, who could share with pilot staff if a student was struggling. Moreover, pilot staff not only encouraged students to ask for help and advocate for themselves to get needed support but also increased the frequency of ILP sessions from quarterly to every 60 days. If ILP sessions revealed challenges or the need for additional support, the ILP staff team worked with the student to develop an action plan. Action plans included, for example, requirements to attend support classes and tutoring and to continue meeting with the ILP staff team until the challenge resolved. Student mentors also supported students with their action plans.

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[36] I-BEST is a state-wide program in Washington State that integrates basic education courses with skills training. https://www.skagit.edu/academics/areas-of-study/basic-education-for-adults/college-career-bridge/

[37] The pilot required students to sign releases allowing the college to share their grades with the pilot but some students later revoked those permissions.

- **The Cascades pilot used specific college course information from the college's learning management platform to better prepare and support students.**

Having access to the college's learning management platform gave the pilot staff the ability to use college course information, materials, and assignments to provide informal and formal supplementary instruction. Staff believed that getting students to succeed in their first course was instrumental to the students' continued success. Thus, the pilot staff implemented a support class for students taking SVC's required First Quarter Experience course. During the support class, pilot staff reviewed the college course lectures and assignments with the students. The support class also allowed students to ask clarifying questions, get extra practice, or ask for additional help. The pilot staff also implemented other support courses, such as a center-led pre-chemistry course.

- **The Cascades pilot provided an evening support services component with limited participation requirements in response to students' request for more unscheduled downtime—though its implementation was delayed.**

The initial pilot design included an evening and weekend component to provide additional instruction and support to students. The design called for the pilot to include scheduled time for students to complete homework, get academic support, and participate in life skills classes and activities to build, for example, study skills and leadership skills. However, hiring delays contributed to delays in providing these services, and other challenges led to the implementation of a modified version of the component. For example, one challenge that led the pilot to modify this component was that students were not meeting component participation requirements and were complained about not having enough unscheduled downtime.

The pilot began implementing its modified component, called Evening Studies, in 2019—about one and a half years into the pilot (Mature Phase). Evening Studies offered similar but different services and support opportunities than originally planned. Instead of the planned life skills programming, the pilot used Evening Studies to further incorporate the conventional Job Corps Career Success Standards activities—beyond what the Orientation included. Evening Studies as implemented also had fewer participation requirements than originally planned, additional ways for students to meet the participation requirements, and did not require weekend participation. Students were required to participate in Evening Studies for the first eight weeks on center, then participation requirements were based on academic performance.

5.6   *Employment-Related and Transition Services*

The Cascades pilot planned to provide the same employment-related services and transition services provided by all conventional Job Corps programs. However, due to delays and challenges, these services were not fully implemented. Many staff reported that hiring delays and staff turnover resulted in the underdevelopment of these services and limited their availability to students. Furthermore, even though employment-related services and transition services are closely connected, pilot staff providing them did not all work in the same department, hindering collaboration and complicating service delivery.

5.6.1   Work-Based Learning
- **The Cascades pilot did not expect all students to complete long-term work-based learning activities such as internships, and staff and students indicated that many students preferred to focus on college instead—though students did participate in short-term work-based activities such as job shadowing or field trips to local employers.**

Conventional Job Corps work-based learning activities include formal ones such as internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training, as well as shorter-term informal ones such as job shadowing, field trips, and mock interviewing. The pilot did not staff or develop work-based learning activities until a year or more after students began arriving at the center. Early plans had the pilot establishing partnerships with local businesses to provide work-based learning opportunities such as internships—but staff later

suggested that this was not a pilot focus. In addition, because the pilot started with all newly enrolled students, none of them was immediately ready to participate in work-based learning.

At conventional Job Corps centers, students typically complete formal work-based learning activities such as internships as a standard part of the program when they reach a particular program benchmark. At the Cascades center, opportunities were limited, with pilot students receiving the opportunity to complete formal work-based learning activities only on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, staff and students reported that pilot students in college often did not want to participate in work-based learning that required longer-term commitments because it would have conflicted with their college schedules or required them to shift focus from their schoolwork.

In total, staff reported that few pilot students participated in a formal internship. However, some healthcare students were required to complete clinical hours as part of their certifications, and the pilot prioritized helping them. Pilot staff also provided informal work-based learning activities to all students, such as job shadowing or field trips to employers, which were generally more accessible to students and easier for staff to execute than were the formal options.

5.6.2   Career Transition Readiness (CTR)

- **Cascades pilot students—especially those students that departed early and with little advance notice—received limited Career Transition Readiness services due to delays in staffing and developing those services.**

Conventional Job Corps students receive CTR services during their final 90 days in the program in preparation to leave Job Corps. The services are specific to a student's post–Job Corps plans. For example, a student wanting to pursue higher education might receive college application assistance, whereas a student planning to enter the workforce might receive job readiness skills training.

The pilot delayed staffing the CTR services in the Start-Up Phase. When eventually hired, the staff had to develop and implement these services simultaneously and with little specialized training. As a result, pilot students received limited CTR services—services were especially limited if students left during the earlier phases of the pilot.

5.6.3   Career Transition Services (CTS)

- **Cascades pilot students received limited Career Transition Services in part because the staff tasked with developing those services were focused instead on recruitment and enrollment.**

CTS seek to help ease a student's transition out of Job Corps and into the military, further education and training, or the workforce. The conventional Job Corps program provides individualized CTS to students following their departure. Services can include help with housing, money management, job search, and job placement. Job Corps students are eligible for up to one year of CTS based on their level of program completion (i.e., Training Achievement Record completion[38]). In addition, students can qualify for a transitional payment—also tied to Training Achievement Record completion. Job Corps students who earn a high school credential receive $200, students who complete CTT receive $500, and students who earn both a high school credential and complete CTT receive $1,000.

As with work-based learning activities and CTR services, the pilot also delayed prioritizing the development of CTS because it did not anticipate students leaving the center until later in the program. The pilot planned to have the same staff members who conducted recruitment and enrollment to also provide CTS; however, very few of those staff received training to provide CTS given their priority on

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[38]   Training Achievement Record (TAR) is Job Corps' system of tracking student progress towards the completion of program benchmarks.

recruiting and enrolling students. Some staff saw value in the dual role, but others reported challenges. For example, at least one staff member suggested that enrollment priorities and high staff turnover reduced the likelihood that the same staff person who enrolled a student would provide the student with CTS.

- **The Cascades pilot had challenges determining Career Transition Service eligibility and dosage because it did not use the conventional Job Corps data systems. In July 2019 (when enrollment ended), the pilot stopped giving eligible students a transition payment—though it allowed students to stay on at the center and work full-time to build some savings.**

The pilot could not accurately report CTS delivery and transition payment eligibility to NOJC. Job Corps ties eligibility to Training Achievement Record completion, but NOJC had instructed the pilot not to record all participation and completion data related to the Training Achievement Record in the Job Corps data systems.[39] Eventually, the pilot began offering 12 months of CTS to all pilot students, regardless of Training Achievement Record completion. Staff reported that some students qualified for and received a transition payment for obtaining a high school credential because secondary education completion data was one of the few things that the pilot did record in the Job Corps systems.

When enrollment was stopped in July 2019, NOJC directed the pilot to stop making any transition payments. After July 2019, pilot students who earned qualifying credentials and thus expected this money were very disappointed. Moreover, these students did not receive any explanation as to why they did not get the payments. Staff suggested that this change had caused some students to decline CTS altogether.

Once exiting students no longer received transition payments, the pilot allowed some of them to stay on at the center, where room and board continued to be covered, so they could build some savings. Normally, Job Corps students left a center after completing their education and training goals. If pilot students had not reached the three-year program limit, the pilot allowed them to stay and work.[40] It required them to complete some CTR activities on center, but otherwise they could work full-time.

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[39] The pilot not being able to fully use the Job Corps data systems led to other challenges, as well. For example, it hindered the pilot's ability to illustrate their program status to students and to determine the timing for work-based learning and CTR services. Additionally, not using the system lost student participation data because staff recorded participation and completion data using rudimentary systems, such as Excel spreadsheets (e.g., sometimes records did not transfer from outgoing to incoming staff when positions turned over).

[40] The pilot considered this opportunity to be a form of Job Corps' Leisure Time Employment policy. However, under conventional Job Corps, Leisure Time Employment is the ability for students to work part-time while they are a program participant and the students do not continue working after completing their education and training goals and are ready to exit the program.

6. Summary

The Cascades College and Career Academy pilot tested a version of Job Corps that would serve a younger, more academically skilled Job Corps student interested in a career in healthcare or IT. Over the evaluation period, the pilot went from having no staff and no students to implementing a unique version of Job Corps aimed at getting all its students to take college courses. Over time, the pilot continued refining its operations. Though it had ongoing staffing challenges and was never at total student capacity, the core education and training aspects were operational by its second year. Only the components that students typically receive at the end of a Job Corps program—employment-related and transition services—had not yet gotten to a steady state.

The main differences between the conventional Job Corps program and the Cascades pilot were the following:

- The pilot focused on coaching students when they broke the rules, which gave the students more opportunities to take responsibility and learn from their mistakes. Additionally, the pilot incorporated student input to create a somewhat less structured culture and had rules and policies with fewer restrictions compared to a conventional Job Corps center. Compared to what the students might have expected from a typical college environment, however, the Cascades center was still highly restrictive.

- The pilot not only offered education and training services at the center, but also gave students the opportunity to attend college, earn college credits, and obtain advanced credentials. In comparison, only a limited number of conventional Job Corps students have the opportunity to attend college or continue participating in Job Corps for a third year to earn advanced credentials through specialized Job Corps programs offered at select centers.

- The pilot CTT had specified career pathways that enabled students to earn stackable credentials as they progressed and ensured that they would leave with some level of CTT credentialing even if they did not participate for the entire three years. This is not necessarily the case at conventional Job Corps centers. For example, conventional Job Corps students could leave after earning a postsecondary credential but may not necessarily have had the opportunity to earn any CTT credentials.

- The pilot provided substantial academic and non-academic preparation and support before and during college enrollment through its unique formal College Readiness module. In comparison, the limited number of conventional Job Corps centers that have college programs do not provide this level of support. However, conventional Job Corps students are assessed in other ways prior to enrolling in a Job Corps college program. For example, students have to first complete the conventional program and then submit an application to the center that includes recommendations from Job Corps center staff.

The implementation of the Cascades pilot highlighted some important considerations for future efforts:

- According to pilot staff, requirements for program entry, such as academic assessment minimum scores, can potentially act as barriers for certain populations more than others. For example, the pilot's sixth-grade academic cutoff was likely a barrier for Hispanic applicants, as well as for potential applicants who may have decided not to apply because of the requirement.

- Limiting the pilot to two career pathways posed recruitment challenges and may have dissuaded some potential applicants altogether. Pilot staff suggested that limiting the pathways was also problematic for newly enrolled students who changed their minds and were no longer interested in pursuing training or attending college in IT or healthcare. This may have led some of these students that

changed their minds to leave the center earlier than they would have if the pilot offered other pathways.

- Despite requiring that students pass an academic assessment as part of the pilot eligibility, pilot staff suggested that the pilot student population still had academic barriers and challenges. In addition, staff suggested that many pilot students (who were younger on average compared to conventional Job Corps students) did not have the necessary life skills and were not mentally or socially prepared to go to college without first being rigorously assessed and completing college readiness activities. While attending college, pilot students required close monitoring, regular check-ins, and various resources and opportunities to get academic support, including mandatory supplemental instruction.

- Paying for college is not only complicated for the program; it also can affect students. The pilot relied on and benefited from outside funding sources to supplement its Job Corps operating funds. However, having multiple funding sources and different eligibility for each source led to complications. In some cases, these outside funding sources had participation requirements that students found to be overextending and stressful. For example, some students needed to maintain enrollment in a minimum number of college credits. Other students participated in college, GED, and high school services at the same time.

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