



Skills Enhancement Program (SEP)

Contact Information:

Brad Paul, Executive Director ... 608.244.0466

Jonathan Bader, Community Action Program Director ... 608.244.0745

WISCAP's Skills Enhancement Program (SEP) improves the incomes of low-wage workers in Wisconsin by providing educational opportunities to get the skills they need to obtain better paying jobs with benefits. Skills Enhancement emphasizes short-term, demand-driven, job-focused post-secondary training, mainly at community & technical colleges. SEP helps participants - 92% of whom are low-income parents - overcome barriers to education by providing financial assistance to help pay tuition & fees, child care & transportation to attend classes. Staff provides comprehensive case management, and works with participants to develop individualized training goals that reflect their interest, aptitude and local job opportunities. Increasing Wisconsin's investment in Skills Enhancement makes sense because:

- Skills graduates **substantially increase their incomes**. From SFY 2011 thru SFY 2016, 445 participants have completed training. Within 9 months of completing training 344 graduates (77%) report getting new jobs that pay **\$3.44 more per hour** on average. They report earning an average of **\$9,876 more in annual income** – a 78% increase.
- Skills graduates are conservatively projected to **earn \$342,000¹ more** on average over their working lifetimes. As earnings increase they pay more in income and sales tax & rely less on public resources.
- Skills graduates report over a **4 fold increase in access to employer-sponsored health care** (rising from 10% before to 55% after graduation), which can reduce reliance on publically-funded insurance.
- Comprehensive case management contributes to a **training completion rate (62%) that's higher than the national average for community colleges (45%)**, despite participants managing work, school and family responsibilities on a limited income.
- **SEP leverages other educational funds**. Currently SEP pays an average of less than \$1,200 per successful graduate for tuition, fees, books, child care and transportation costs. About 40% of graduates report obtaining additional educational funds from other sources averaging \$5,700 each.

However, state GPR funding - currently \$250,000/year - is modest and provides just \$15,000 per agency. This isn't sufficient to engage full-time staff or provide services in every county. Increasing the annual appropriation to \$500,000 would enable Community Action Agencies to serve more low-wage workers, expand services to more counties, improve staffing levels and increase retention rates.

- WISCAP estimates over 5 years the additional \$250,000 in annual GPR would enable **370 more participants to complete training - of which 285 (77%) would be expected to obtain new jobs** within nine months of graduation. By 2022 the cumulative increased earnings of additional graduates are projected to total **over \$8 million – 6 times more** than the state's investment. By 2027, the increased income of all additional graduates would cumulatively total over **\$22 million**. Every year the benefit to the state's economy would continue to increase.

¹ This is calculated by multiplying the increase in annual income per graduate by their remaining years until full retirement. This estimate conservatively assumes graduates never receive a raise, promotion, nor cost-of-living increase during any of the working years following graduation.

Skills Enhancement Client Testimonials

"When I went to back to school I was on FoodShare, BadgerCare, child care assistance, and energy assistance. I am now self-sufficient. Since obtaining my job I have gotten off all community assistance programs, purchased a new vehicle, and just recently received a promotion to charge nurse. I owe all of this to the Skills Enhancement Program... Me and my children thank you!" **Skills Enhancement Graduate: Jessica Hadley**

"...(Skills Enhancement) helped me get on the right track with my schooling. Financially, there is no way I could have been able to finish the Respiratory Program. . . I love being a Respiratory Therapist! Thank you for making my dreams come true!" **Skills Enhancement Graduate: Anonymous**

"...(Skills Enhancement) is an unbelievable program and I was very fortunate to have the chance to be a participant. I am so thankful for their assistance and owe them so much. So from the bottom of my heart, thank you, thank you, thank you. The hard work paid off and I did it." **Skills Enhancement Graduate: LaKisha Jackson**