



BRIEFLY...

COVID-19: SAFETY AND REMOTE LEARNING CHALLENGES CONTINUE FOR JOB CORPS

NOVEMBER 12, 2021

WHY OIG CONDUCTED THE AUDIT

In March 2020, Job Corps, administered by the Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA), suspended operations at 121 campuses and sent nearly 29,000 students home. Over the following months, Job Corps centers developed protocols to resume on-campus operations and transitioned from in-person to remote instruction.

This audit focuses on Job Corps' efforts to resume on-campus operations and teach students remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As of August 2021, on-campus operations had resumed at 113 centers.

WHAT OIG DID

We conducted this performance audit to answer the following question:

How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact Job Corps' efforts to safely and effectively educate its students?

To answer this question, we reviewed Job Corps policies, data, and documents; center resumption and remote learning plans; and related public health guidance. We also interviewed ETA and Job Corps staff and conducted virtual walk-throughs of two Job Corps centers that had resumed operations.

READ THE FULL REPORT

<https://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2022/19-22-001-03-370.pdf>

WHAT OIG FOUND

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Job Corps' efforts to develop and implement protocols to safely resume on-campus operations and provide effective remote instruction.

While Job Corps established specific requirements for safely returning students and staff to centers, we found gaps in the oversight of its COVID-19 safety precautions for resuming on-campus operations. These included lack of site visits (virtually or in-person) to verify safety precautions were followed before and after centers resumed on-campus operations. As of July 2021, Job Corps brought students and staff back to 112 centers, but reviewed less than half of them for compliance with select safety requirements (e.g., masking; installing physical barriers). Instead, Job Corps relied on written explanations and declarations from centers.

Furthermore, since suspending in-person instruction and shifting to remote learning, Job Corps encountered many challenges ranging from an inadequate remote learning infrastructure to ensuring students had the resources to learn remotely. For example, more than 68 percent of its students needed basic tools, including computers and internet access. As such, Job Corps' student enrollment dropped 56 percent from March 2020 to April 2021; trades training completions dropped to zero from April 2020 to April 2021; and the average length of time it took students to complete the program more than doubled from approximately 8 to 18 months.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

We made four recommendations to ETA focusing on continuing COVID-19 safety protocol development and monitoring, identifying and closing student learning gaps, and increasing oversight of remote instructional programs. ETA agreed with our recommendations and indicated the agency has already taken some actions to address them.