

# The ACT<sup>®</sup> National Career Readiness Certificate<sup>®</sup> as a Predictor of Academic and Workforce Outcomes

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Increasingly, employers, educational institutions, and federal agencies use ACT WorkKeys<sup>®</sup> as the foundation for evaluating career readiness initiatives.<sup>1</sup> A recent example is the use of WorkKeys assessments and associated training programs by Cincinnati State Technical and Community College (CSTCC) with funding from a U.S. Department of Labor grant to help identify evidence-based best practices in workforce development.

An analysis by ACT Research examined relationships between ACT WorkKeys, training and counseling services offered by CSTCC, and outcomes such as grades, program completion, employment status, and wages. Students in the study may have participated in ACT KeyTrain<sup>®</sup> to develop the foundational skills measured by WorkKeys assessments, ACT soft skills training, or other support services offered by CSTCC, such as tutoring, academic and career counseling, coaching for job seekers, and job search assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, results from the study support the use of ACT WorkKeys products and services as tools for predicting and improving educational and labor market outcomes such as grades, program completion rates, employment rates, and post-enrollment wages. In all, 84% of students received at least one training or support service. With 71% participation, ACT KeyTrain was most commonly utilized. Thirty-five percent of students received ACT soft skills training, and only 12% of students used CSTCC services but not ACT services. Students who received a WorkKeys training service were far more likely to earn a National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).<sup>3</sup> Ninety percent of students who used KeyTrain and 90% of students who received ACT soft skills training earned a NCRC (Figure 1). Of those who received other services (and possibly ACT services), 67% earned a NCRC.

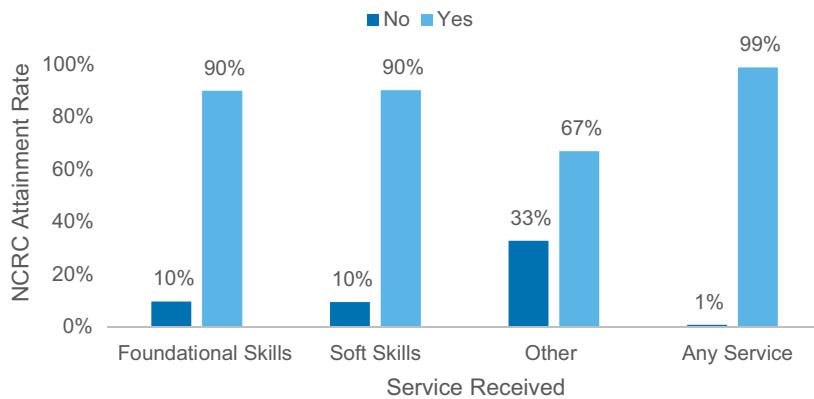
Students who received ACT training services earned an average GPA of 3.0, compared

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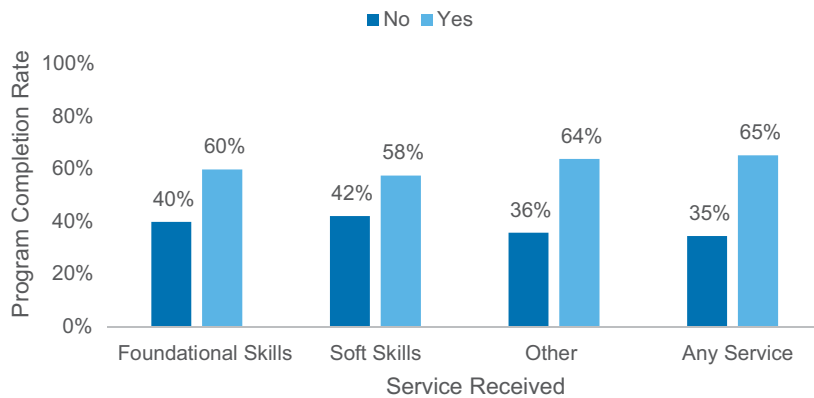
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**Acknowledgments:** The authors thank Mary LeFebvre for her comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this report.



**Figure 1.** Services received and NCRC obtained.



**Figure 2.** Services received and program completion.

to 2.3 for those who did not. Similarly, students who earned a NCRC had an average GPA of 3.1, whereas those without a NCRC earned an average GPA of 2.2. Program completion rates were higher for students who received training or support services. Whereas 35% of students who received no services completed their programs, the completion rate was 60% for those who received foundational skills training, 58% for those

who received soft skills training, and 64% for those who received some other service (Figure 2).

In the study sample, 76% were employed before enrollment, and 86% were employed after enrollment. Of the 166 who were unemployed before enrollment, 69% of those who received ACT training became employed, compared with 57% of those who did not. In the same group of students, 70% of those who earned a

NCRC became employed, compared with 57% of those who did not earn a NCRC. An analysis of wages for 483 students employed before and after enrollment revealed a positive association between ACT training services and post-enrollment wage increases. Average weekly wages increased by \$61 for those who received ACT training services and \$49 for those who did not. Average weekly wage increases were similar for those who did or did not earn a NCRC (\$59 vs. \$56). However, when analyzing a longer time span between enrollment and reported wages, average wage increases were greater for those who earned a NCRC (\$96 vs. \$54), which suggests that the effects of a NCRC may take time to accrue.

### Notes

1. ACT WorkKeys® assesses foundational and soft skills that help employers select, hire, train, develop, and retain a quality workforce. The WorkKeys assessments measure three foundational skills (Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information) and three soft skills (Fit, Talent, and Performance).
2. The sample for this study included 684 students who enrolled between 2012 and 2014. The sample was 78% female, 54% White, and 44% African American. The average age was 31 years, and 25% of the sample represented first-generation college enrollees.
3. Combined performance on three WorkKeys assessments—Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information—can merit the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC®) at the Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum Level.