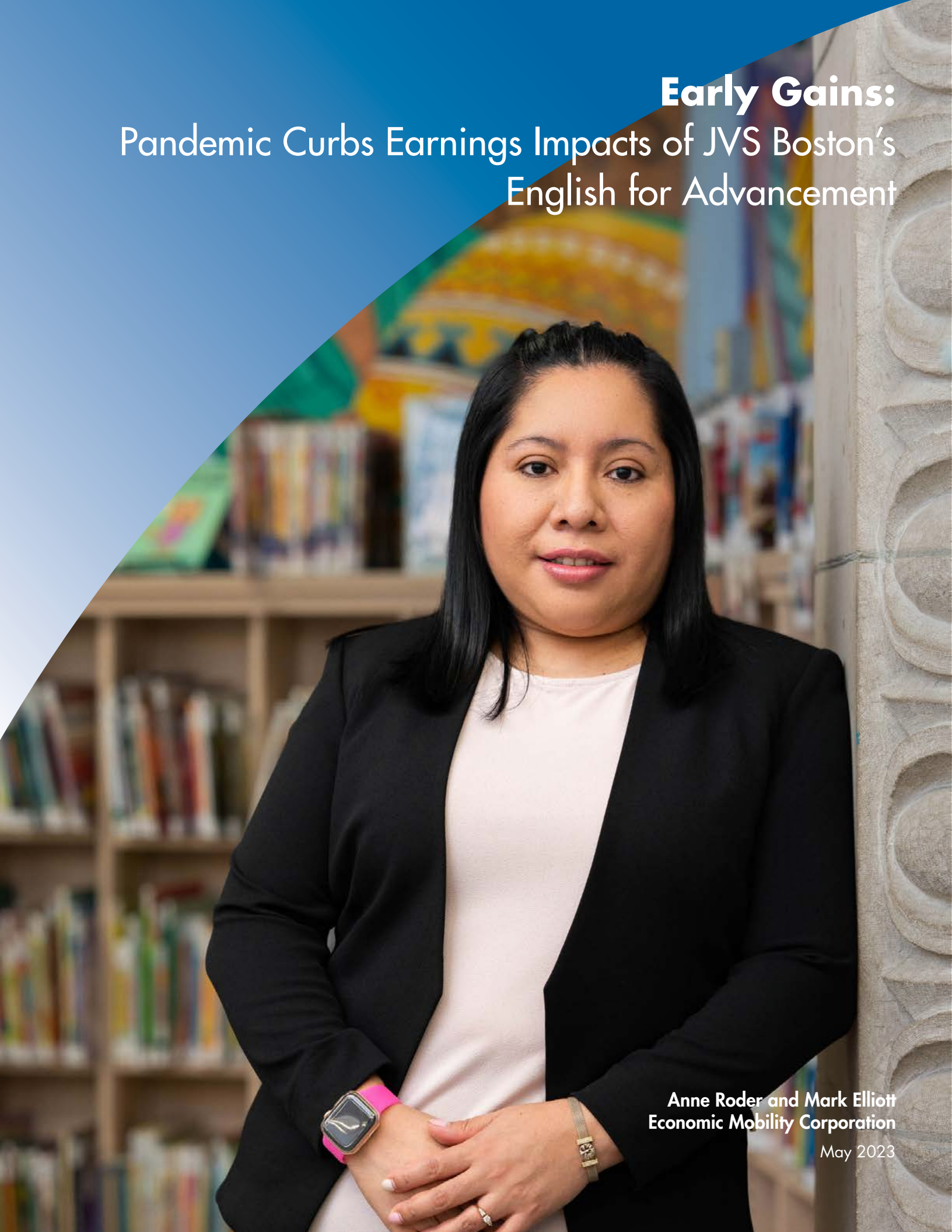


Early Gains: Pandemic Curbs Earnings Impacts of JVS Boston's English for Advancement



Anne Roder and Mark Elliott
Economic Mobility Corporation

May 2023

On the Cover: Marisela

Marisela is a self-described hard worker who emigrated from Guatemala at age 17. She lives in Lynn, MA with her husband and 13-year-old son. Marisela worked at a sausage factory in Lynn for more than a decade, starting at \$7.25 an hour and working up to \$11.80. Eager to improve her English and get a better job, Marisela saw JVS's English for Advancement (EfA) program on Facebook. When she was accepted by the program, she quit her job at the factory and took EfA classes for a year.

Equipped with better communication skills, Marisela's JVS career coach helped her land a job at Walmart making \$14.10 an hour. She enjoyed the work and quickly moved up over the next three years, earning raises that brought her to \$21.00 an hour. Once the onset of diabetes limited her ability to perform some tasks and, after a difficult discussion with her manager, Marisela gave her notice in March 2022.

Marisela realized that many jobs require a GED, so she enrolled in a high school equivalency program at Pathways, Inc. a nonprofit based in Lynn. After earning her GED credential in June 2022, Marisela reached out to her JVS job coach, Marsha Finkelstein, who helped her land a job at MilliporeSigma assembling medical equipment for hospitals. Once again, her new job, paying \$23.00 an hour full-time, helped her increase her earnings. Unfortunately, when MilliporeSigma laid off 150 workers in early December 2022, Marisela was let go.

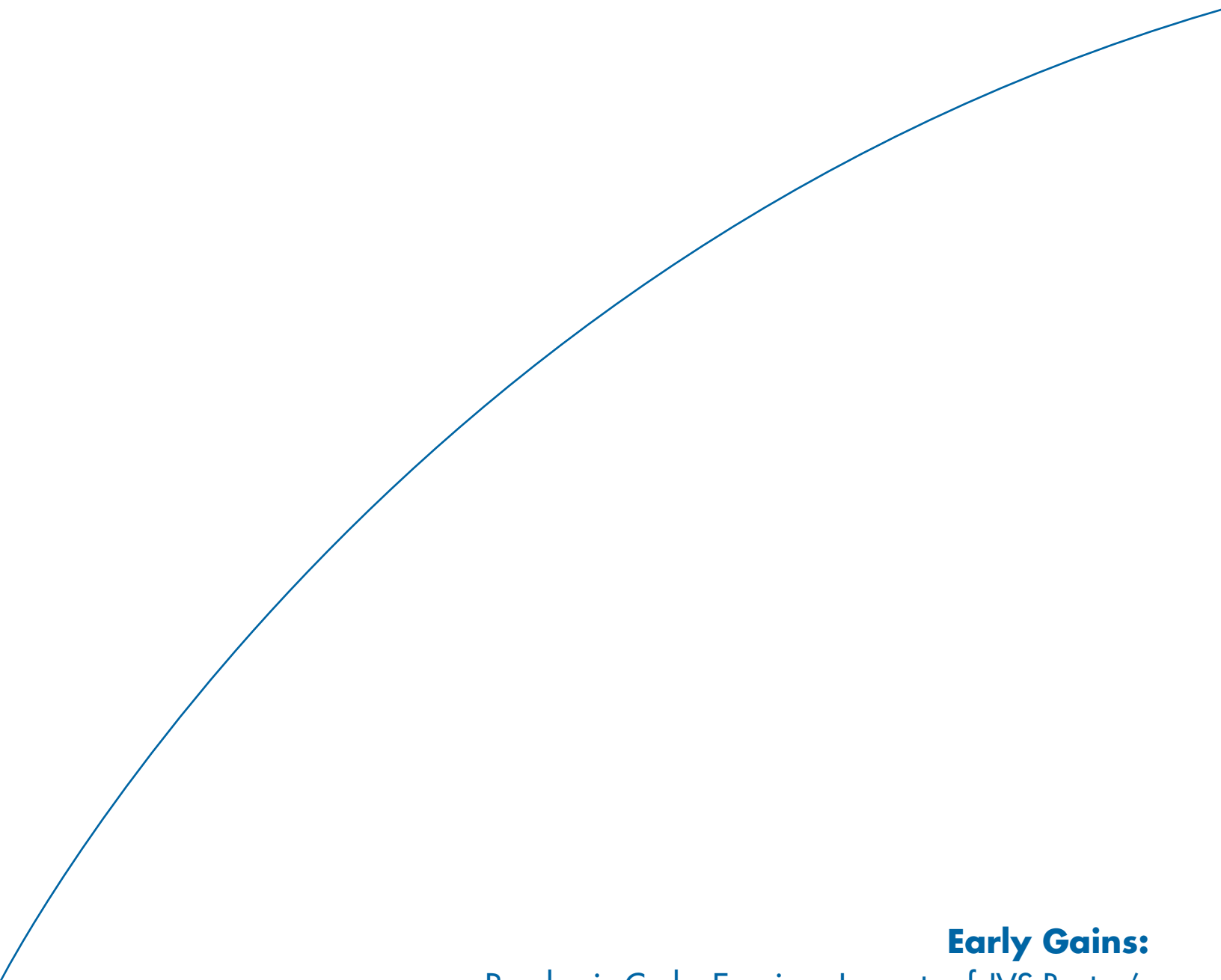
While considering whether to pursue another job or enroll in a training program, Marisela is intent on improving her writing skills. Her goal is to land another well-paying job, making at least \$23.00 or \$24.00 an hour. With the price of food and rent rising, she feels it is the minimum amount she needs.

Marisela remains grateful to JVS, "I'm so happy because when I need help for my job or to apply for another job, I have a JVS job coach. My coach helps me rephrase my resume, submit applications and prepare for my interviews."

Marisela's experience resonates with her current career coach at JVS, Eli Pajo. "Marisela is very driven, very kind and a good communicator. She would like to become a pharmacy technician or medical assistant, but first she needs to improve her English skills. I'm trying to help her get a job making \$22 or \$23 an hour with a schedule that will allow her to take classes at night."

Marisela's trajectory since graduating from EfA is familiar to Pajo, "It's very common for our graduates to want to continue improving their English skills so they can get better-paying jobs. If they need a GED I'll refer them to a program, then they can go to a training program or a school. I'm hoping once Marisela improves her English a little more she can return to JVS to continue her training in one of our occupational programs."

Cover photograph: Leise Jones <https://leisejones.com/>



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This report is based on the evaluation study being conducted as part of Massachusetts Pathways to Economic Advancement, a collaboration of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), and Social Finance. The third Pay for Success (PFS) initiative in Massachusetts, and the first in the nation to focus exclusively on workforce development, the project increases access to programs that assist adult English-language learners in making successful transitions to employment, higher-wage jobs, and higher education. Jobs for the Future and Harvard Kennedy School's Government Performance Lab provided technical assistance to project partners. Massachusetts Pathways to Economic Advancement was made possible through a wide range of institutional and individual impact investors. Among others in the project, Bank of America acted as placement agent in offering investments to its clients.



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The Economic Mobility Corporation (Mobility) identifies, develops, and evaluates programs and policies that enable disadvantaged individuals to acquire the education, skills, and networks needed to succeed in the labor market so that they can support themselves and their families.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the EfA participants for taking part in the study, the EfA staff for participating in interviews and allowing us to observe the program, and Alissa Brooks of JVS for ensuring the quality of the program data and coordinating our site visits.

We thank Social Finance, particularly Tracy Palandjian and Navjeet Bal, for the opportunity to work on the MA Pathways project. We are grateful to the Evidence-Based Policy team at Arnold Ventures for its generous support of the EfA evaluation. This report was also made possible through investments in the MA Pathways project provided by partners including Living Cities Blended Catalyst Fund, LLC, Prudential Financial, Inc., Maycomb Capital, Community Outcomes Fund, Combined Jewish Philanthropies Donor Advised Funds, Bank of America clients and other impact investors.

From the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we thank Mark Attia, former Assistant Secretary of the Executive Office for Administration and Finance, the project's lead agency, as well as Jennifer James, Undersecretary for Workforce Development of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, and Robert LePage, Assistant Secretary for Career Education in the Executive Office of Education.

We also want to acknowledge the many people who contributed to this report. Amy Nishman of JVS, Thomas Coen and Annie Jensen of Social Finance, and Paul Osterman of MIT provided valuable feedback on drafts of the report. Mara Primosch edited the report and Demitri Pagonis designed the publication.

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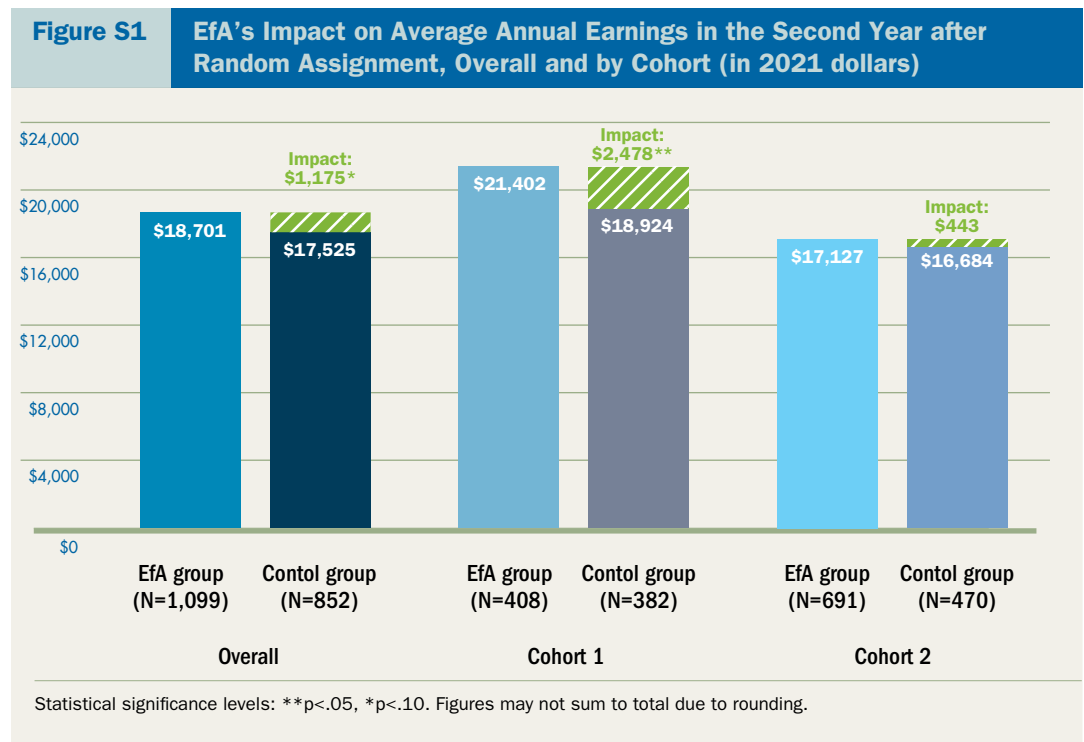
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Summary

English for Advancement (EfA), a program offered by Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) in Boston, provides adult English-language learners with employment-focused language instruction, career coaching, and job placement assistance to help them obtain employment or advance to a better job. EfA was part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Pathways to Economic Advancement project, which sought to help limited English speakers enter the workforce and progress up the economic ladder by providing English instruction and workforce development services. The project, managed by Social Finance, used an innovative "Pay for Success" funding model in which private sector investors provide upfront capital to scale promising programs, and the government pays back the investors only if the programs achieve pre-specified outcomes. As the project's independent evaluator, Economic Mobility Corporation (Mobility) conducted a study of EfA that used a randomized controlled trial design to assess program effectiveness—that is, study participants were randomly assigned to a treatment group that could receive EfA services or to a control group that could not, then their outcomes over a two-year period were compared.

In this report, Mobility presents findings on EfA's earnings impacts based on state administrative data for the 1,952 study participants. While enrollment in the EfA study concluded prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 60 percent of EfA study participants were still in their two-year post-enrollment observation periods when the pandemic began. Given the pandemic's extraordinary effects on the economy, we examined program impacts overall and by cohort based on whether participants' observation periods overlapped at all with the pandemic. Cohort 1 includes



participants who enrolled from September 2016 through December 2017, whose two-year observation periods ended prior to 2020 and, therefore, were unaffected by the pandemic. Cohort 2 includes participants who enrolled between January 2018 and September 2019, whose two-year observation periods include from one to seven quarters in 2020 and/or 2021.

We found that EfA's impact on average earnings in the second year after study enrollment was \$1,175—a 6.7 percent increase that was statistically significant at the 10 percent level (**Figure S1**). However, the overall impact masks differences between the two enrollment cohorts. Among participants in Cohort 1, whose two-year employment observation periods occurred entirely prior to the pandemic, EfA's impact on average earnings in the second year after random assignment was \$2,478—a 13.1 percent increase that was statistically significant at the 5 percent level. The program had no detectable impact for Cohort 2, whose two-year employment and earnings observation period overlapped with the pandemic by one to seven quarters. Many EfA participants were placed in leisure and hospitality industry jobs that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, which may have contributed to the program's diminished impact for the second cohort.

Analyses of program impacts across participant subgroups found that EfA was particularly beneficial to those who faced challenges identifying and accessing employment opportunities.

- EfA had a large, statistically significant earnings impact for individuals who had U.S. labor market experience but were unemployed when they enrolled. Conversely, the program had no impact on earnings for those who were employed full-time at the time of study enrollment.
- EfA offered the greatest benefit—a 40 percent increase in annual earnings—to job seekers with low-intermediate English skills.
- EfA also had a large, statistically significant impact on earnings for parents with children under age 18 in the household.

As the first RCT study of the earnings impacts of a workforce development program for English-language learners, the EfA study findings are important for the adult education and workforce development fields. While the overall impact on earnings in the second year after enrollment was diminished by the pandemic, we believe the program's potential should be judged primarily on the pre-pandemic outcomes. The findings' key policy implications include the following.

- The EfA findings support investment in workforce development programs that integrate employment-focused English-language instruction with career coaching and job placement assistance to increase job seekers' employment and earnings.

- The evidence suggests JVS's employer relationships were critical to EfA's success. Replication efforts should invest in strong workforce programs that have experience preparing immigrants for the labor market and developing employer relationships.
- Subgroup analyses suggest that EfA's impact could be considerably greater if future programming focuses on the groups that benefitted the most, that is, unemployed job seekers with some U.S work experience and those with low-intermediate English skills.

Additional years of follow-up are needed to learn whether the early positive earnings gains are sustained. EfA participants will likely need to add occupational skills and/or college credentials to advance to higher-paying jobs. Recent studies suggest that long-term advising and guidance are needed to help working adult learners transition from short-term workforce programs to longer-term postsecondary programs leading to certificates or degrees. The EfA study demonstrates that the program was effective in helping English-language learners obtain consistent employment and increase their earnings in the two years after enrollment.

Introduction

Forty-five million immigrants reside in the U.S., of whom about 78 percent are working age adults. Immigrants account for 17 percent of the U.S. civilian labor force but face a number of challenges to succeeding in the U.S. labor market. About 46 percent have limited English skills.¹ Nearly half of immigrants with low English proficiency are unemployed, and those who work are more likely to be employed in low-paying manual occupations.² In addition to their limited English skills, immigrants often lack practical knowledge about the U.S. job search process and do not have professional networks. Their skills are often underutilized, even when employer demand for skilled workers is high.³

The public workforce system faces challenges in meeting the employment and training needs of immigrants with limited English proficiency, due to communication and cultural barriers and a lack of resources for individualized job search assistance directed to this diverse population.⁴ The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), provides federal funding to states for adult basic education, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. However, most of this funding is for programs that seek to increase English language skills without regard to employability.⁵ Twelve percent of federal adult education funding is dedicated to the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program, intended to promote adult English-language learners' economic, linguistic, and civic integration into American society by requiring programs to combine adult education and workforce activities. Participation in combined services has been low, however, partly due to high entry requirements, and reforms are needed to promote higher participation among learners at all English and educational levels.⁶

This report details a program designed to respond to English-language learners' need for integrated education and workforce services. It presents findings from a study of English for Advancement (EFA), a program created by Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) in Boston that provides adult English-language learners with employment-focused language instruction, career coaching, and job placement assistance to help them obtain employment or advance to a better job. EFA is part of a Commonwealth of Massachusetts project that sought to help limited English speakers enter the workforce and progress up the economic ladder by providing English instruction and workforce development services. The study offers important lessons for integrating adult education and workforce development services to help adult English-language learners succeed in the labor market.

The Massachusetts Pathways to Economic Advancement Project

Between 2010 and 2020, the greater Boston metropolitan area's population grew, driven largely by new residents who emigrated from a number of countries. Greater Boston is home to more than 240,000 working-age adults with limited English skills.⁷ In 2014, as part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' efforts to

prioritize investments in workforce development, it embarked on a Pay for Success (PFS) project focused on adult basic education. PFS projects use an innovative funding model where private sector investors provide the upfront capital to scale promising programs that address chronic social issues. If the programs achieve pre-specified outcomes that benefit society and generate value for the government, the government then pays back the investors. Prior to pursuing the PFS project, Massachusetts was investing \$30 million annually in adult basic education and ESOL programs that served about 23,000 people. However, another 16,000 people statewide were on waiting lists for these services. For Massachusetts, the PFS project was an opportunity to reduce the waiting lists and help more adults transition to employment, higher education, and higher wage jobs. At the same time, the PFS project afforded Massachusetts the opportunity to learn about the programs' effectiveness in improving participants' outcomes while only requiring it to pay after they demonstrated success.

Through an open request for proposal process, Massachusetts selected JVS as the project's service provider and Social Finance, one of the nation's leading PFS financial intermediaries, to manage the project. Descriptions of these project partners are included in the appendix. After nearly two years of planning, the partners launched the \$15 million MA Pathways to Economic Advancement Pay for Success project (MA Pathways). The goal of MA Pathways was to increase employment opportunities for limited English speakers and help them enter the workforce and progress up the economic ladder by providing employment-focused English classes and workforce development services. MA Pathways was the nation's first PFS project focused exclusively on workforce development services. Mobility was the project's independent evaluator.

JVS is a nonprofit that assists individuals from diverse communities with finding employment and building careers, and it partners with employers to hire, develop, and retain productive workforces. Founded in 1938 to help Jewish immigrants and refugees join the U.S. workforce, over the years JVS has expanded to help immigrants from over 65 nations and others in Greater Boston overcome education, job skills, and employment challenges. It is one of the largest providers of adult education and workforce development services in Greater Boston, serving over 16,000 individuals annually. JVS services are targeted to low-income adults who are unemployed, underemployed, or in need of career advancement services. Offerings include a wide range of adult education, training, and employment services, including programs that integrate basic education and English language instruction with preparation for a job, advanced training, postsecondary education, or career advancement.

Through the MA Pathways project, JVS operated four programs designed to help adults with varying levels of English skills and U.S. work experience improve their English and achieve their employment and career goals: Rapid Employment, English for Advancement, Skills Training, and Bridges to College. This report examines the effectiveness of one of the four programs, English for Advancement (EfA), which

provides employment-focused language instruction, career coaching, and job placement assistance to help adult English-language learners obtain employment or advance in their careers. (See the summary on pages 10 and 11 for descriptions of the target populations, services provided, and outcomes of the remaining three programs.)

The EfA Evaluation

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) study design was used to evaluate EfA's impacts. The primary research question was whether EfA had a positive impact on earnings two years after study enrollment. Between September 2016 and September 2019, JVS enrolled 1,952 individuals in the EfA study, of whom 1,099 were assigned to the treatment group able to receive EfA services, and 853 were assigned to the control group unable to receive EfA services. Because individuals were randomly assigned, the two groups were equivalent at the time of study intake on measured characteristics, such as age, education, English skill level, and prior work experience, and unmeasured characteristics, such as motivation. Therefore, any differences in the outcomes of the two groups can be attributed to the EfA services. When well-conducted, RCTs are considered the strongest way to evaluate program effectiveness.⁸

All study participants are included in the analysis, regardless of whether they received services as intended. In this report, we refer to all members of the EfA study treatment group interchangeably as the “EfA participants” or the “EfA group.” The results are based on Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) data on quarterly earnings, as reported by employers through the Commonwealth's unemployment insurance program. Additional study design details are provided in the appendix.

The EfA Study's Contribution to Research on Workforce Development and Adult Education

Research literature on the effectiveness of integrated ESOL and workforce development services, and of ESOL programs in general, is limited. Most studies of English-language instruction focus on young learners in school settings. Even when studies focus on adult learners, success is typically measured by attainment of language skills rather than employment outcomes. ESOL instruction is diverse, and no one model has consistently proven effective.⁹ One RCT study tested whether a single reading intervention was more effective than regular ESOL instruction in improving the reading and English language skills of adult learners with low literacy levels, but the study found no difference in learners' outcomes.¹⁰ One study of an ESOL program in Massachusetts that examined program effects on earnings found that learners who participated in ESOL classes earned about \$2,400 more annually than those in a comparison group.¹¹

Evidence from the workforce development field includes studies of programs that integrate basic education, job skills training, and employment assistance and are targeted to both native-born Americans with low basic skills and immigrants with limited English skills. Findings from these studies have been mixed. The Center for Employment and Training (CET) program integrates English language, literacy, and math instruction into occupational training and offers job placement assistance. An RCT study of CET's impact on single mothers in the early 1990s, in which most participants were Latina and many had limited English skills, found that the program increased earnings by 22 percent relative to the control group during the 30 months after enrollment.¹² The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program combines basic and occupational skills training and offers intensive supports to help adults with low basic skills earn college credentials. An RCT study of I-BEST at three Washington State community and technical colleges found early positive impacts on short-term credential attainment but no detectable effects on earnings or longer-term college credential attainment after six years.¹³

Reviews of welfare-to-work studies have found that programs offering a mix of education, training, and job placement services performed better than stand-alone adult basic education or ESOL classes. For example, the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies, which studied 11 programs in the mid- to late-1990s, found that a Portland, Oregon program combining education, job training, and job search assistance increased participants' earnings by 25 percent relative to a control group over five years—substantially more than the programs focused only on job search or basic education.¹⁴

EfA differs from these other programs in a number of ways. The EfA program provides employment-focused English-language instruction that is not connected to occupation-specific skills training. EfA also exclusively serves English-language learners—those for whom English is not their first language—who possess varying levels of education and basic skills. Other programs combining workforce development and basic education services that have been rigorously evaluated served only adults with low literacy and job skill levels, and also included native English speakers. The evaluation of EfA is the first RCT study of the earnings impacts of a workforce development program for English-language learners with varying education and basic skill levels.

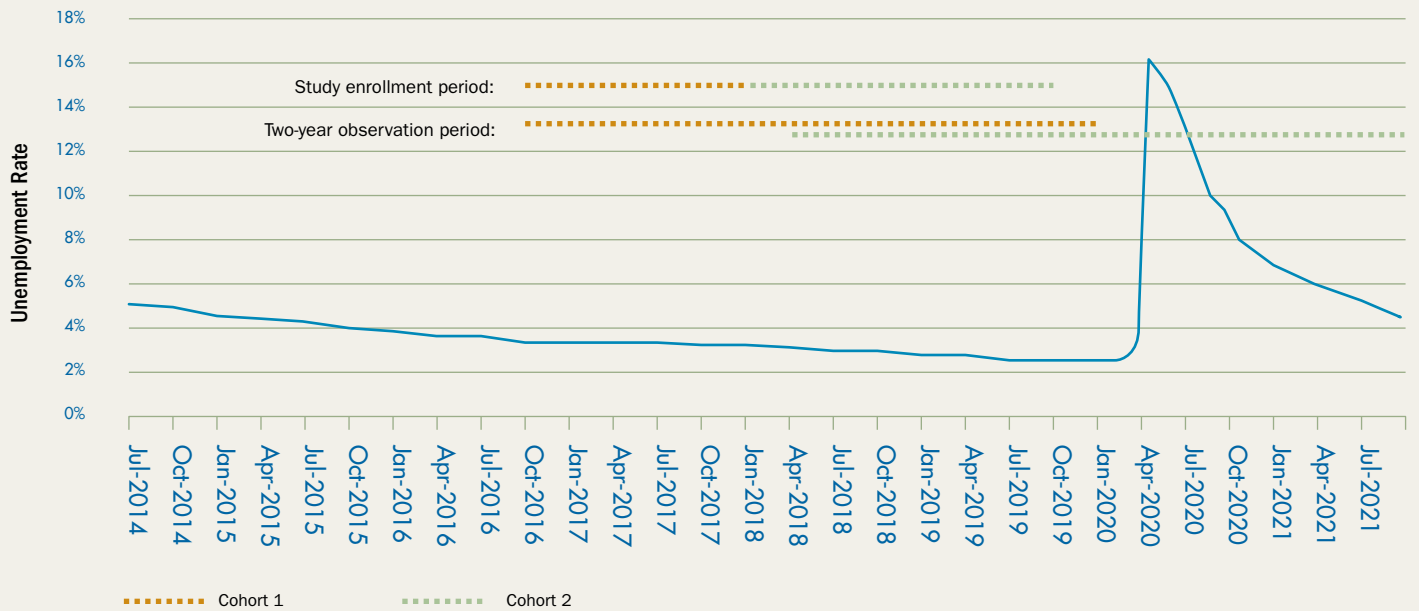
Economic Context

Significant changes in the Massachusetts economy during the study period affected the project's implementation and outcomes. EfA study enrollment took place from September 2016 through September 2019 across six sites, including downtown Boston, East Boston, Dorchester, Lynn, Lawrence, and Lowell. The study examines EfA's impacts on earnings during the two years after study enrollment—a period that ranged from October 2016 through September 2018 for the earliest enrollees to October 2019 through September 2021 for the last cohort. During this timeframe:

- Massachusetts increased the minimum wage several times—from \$10.00 an hour in 2016 to \$13.50 an hour as of January 1, 2021.
- Labor force participation was growing and the unemployment rate declining to record lows in the greater Boston metropolitan area up until the start of the pandemic. The unemployment rate ranged from 3.4 percent when study enrollment began to 2.5 percent when it ended. Unemployment rates were similarly low in Lynn and Lowell. In Lawrence, the unemployment rate was 8.3 percent when study enrollment began and declined steadily to 4.8 percent by the end of the enrollment period.
- Finally, in 2020, the economy contracted sharply as a result of the shutdowns implemented to stem the spread of COVID-19. Unemployment climbed and labor force participation declined sharply. While there was improvement as of September 2021, employment remained below pre-pandemic figures. Throughout the period, unemployment rates were higher for foreign-born workers than for U.S.-born workers, partly due to their higher concentrations in industries that experienced more layoffs, particularly leisure and hospitality. Unemployment rates also differed across states due to variations in the timing and length of lockdowns and definitions of essential workers. Among the ten states with the largest immigrant populations, foreign-born workers in Massachusetts saw the largest employment losses early in the pandemic.¹⁵

Enrollment in the EfA study concluded prior to the pandemic, and less than four percent of EfA treatment group members were still attending classes at JVS at the pandemic's onset. However, 60 percent of EfA study participants were still in their two-year observation periods when the pandemic began. Given the pandemic's extraordinary effects on the economy, we examine program impacts overall and by cohort based on whether or not participants' observation periods overlapped with the pandemic. Cohort 1 includes participants who enrolled from the start of the study through December 2017, whose two-year observation periods ended prior to 2020 and were unaffected by the pandemic. Cohort 2 includes participants who enrolled between January 2018 and September 2019, whose two-year post-enrollment observation periods included between one and seven quarters in 2020 and/or 2021. **Figure 1** presents the study timeline, cohorts, and relevant monthly unemployment rates in the Greater Boston area.¹⁶ The appendix includes additional information about the cohort definitions.

Figure 1 Study Timeline, Cohorts, and Monthly Unemployment Rates in the Greater Boston Area



Note: Data are for the Boston-Cambridge-Nashua, MA-NH New England City and Town Area (NECTA).

This Report

In the sections that follow, we describe the recruitment and characteristics of the EfA study participants and provide details about the EfA program and the services EfA participants received. We then present EfA’s impacts on participants’ earnings, overall, by enrollment cohort, and across demographic subgroups, and the program’s costs. The final section provides conclusions and the policy implications of the findings.

Summary of Findings on the Remaining Three MA Pathways Programs

Through MA Pathways, JVS operated four programs designed to help adults with varying levels of English skills and U.S. work experience improve their English and achieve their employment and career goals. EfA was the second of four program tiers, and the only tier evaluated using an RCT design. Study enrollment for the Rapid Employment, Skills Training, and Bridges to College programs took place from July 2016 through June 2019. For Rapid Employment and Skills Training, the study examined participants' earnings during the eight quarters before through the eight quarters after program enrollment—a period that ranged from July 2014 through June 2021, depending on when participants enrolled. Mobility examined program outcomes overall and by cohort based on whether participants' observation periods overlapped with the pandemic. Overall, JVS met the project's enrollment goals and achieved high participation, graduation, and job or college placement rates across the three tiers. The following is a brief summary of the study's findings by program tier.

Rapid Employment

Intervention and target population: Rapid Employment provided employment-focused English-language classes and one-on-one career coaching to help refugees and other recent immigrants with low-level English skills and limited U.S. work experience to obtain employment.

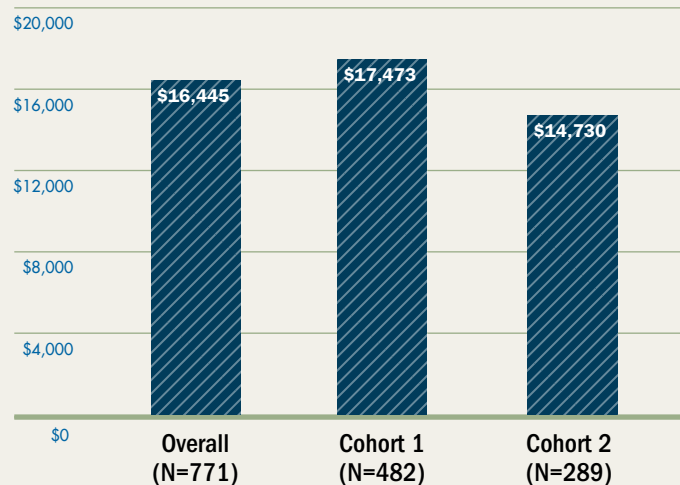
Evaluation design: The study employed a pre/post-test design, examining the average change in annual earnings from the year before to the second year after enrollment, using MA Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data.

Implementation findings: JVS enrolled 797 learners in Rapid Employment, of whom 81 percent attended English-language classes for an average of 78 hours. All learners received career coaching for an average of six months, and JVS reported that 80 percent obtained a job.

Outcomes: Rapid Employment participants' earnings more than tripled from the year before to the second year after program enrollment—an average increase of \$16,445. The change in earnings was greatest for the original target population of English-language learners who recently arrived in the U.S. and had no prior

U.S. work experience. However, changes in annual earnings among all subgroups examined were large and statistically significant. The data indicate that the pandemic reduced the earnings gains in the second year after enrollment for the second cohort (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Rapid Employment Change in Average Annual Earnings from the Year Before to the Second Year After Enrollment (in 2021 dollars)



Note: Difference between the cohorts statistically significant at the *p<.10 level.

Skills Training

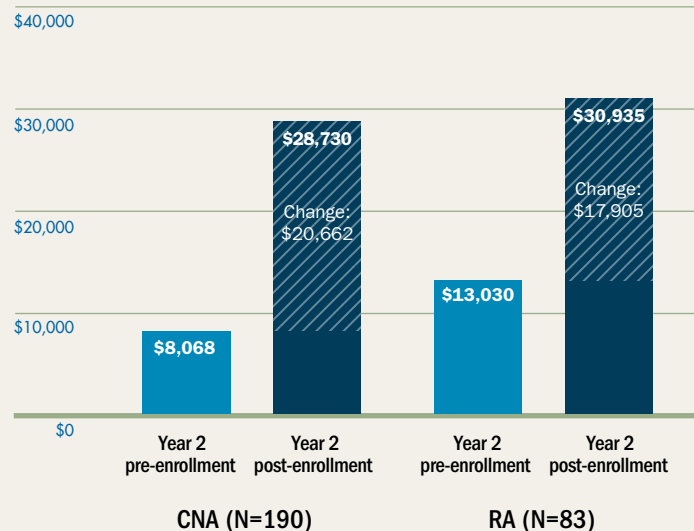
Intervention and target population: This tier included two skills training programs—a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training run by JVS and a Room Attendant training run by BEST Hospitality Training. The programs provided occupational skills training, job readiness training, and job placement support to help immigrants with intermediate English skills and U.S. work experience obtain better-paying jobs.

Evaluation design: The study employed a pre/post-test design, examining the average change in annual earnings from the second year before to the second year after enrollment, using MA Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data.

Implementation findings: Skills Training served 273 learners who received an average of 291 hours of training and four months of career coaching. Ninety-five percent of learners completed training, and JVS reported that 89 percent of graduates obtained a job.

Outcomes: Participants' earnings increased by an average of \$19,824—or 207 percent—from the second year before to the second year after program enrollment. All demographic subgroups of participants experienced large, significant average increases in annual earnings. Over this period, average annual earnings more than tripled among CNA participants and more than doubled among Room Attendant (RA) participants (Figure 3). Consistent with data on the pandemic's differential effects across industries, CNA participants did not experience the same declines in earnings during the pandemic quarters as Room Attendant participants.

Figure 3 Skills Training Average Annual Earnings in the Second Years Pre- and Post-Enrollment (in 2021 dollars), by Training Type



Bridges to College

Intervention and target population: This tier provided college preparation classes contextualized to programs at two colleges, combined with academic and career coaching, to help learners with high-intermediate English skills enroll in and complete postsecondary education.

Evaluation design: The study employed a post-test only design, examining college enrollment, credits earned, and credential completion using MA Department of Higher Education and Quincy College data as well as a preliminary analysis of change in annual earnings using MA Department of Unemployment Assistance earnings data.

Implementation findings: The program served 274 learners who on average attended 180 hours of college preparation classes. Ninety-three percent completed the Bridges to College program.

Outcomes: Eighty-four percent of participants enrolled in college and 78 percent earned college-level credits two to four years post-program. Fifty-six percent achieved the target outcome of earning 12 or more college-level credits and no more than three remedial credits. Forty-two percent of participants earned a college credential within two to four years of participating. Sixty percent of participants in the biotechnology and health information technology program tracks earned a college credential, and these graduates experienced large average increases in earnings.

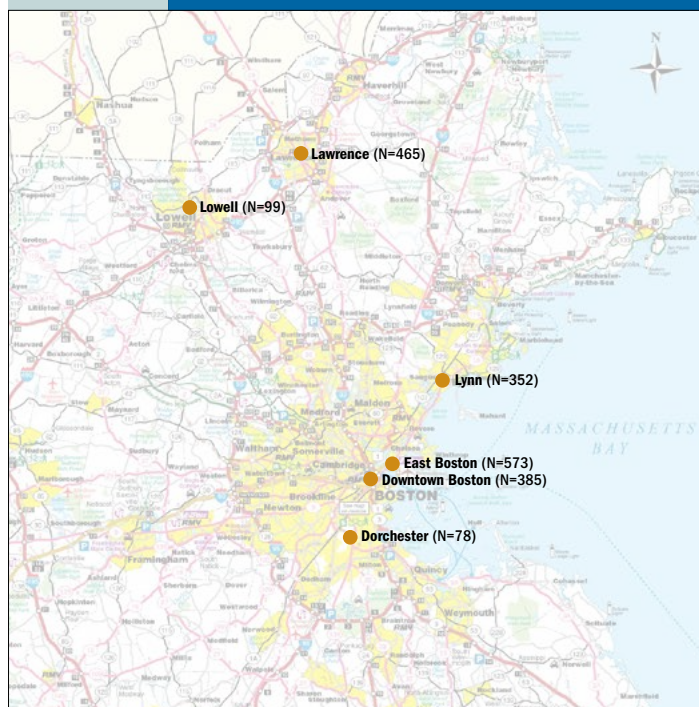
The EfA Study Participants

JVS conducted extensive outreach efforts in communities that contain some of the largest concentrations of immigrants in Massachusetts. JVS had run an earlier version of EfA but was not doing so when the PFS project began.¹⁷ To bring EfA to scale, JVS contracted with nonprofits located in each of the targeted communities to recruit participants and provide space for JVS staff to hold information sessions, classes, and career coaching meetings. These partner agencies are listed in the appendix ([Table A1](#)).

JVS and its partners operated EfA in six locations, using staggered launches throughout the project's first year. [Figure 4](#) shows each site's geographic location and number of study participants. Classes began in East Boston and Dorchester in September 2016, Lawrence in February 2017, Lynn in March 2017, Downtown Boston in April 2017, and Lowell in August 2017. Two sites closed due to low enrollment numbers, including Dorchester in December 2017 and Lowell in March 2019.

Figure 4

EfA Locations during the MA Pathways Project



Note: N = the total number of study participants in each location included in the analyses in this interim report.

As noted earlier, the economy was strong when EfA enrollment took place. Enrollment in education and training programs, particularly among low-income adults, typically falls when unemployment is low and jobs are plentiful.¹⁸ The enrollment period also saw new federal immigration policies and increased enforcement of immigration laws, factors that have been shown to deter immigrants from seeking services, including those who are in the country legally.¹⁹ JVS faced significant

challenges recruiting candidates in this climate and invested substantial resources into outreach efforts. These included running newspaper, radio, and social media advertisements, distributing information at community events and via door-to-door to residences and businesses, and hiring full-time staff dedicated to community outreach. JVS met the MA Pathways enrollment goal for EfA despite the challenges. As a consequence of the strong economy, in order to meet the MA Pathways initiative's enrollment goals, JVS enrolled more people than anticipated who were employed when they applied to the program.

Individuals interested in EfA attended an information session on the EfA program and the study. Those who remained interested after the information session received appointment cards to return to JVS for one-on-one interviews. During these interviews, JVS staff completed oral assessments of candidates' English skills while evaluating program eligibility and fit, including readiness to attend class and willingness to work. Candidates were required to have a Social Security number and work authorization documents, the desire to obtain a job or a better job, and the ability to attend available classes. Staff verified that candidates had childcare and transportation arrangements in place so that they could attend class and obtain a job. They reviewed candidates' employment goals to determine if they were realistic given their work experience, English skill level, and availability. Staff also considered the current hours and wages of those with jobs and whether the program could help them achieve earnings gains.

Staff submitted candidates deemed eligible for the program for enrollment in the study, and a computer program randomly assigned them to the treatment or control groups. Those assigned to the treatment group were invited to EfA classes. Those assigned to the control group did not participate in EfA services but were given a list of ESOL classes in the community that they could pursue.

As shown in [Table 1](#), about three-quarters of EfA study participants were female, with an average age of 40. Just under half had children under age 18 in their household, and 55 percent lived with at least one other adult. Participants' main sources of income were their own or other household members' earnings from employment. Few received public assistance.

Seventy percent of study participants were legal permanent residents, and 15 percent were naturalized U.S. citizens. While native-born Americans account for 13 percent of the working-age English-language learner population in the U.S.,²⁰ only six percent of study participants were born in a U.S. state or territory, nearly all in Puerto Rico. Nearly three-quarters were born in countries in the Caribbean and South or Central America. Seventy-one percent of study participants spoke Spanish as their primary language; however, the other 29 percent spoke more than 40 different languages. There was significant variation in the amount of time study participants had lived in the U.S.—29 percent had been in the U.S. for one year or less and 25 percent for over ten years.

Table 1	EfA Study Participants' Characteristics at the Time of Intake (N=1,952)	
Female		76%
Average age		40
Household		
Single adult		28%
Two or more adults, no children under 18		25%
Single adult with child(ren) under 18		17%
Two or more adults and child(ren) under 18		30%
Sources of income		
Own employment		47%
Other household members' earnings		38%
SNAP		21%
TAFDC (cash assistance)		<1%
Citizenship/resident alien status		
Legal permanent resident		70%
Refugee, asylee, humanitarian parolee		9%
Naturalized U.S. citizen		15%
U.S.-born citizen		6%
Region of birth		
Caribbean		42%
South or Central America		31%
Africa		13%
Asia		6%
Other (North America, Europe, Middle East)		7%
Years in the U.S.		
1 year or less		29%
1.1 to 5 years		32%
5.1 to 10 years		14%
More than 10 years		25%
English Level		
Low		46%
Low-intermediate		18%
Intermediate		21%
High-intermediate		15%
Highest degree earned		
None		18%
High school diploma or equivalent		50%
College degree		32%
Earned highest degree outside of the U.S.		90%
U.S. employment experience		
Employed full-time at intake		27%
Employed part-time at intake		20%
Had prior U.S. employment, but not at intake		31%
Never employed in the U.S.		22%

Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

EfA served a diverse group in terms of skill levels, as indicated by their education levels and JVS's English skill assessments. Forty-six percent assessed at low-level English skills, and the remainder varied from low-intermediate to high-intermediate skill levels.²¹ While about half possessed a high school diploma or equivalent degree, 18 percent had no degree, and 32 percent had a college degree. Ninety-percent of study participants earned their highest degree outside the U.S., which is often a significant barrier for immigrants seeking jobs in their professions once in the U.S.²² The group was nearly evenly divided between those who were employed at the time of study intake and those who were unemployed. Twenty-two percent of study participants had never been employed in the U.S. The diversity of the population posed program design challenges, requiring services tailored to individuals' skill levels and needs.

The EfA Program

EfA's employment-focused English classes incorporated instruction that addressed skills needed to find and succeed in a job, including interviewing skills and communication in the workplace. The classes admitted students monthly, were open-exit, and were offered up to nine hours per week over two or three days. When the program reached sufficient scale at a location, students were divided into classes by English level. The curriculum was segmented into four-month cycles. Students completed assessments at the beginning and end of each cycle to evaluate their progress. The assessments included questions asked during job interviews, and students were evaluated on their comprehension of the questions, the content of their answers, and whether they could be understood. The program held end-of-cycle celebrations to recognize students' progress. End-of-cycle check-ins provided an opportunity for students and staff to reassess goals and decide whether students would return for the next cycle and/or start looking for a job.

Career coaches began working with participants during the first week of class. Coaches helped participants set short- and long-term employment goals, develop a resume, and practice for interviews. The level of ongoing contact depended on participants' goals. Some started their job search immediately while others attended class for a time before beginning to search. Coaches checked in with participants at the end of cycles to review their goals and progress.

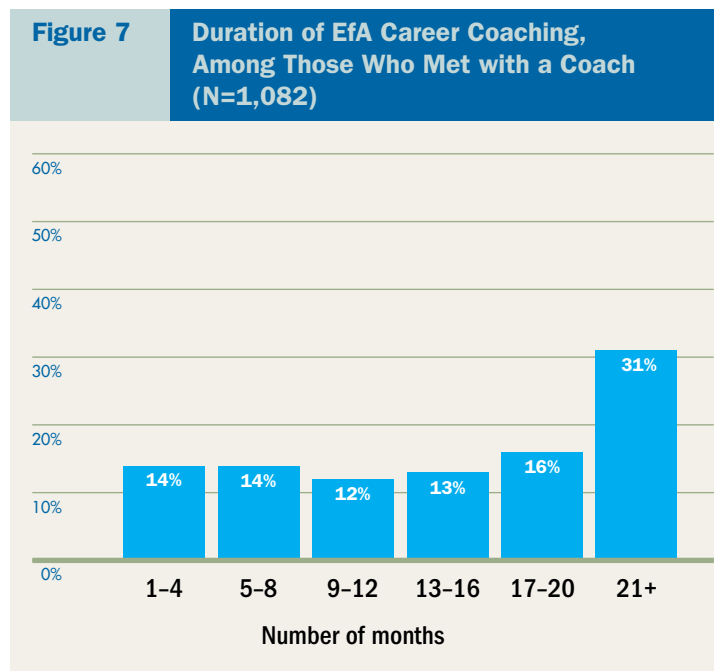
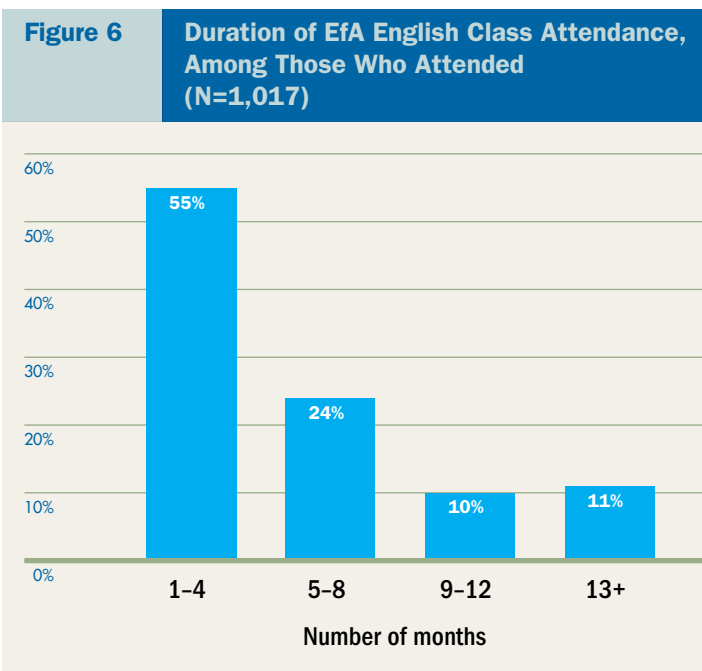
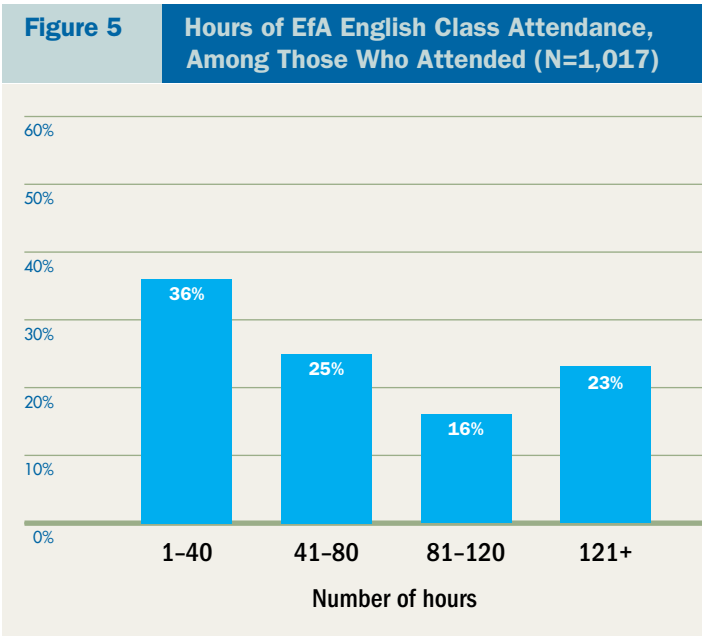
Career coaches shared job leads with participants and also taught them how to search for jobs independently. JVS has longstanding relationships with employers in the Greater Boston area from decades of helping refugees and immigrants obtain work. EfA was staffed by a mix of established and newly-hired career coaches who shared job leads with each other and worked as a team to place participants. Coaches were responsible for maintaining existing employer relationships and developing new ones. They met with employers to talk about JVS's work and discuss what the employers were seeking in job candidates. Coaches followed up with employers on whether the candidates they sent met the employers' needs and checked how new hires were faring. Some coaches primarily worked with

participants who had been in the program for a year, reaching out to confirm if they were working and then help them obtain jobs or plan how to pursue promotions or wage upgrades.

EfA participants were expected to attend the employment-focused English classes for anywhere from two to 12 months, depending on their goals and needs, and to receive up to two years of job retention and advancement assistance from a career coach. Nearly all EfA group participants (93 percent) attended at least one English class, and 98 percent met with a career coach at least once. Among

those who attended EfA English classes, the average number of hours attended was 88; the median was 60. Reflecting the flexible structure of the program, the number of hours attended varied widely, as shown in **Figure 5**. On average, EfA participants attended employment-focused English classes over a five-month period. Fifty-five percent attended classes for up to four months and another 24 percent for five to eight months (**Figure 6**). On average, EfA participants met with a career coach over a period of 14 months. While the length of career coaching varied, 60 percent met with a coach for more than a year (**Figure 7**).

EfA group members were significantly more likely than control group members to attend English-language classes during the two years after study enrollment. According to data from the MA Department of



Elementary and Secondary Education, Adult and Community Learning Services unit, 13.2 percent of the 853 control group members attended ESOL classes funded by the state during the two-year follow-up period (**Table 2**). A smaller percentage of EfA group members—9.5 percent—attended ESOL classes outside of EfA during this period. The average hours of any English-language classes attended, among those who attended any, was greater for the control group than for the EfA group. However, because nearly all EfA group members attended the EfA employment-focused English-language classes, the average hours of classes attended among all study participants was greater for the EfA group than for the control group (103 hours versus 35 hours, respectively).

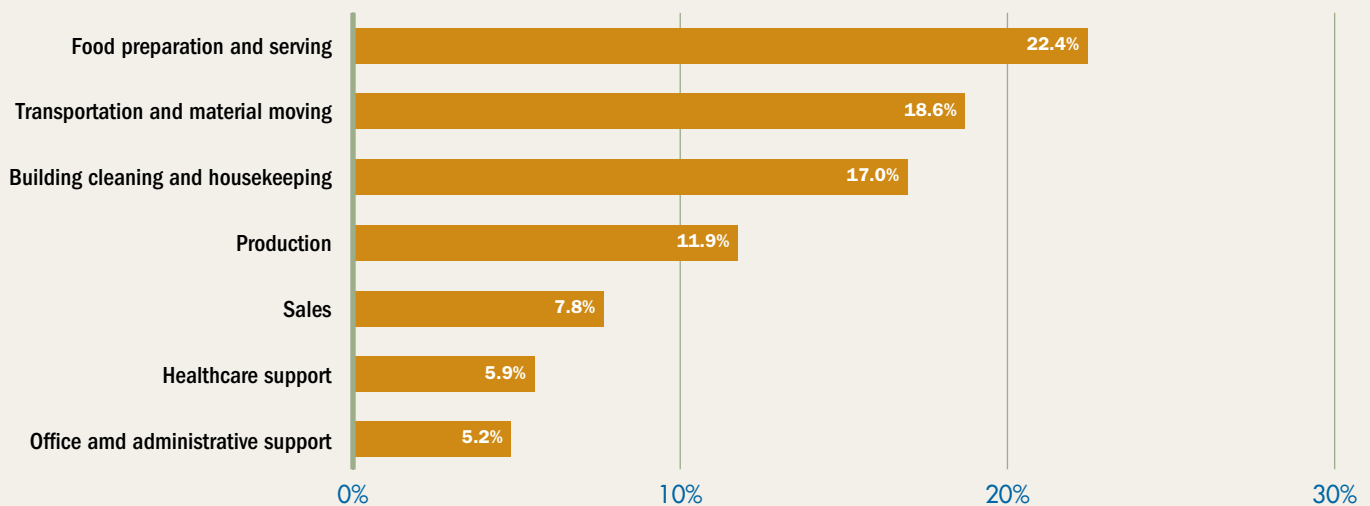
Table 2 English-Language Class Attendance Among All Study Participants

	EfA Group (N=1,099)	Control Group (N=853)
Percentage who attended any English classes	92.5% [^]	13.2%
Percentage who attended EfA English classes	92.5%	0%
Percentage who attended ESOL classes outside of EfA	9.5%	13.2%
Average English class hours among those who attended any	112	261
Average English class hours among all, including those with zero attendance	103	35

[^]Note: ACLS provided the aggregate numbers of EfA group and control group members who attended ESOL classes funded by the state. We do not know which EfA participants attended ESOL classes at other agencies. We provide a conservative estimate of overall English class attendance by assuming that all EfA participants who attended ESOL classes elsewhere also attended EfA English classes. If some had not attended EfA classes, then the percent of EfA group members who attended any English classes would be greater than 92.5 percent.

JVS reported that 92 percent of EfA group members met the program's enrollment criteria—participating for at least 11 days—and 65 percent of those enrolled obtained new jobs. EfA participants who were unemployed at study intake were more likely than those who were working to obtain new jobs after enrolling in EfA (71 percent versus 58 percent, respectively). EfA's post-program employment rate is about double that of ESOL programs in Greater Boston, where only about a third of participants are employed after program exit.²³ As shown in **Figure 8**, EfA participants obtained work in a variety of occupations, the most common of which were in food preparation and serving, transportation and material moving (primarily as packers and stockers), and building cleaning and housekeeping. Starting wages averaged \$14.23 per hour (in 2021 dollars), and 70 percent of those placed worked 30 or more hours per week.

On average, EfA participants obtained their first new job five months after enrollment. Thirty-nine percent of those who obtained jobs continued to attend EfA English classes for a month or more after starting their first job. Career coaches maintained contact with nearly all (99 percent) of those placed after they began their first job.

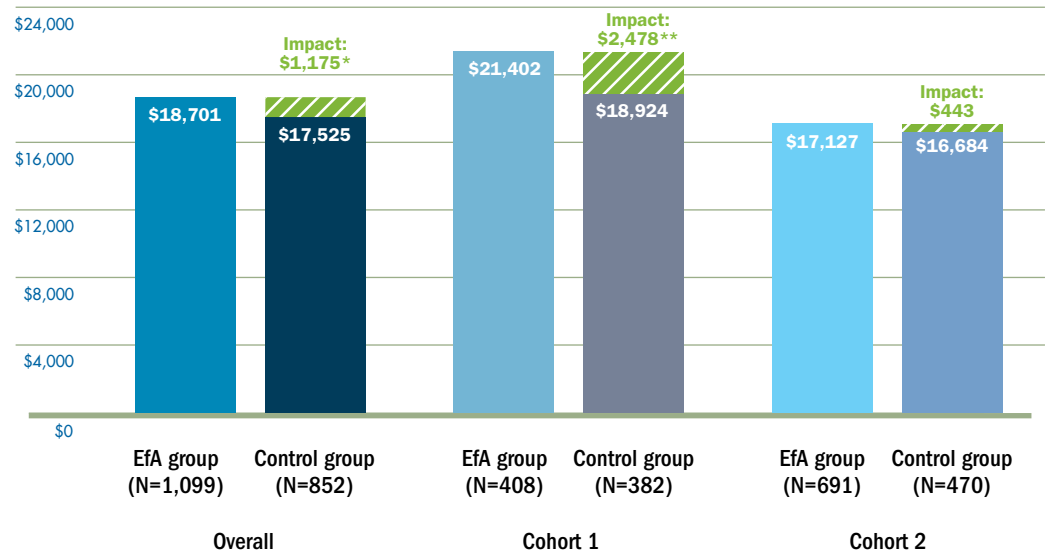
Figure 8 Primary Occupations in Which EfA Participants Obtained Jobs (N=656)

EfA's Impacts on Employment and Earnings

Unlike nearly all ESOL programs, which focus strictly on language proficiency, EfA's goal was to help adult English-language learners obtain employment or advance to a better job. The primary measure of the program's success was increased earnings from work during the second year after study enrollment. We estimated impacts for all EfA group and control group members, including those who had zero earnings during the period. Overall, EfA's impact on average earnings in the second year after random assignment was \$1,175—a 6.7 percent increase that is statistically significant at the 10 percent level (Figure 9).^{24 25} However, the overall impact masks differences between the two enrollment cohorts. Among participants in Cohort 1, whose two-year employment observation periods occurred entirely prior to the pandemic, EfA's impact on average earnings in the second year after random assignment was \$2,478—a 13.1 percent increase that is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.²⁶ Among participants in Cohort 2, for whom some observation period quarters overlapped with the pandemic, EfA participants earned an average of \$443 more than control group members—a difference that was not statistically significant.

As noted in the introduction, unemployment rates soared at the beginning of the pandemic as states implemented stay-at-home orders to stem the spread of COVID. Unemployment rates were greater among foreign-born workers than among U.S.-born workers in the early months of the pandemic, particularly among foreign-born women.²⁷ In response to the economic crisis, the federal government extended unemployment benefits, provided direct relief payments to a large portion of U.S. households, and expanded the Child Tax Credit. The pandemic unemployment programs were in place through the end of the study's observation period. In addition to this support, workers' concerns about returning to the workplace and placing

Figure 9 EfA's Impact on Average Annual Earnings in the Second Year after Random Assignment, Overall and by Cohort (in 2021 dollars)



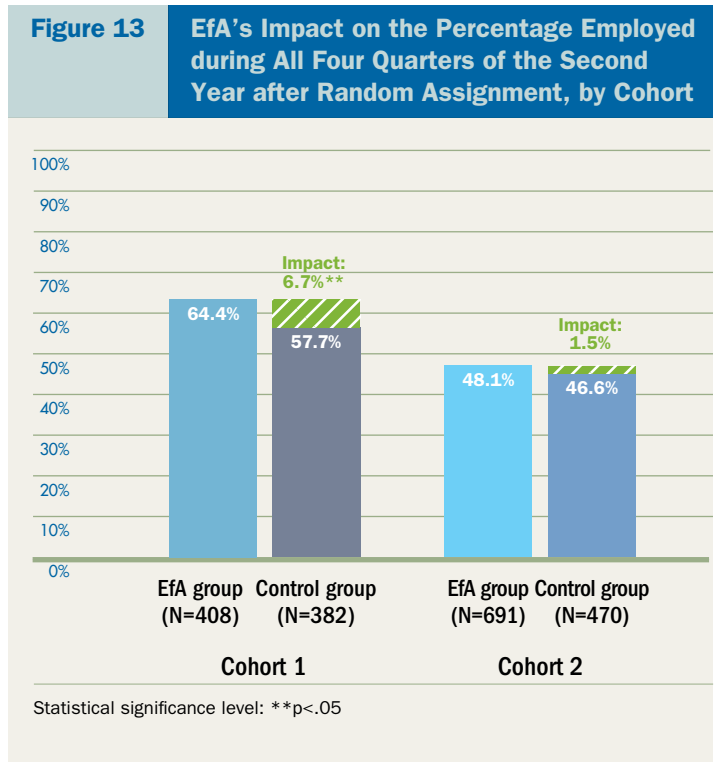
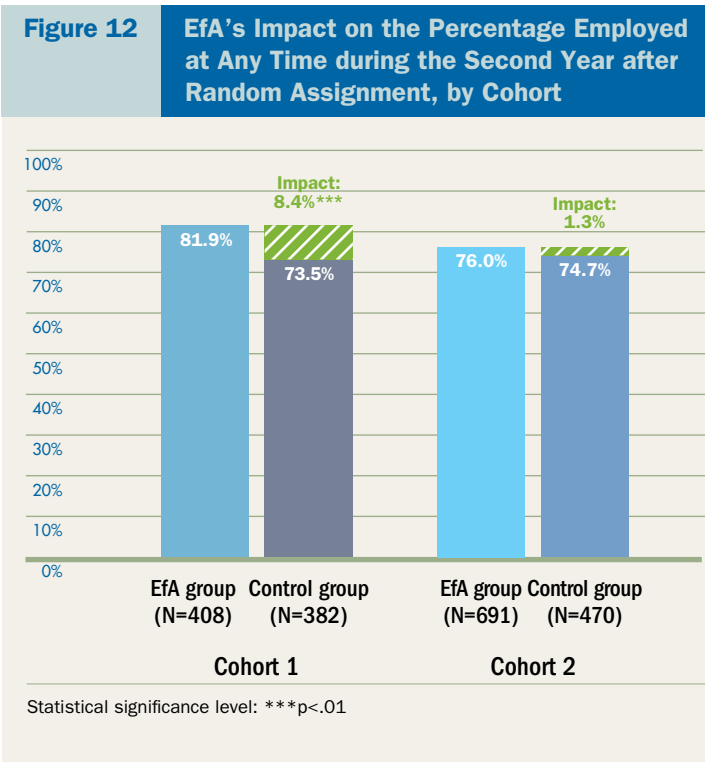
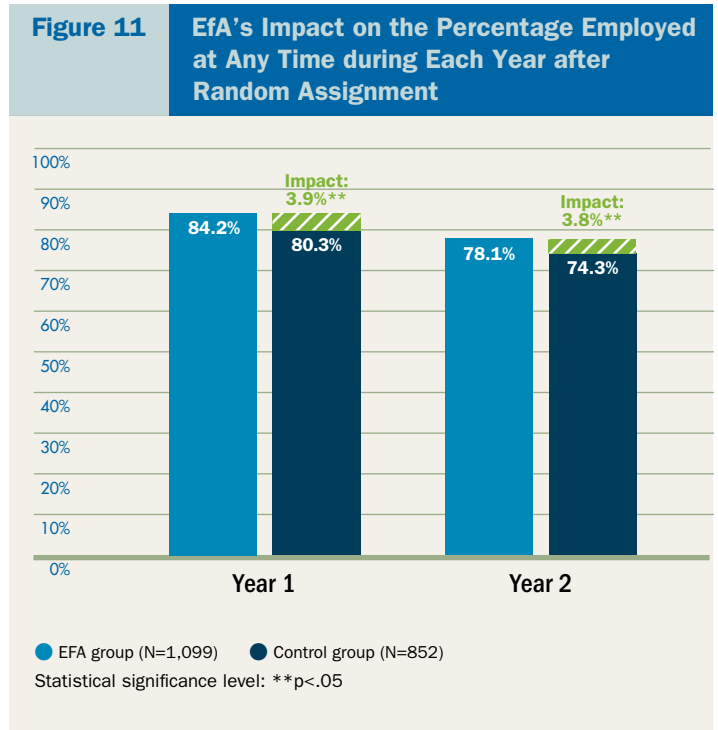
Note: Figures are for all study participants, including those with zero earnings during the period. Figures may not sum to total due to rounding. Statistical significance levels: ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$

themselves and their families at risk of infection, as well as the need to care for children while schools and day cares were closed or operating remotely, may have contributed to the lower employment rates and earnings of study participants in the second cohort. However, these factors would have affected participants in both the EfA group and the control group and, on their own, do not explain EfA's diminished impact on earnings for the second cohort.

As noted earlier, nearly 40 percent of EfA participants obtained jobs in either food preparation and serving or building cleaning and housekeeping occupations. The leisure and hospitality industries were disproportionately affected by the pandemic-related stay-at-home orders. Among immigrants working in leisure and hospitality, unemployment peaked at 64 percent in Massachusetts in the second quarter of 2020.²⁸ It is possible that a larger percentage of EfA participants than control group members obtained jobs in these sectors, resulting in a greater loss of earnings that counteracted the program benefits observed in the first cohort.

Overall, EfA had a statistically significant impact on average total earnings during the two years after random assignment—an average increase of \$2,273 over the control group (Figure 10). The impact on average total earnings during the two years for Cohort 1 was \$3,114 and significant at the 10 percent level; the \$1,804 impact for Cohort 2 was not statistically significant. The program also had statistically significant impacts overall on the percentage employed at any time during the first and second years after random assignment (Figure 11). As shown in Figure 12, EfA's impact on the percentage employed at any time during the second year after random assignment for Cohort 1 was 8.4 percentage points and

statistically significant. The impact for Cohort 2 was not statistically significant. EfA also had a significant, positive impact for Cohort 1 on consistent employment—increasing the percentage employed during all four quarters of the second year after random assignment by 6.7 percentage points. There was no similar statistically significant impact for Cohort 2 (Figure 13).

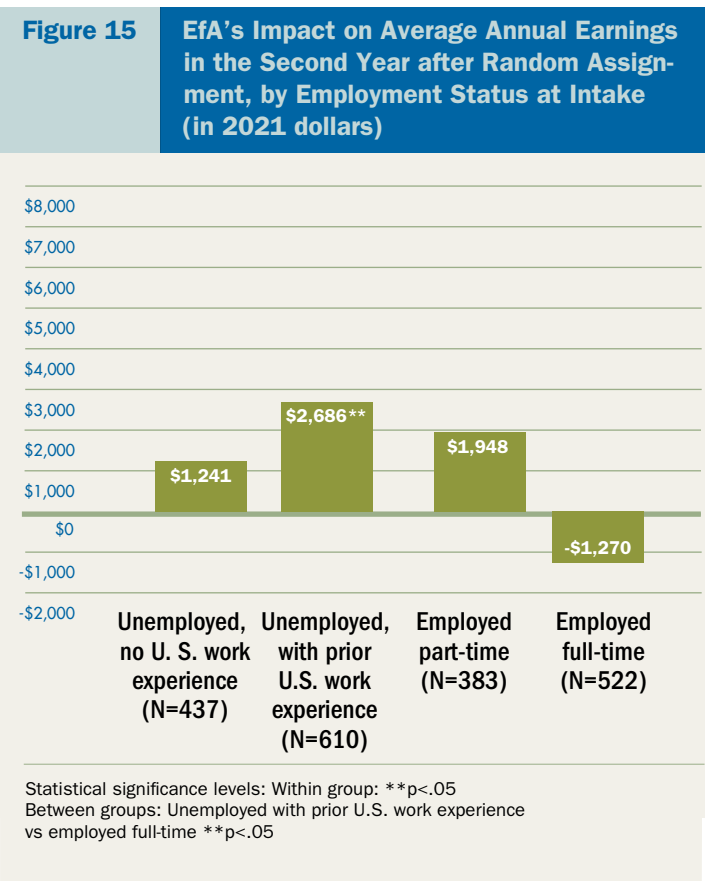
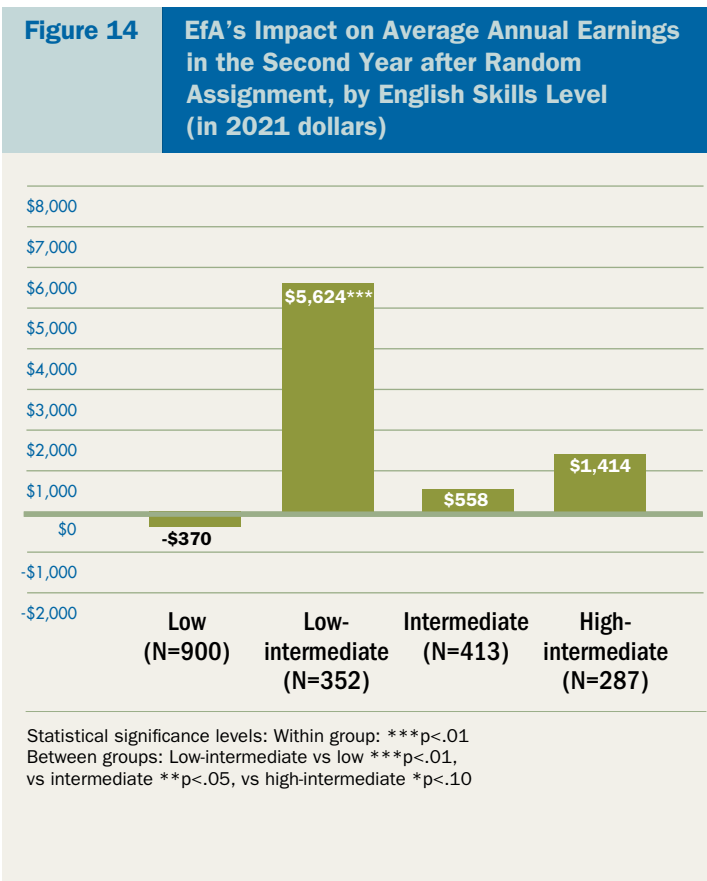


Earnings Impacts for Subgroups

We examined whether EfA was effective for different groups of English-language learners based on demographics and program location. This analysis is exploratory as the study was not designed to ensure that sample sizes across subgroups would be large enough to detect effects of a policy-relevant size. **Figures 14** through **18** present the differences in earnings between the EfA group and the control group (“EfA’s impact”) during the second year after random assignment.

We found that EfA had a large, statistically significant impact on earnings for the originally intended population: learners with low-intermediate English skills (**Figure 14**) and those who had prior U.S. work experience but were unemployed when they entered the program (**Figure 15**). English-language learners with low-intermediate English skills can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication but for which job tasks can also be demonstrated. **Table A4** in the appendix provides a detailed explanation of the English-proficiency levels. The differences in impacts between those with low-intermediate skills and those with lower- and higher-level skills were statistically significant, as was the difference in impacts between those who were unemployed but had prior U.S. work experience and those who were employed full-time at study intake.

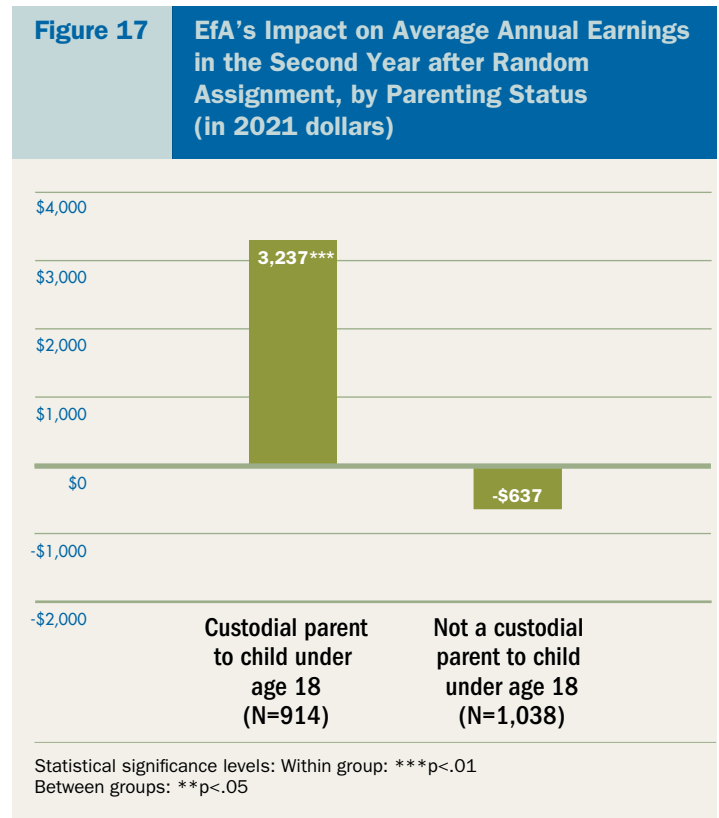
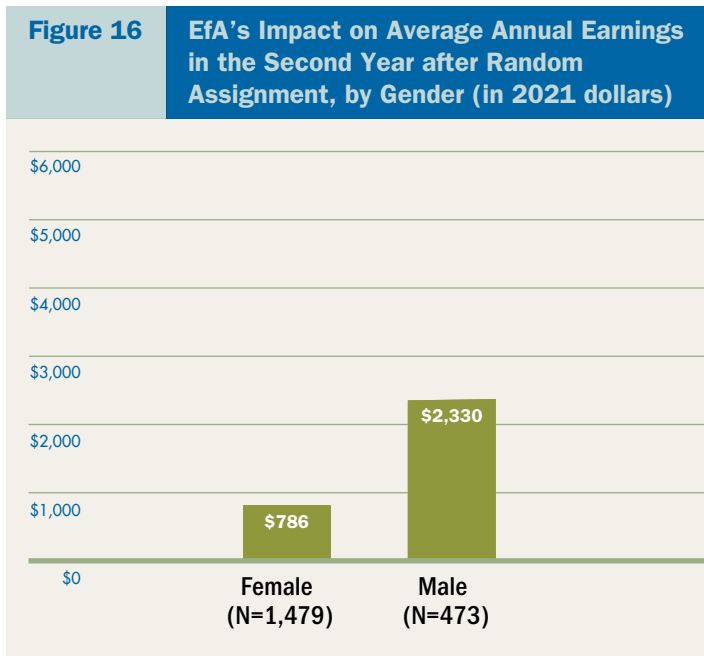
While EfA participants who were employed full-time at study intake had higher earnings two years after study enrollment than those who were unemployed at study



intake, their counterparts in the control group did just as well. Employed individuals seeking better-paying jobs may benefit from interventions that include job skills training or postsecondary education. On the other hand, individuals with no U.S. work experience, and those with the lowest-level English proficiency, may benefit from more intensive interventions and additional supports to access and retain jobs offering better pay and consistent work.

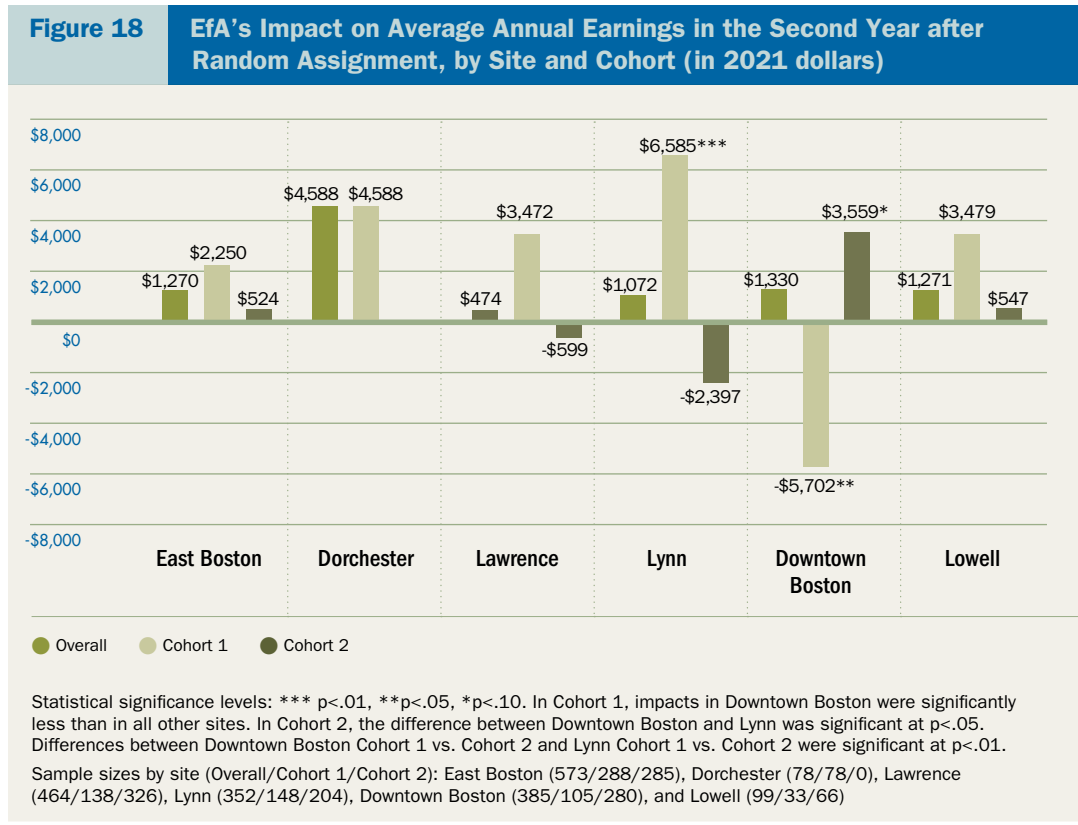
EfA’s impact on average earnings in the second year after random assignment was larger for male participants than for female participants, although the difference between the groups was not statistically significant (Figure 16). Among Cohort 1 participants, EfA’s impact was similar for female and male participants, but among Cohort 2 participants there was virtually no difference in earnings between female participants in the EfA group and those in the control group. This was true after accounting for whether or not the participants were living in households with children under age 18. It is possible that female EfA participants were more likely than their control group counterparts to obtain jobs in the leisure and hospitality industries and were disproportionately affected by the pandemic-related shutdowns, reducing the program’s impact for the second cohort.

On the other hand, EfA had a positive, statistically significant impact on average earnings among those who had children under age 18 in their households (Figure 17). The difference between those with and without custodial children under age 18 was statistically significant. EfA’s impacts on the percentage employed at all in the



second year after study enrollment and the percentage employed in all four quarters of the second year were significantly greater for custodial parents than for those without custodial children. There were no significant differences in Efa participation rates (e.g., hours of English classes attended or job placement rates) by whether or not learners had custodial children. A possible explanation of the findings is that the Efa services, including JVS's relationships with employers, were particularly beneficial to custodial parents who may otherwise have difficulty identifying and accessing employment opportunities compatible with their schedules.

We also examined differences in earnings impacts across the Efa locations, after accounting for differences in the characteristics of study participants at each site. Sample sizes by site and cohort varied and were too small to detect policy-relevant differences in some sites, particularly in Dorchester and Lowell. None of the overall impacts within sites or across sites were statistically significant (Figure 18). In East Boston, Lawrence, Lowell, and Lynn, earnings impacts were greater for Cohort 1 than for Cohort 2, although only the difference in Lynn was statistically significant.²⁹ The opposite was true for the downtown Boston site, where the earnings impact for Cohort 2 was significantly greater than that for Cohort 1.



The evidence does not suggest that differences in impacts across the sites or across cohorts within sites were due to differences in the quality of program implementation across sites or over time. It is possible that control group members in Cohort 1 in the downtown Boston site were able to find other available workforce

programs. It is also possible that, among individuals seeking employment assistance at the downtown Boston location, the EfA services were more beneficial when the economy was sluggish, but were less so when the economy was strong. However, this was not the case for the locations outside of Boston, particularly in Lawrence and Lynn, where unemployment rates during the pandemic were substantially higher than those in Boston (Table 3).

Table 3 Unemployment Rates by EfA Site at Select Points during the Pandemic

	Apr-2020	Oct-2020	Sep-2021
Boston	15.4%	9.1%	5.3%
Lawrence	29.1%	16.2%	10.4%
Lowell	17.9%	9.2%	6.1%
Lynn	22.4%	11.4%	6.9%

EfA Costs

EfA's costs per participant when it was fully operating across the six locations averaged approximately \$5,306 in 2021 dollars. This included costs for JVS outreach staff, instructors, and career coaches, as well as marketing costs and subcontracts with community agencies for participant recruitment and space for EfA service delivery. EfA's average costs were greater than the costs for other adult education programs in Massachusetts, which averaged about \$3,100 per student in 2021 dollars.³⁰ The higher costs were due in part to EfA students receiving support from both an English-language instructor and a career coach. JVS employed one coach for every three EfA English classes.

A comparison of EfA's costs and benefits must consider the cost of services received by control group members. As noted earlier in this report, 13.2 percent of control group members received ESOL services funded by the state during the two years after study enrollment. We do not have information about whether control group members received career coaching or job placement services similar to those offered by EfA. Given that most ESOL programs do not provide employment assistance and that English-language learners face barriers to accessing public workforce services, we expect that few control group members received the individualized career coaching that EfA participants received. As shown in Table 4, because very few control group members received ESOL services and some EfA group members also received ESOL services outside of EfA, the net cost per participant of EfA, \$5,188, is only slightly lower than the gross cost. EfA's net earnings benefit over the two years after study enrollment in 2021 dollars was \$2,273.

Table 4 Average Net Costs of EfA in 2021 Dollars

	EfA group	Control group	Net
Average EfA costs	\$5,306	\$0	\$5,306
Average ESOL costs (not including EfA)	\$293	\$411	-\$118
Total costs	\$5,599	\$411	\$5,188

While EfA’s net earnings benefit did not outweigh its net costs after two years, the study cannot draw firm conclusions about EfA as an investment because the benefits have the potential to accrue over time. If EfA participants continue to earn more than control group members, the program’s net earnings benefit could exceed its net costs within four to five years of enrollment.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The EfA findings support investment in workforce development programs that integrate employment-focused English-language instruction with career coaching and job placement assistance to increase job seekers’ employment and earnings. While the overall impact on earnings in the second year after enrollment was diminished by the pandemic, we believe the program’s potential should be judged primarily on the pre-pandemic outcomes.

For the cohort unaffected by the pandemic, EfA increased average earnings in the second year after enrollment by \$2,478, or 13.1 percent more than the control group. As noted in the introduction, there are no other RCT studies of the earnings impacts of integrated English instruction and employment services for English-language learners available for comparison to the EfA results. Two recent studies of career pathways programs that provided adult basic education and/or ESOL instruction to help adults access occupational training and enter well-paying careers found no significant impacts on earnings during the six years after study enrollment.³¹ Sector-based skills training programs that have succeeded in RCT studies have demonstrated earnings gains of 26 to 35 percent relative to the control group in the second year after study enrollment.³² These programs were more intensive than EfA—requiring full-time attendance over several weeks—and often helped participants earn certifications needed to obtain well-paying jobs. Many EfA participants would not qualify for these programs due to their English skill levels.

While the EfA program is less intensive than many workforce programs that have demonstrated large earnings impacts, it may not be easy for other organizations to replicate. JVS is a well-respected workforce development organization in the Boston area with decades of experience helping immigrants succeed in the labor market. This experience was brought to bear on the design and implementation of EfA—and was likely instrumental to its success. While the RCT design does not allow for disentangling the effects of the English classes and career coaching, the

evidence suggests JVS's employer relationships were critical to EfA's success. First, the time most learners spent in EfA's English classes was less than what is generally considered necessary to substantially improve English skills. Second, EfA was particularly beneficial to individuals who faced challenges identifying and accessing employment opportunities. Simply investing in programs that combine contextualized English-language instruction, career coaching, and job search assistance is unlikely to match JVS's success unless organizations have similar kinds of expertise and devote significant resources to the coaching and employer relationship development.

Massachusetts has continued to support the EfA program since the end of the demonstration, albeit at somewhat diminished levels. The findings indicate EfA merits a more substantial investment across the state, focusing on communities with large immigrant populations. With a per-person cost of \$5,306, EfA is substantially less expensive than other workforce development programs that have demonstrated large, statistically significant earnings impacts in rigorous evaluations—which strengthens the rationale for devoting resources needed to expand it. To ensure such investment pays off, the state should consider investing in JVS or ensuring other organizations receive training and ongoing support on how to effectively implement the EfA model. Similarly, replication efforts in other states should invest in strong workforce organizations that have demonstrated expertise preparing immigrants for the labor market and developing employer relationships, and should include training and support on the EfA model.

The subgroup analyses suggest that EfA's impact could be considerably greater if future programming focuses on the groups that benefitted the most.

- EfA had a large, statistically significant earnings impact for individuals who had U.S. labor market experience but were unemployed when they enrolled. Conversely, the program had no earnings impact for those who were employed full-time at the time of enrollment.
- EfA offered the greatest benefit—a 40 percent increase in annual earnings—to jobseekers with low-intermediate English skills (those who can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication but where job tasks can also be demonstrated).³³
- EfA also had a large, statistically significant impact on earnings for parents with children under age 18 in the household.

The study's findings support the MA Pathways project's tiered design in order to help learners with varying levels of English skills and work experience achieve their employment and career goals. While comparable impact data for the Rapid Employment, Skills Training, and Bridges to College program tiers are not available, EfA was most effective for its originally intended population—learners with low-intermediate English skills who had prior U.S. work experience but were unemployed when they entered the program. Employed individuals seeking better-paying jobs

may benefit more from interventions that include job skills training or postsecondary education. Individuals with no U.S. work experience, and those with the lowest-level English proficiency, may benefit from more intensive interventions and additional supports to access and retain jobs offering better pay and consistent work.

A question remains about the MA Pathways programs' longer-term effects on participants' earnings. Additional years of follow-up are needed to learn whether the early positive earnings gains are sustained and whether participants who start in the lower tiers—Rapid Employment and EfA—are able to upgrade their skills and obtain better-paying jobs. EfA participants will likely need to gain occupational skills and/or college credentials, like those targeted by the Skills Training and Bridges to College programs, to advance to higher-paying jobs. Recent studies of career pathways programs suggest that stronger and longer-term advising and guidance is needed to help working adult learners transition from short-term workforce programs to longer-term postsecondary programs leading to certificates or degrees. The MA Pathways study demonstrates that EfA was effective in helping English-language learners obtain consistent employment and increase their earnings in the two years after enrollment.

Endnotes

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22. Batalova and Zong, *Language Diversity and English Proficiency in the United States*.
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24. The p-value for the difference in average earnings in the second year after random assignment was .086.
25. Data for one study participant was excluded from the analysis because their annual earnings both before and after study enrollment were more than three standard deviations from the mean and they held only one job during each period, suggesting that the data were not for the correct person. The impact results did not substantively change after excluding this participant.
26. This figure differs by a couple hundred dollars from the one reported in a Mobility interim report on the Efa program due to changes in the data reported by employers to the MA Department of Unemployment Assistance as well as changes in the weighting (due to the modification of the randomization ratio) and in the regression-adjusted estimates as new cohorts were added to the analysis.
27. Pew Research Center. "Immigrants in U.S. experienced higher unemployment in the pandemic but have closed the gap," July 26, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/26/immigrants-in-u-s-experienced-higher-unemployment-in-the-pandemic-but-have-closed-the-gap/>
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29. The Dorchester site ended operations in December 2017 and did not have Cohort 2 participants.
30. Costs are based on Mobility's calculations using MA Adult and Community Learning Services 2020 data on the cost per seat for Adult Basic Education and ESOL services across all providers except JVS. Average costs were adjusted to 2021 dollars to be comparable to the EfA cost figures.
31. See Martinson, Karin, and Asaph Glosser. *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program: Six-Year Impact Report*. OPRE Report 2022-64. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022; Gardiner, Karen, and Amanda Grittner. *Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud Program: Six-Year Impact Report*. OPRE Report 2022-47. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022.
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Appendix

MA Pathways to Economic Advancement Project Partners

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Executive Office for Administration and Finance serves as lead agency and outcomes payor for the Massachusetts Pathways to Economic Advancement Project. The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and Executive Office of Education provide administrative data and ongoing support to inform outcomes measurement for the project.

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonsectarian organization founded in 1938. JVS serves more than 16,000 individuals annually and is one of the largest community-based providers of adult education and workforce development services in Greater Boston. JVS's mission is to empower individuals from diverse communities to find employment and build careers, while partnering with employers to hire, develop, and retain productive workforces. In support of this mission, JVS provides a wide range of adult education, vocational training, job readiness, career counseling, and job placement services, as well as related supportive services.

Social Finance is a national impact finance and advisory nonprofit. Social Finance works with the public, private, and social sectors to create partnerships and investments that measurably improve lives. Since its founding in 2011, Social Finance has mobilized \$350 million in new investments designed to help people and communities realize improved outcomes in education, economic mobility, health, and housing. Social Finance has pioneered impact investments including the Social Impact Bond and the Career Impact Bond to deliver sustainable impact across the U.S. Learn more at socialfinance.org.

EfA's Community Partners

Table A1 lists the community nonprofit organizations with which JVS contracted for recruitment services and/or space in the EfA locations outside of downtown Boston. The downtown Boston program is located at JVS headquarters.

Table A1	EfA Community Partners for Each Location
East Boston	East Boston Neighborhood Health Center
Dorchester	Lena Park Community Development Corporation St. Mark Community Education Program
Lynn	Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development Lynn Economic Opportunity Inc.
Lawrence	Lawrence Community Works
Lowell	Coalition for a Better Acre Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association International Institute of New England

Study Design and Sample

Mobility used a randomized controlled trial, or RCT, design to evaluate EfA and assess its impacts on individuals' outcomes. To examine program impacts, this report relies on administrative earnings data from the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) for the two years before the quarter of random assignment through the two years after that quarter. Employers report employee earnings to DUA for purposes of administering the unemployment assistance program. While state administrative earnings records are less expensive to collect and are considered more reliable than self-reported data from surveys, they do not cover all types of employment. Specifically, the DUA data does not include earnings for the self-employed, independent contractors (reported on a Form 1099), most federal government employees, those in informal work, or those who worked outside of Massachusetts.

We also rely on data provided by JVS on study participants' characteristics at the time of intake and the services treatment group members received. We used the intake data to compare the characteristics of treatment and control group members, to control for any differences in characteristics between the groups in the analysis of program impacts, and to examine impacts across subgroups.

JVS staff completed the EfA program's intake and screening process to identify eligible candidates and obtained their written consent to take part in the study. EfA staff entered eligible candidates' data into a customized database that used a random number generation function to assign participants to the treatment or control group. Individuals were blocked according to the EfA location where they were expected to receive services and randomization was completed within each block. Staff invited those assigned to the treatment group to receive EfA services. Staff informed those assigned to the control group that they could not participate in EfA and sent them a list of other ESOL programs in the community that they could pursue.

From the start of enrollment in September 2016 through November 30, 2017, 50 percent of participants were randomly assigned to the treatment group and 50 percent to the control group. To increase the likelihood that JVS would meet the PFS enrollment goal for EfA, the PFS partners decided to change the randomization ratio so that a greater portion of individuals would be assigned to the treatment group. From December 1, 2017 through the end of enrollment in September 2019, eligible applicants were assigned to the treatment group on a 1.5:1 basis. Because the randomization ratio varies between cohorts enrolled before and after December 1, 2017, it was necessary to weight the data in all analyses to ensure that the reported results equally represented the treatment group and control group participants for each time period. The weight assigned to each treatment group participant was 1. The weight assigned to each control group participant was equal to the number of treatment group participants divided by the number of control group participants in each cohort.

Table A2 presents the baseline characteristics of the 1,099 EfA treatment group members and 853 control group members. The results demonstrate that the groups were well-balanced; that is, there were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups in any of the characteristics.

Table A2	Comparison of EfA Treatment Group and Control Group Members			
	EfA Group (N=1,099)	Control Group (N=853)	Difference	p-value
Female	77.3%	74.1%	3.2%	0.105
Age				0.215
Age 18 to 24	13.9%	11.7%	2.2%	
Age 25 to 44	55.0%	54.2%	0.7%	
Age 45 or older	31.1%	34.1%	-3.0%	
Race/ethnicity				0.165
Hispanic or Latino	72.4%	71.0%	1.4%	
White (not Hispanic/Latino)	4.9%	7.0%	-2.1%	
Black (not Hispanic/Latino)	12.5%	13.2%	-0.8%	
Asian (not Hispanic/Latino)	5.5%	5.6%	-0.1%	
None or other race specified (not Hispanic/Latino)	4.7%	3.2%	1.5%	
Highest degree earned				0.923
None	18.6%	18.2%	0.3%	
High school diploma or equivalent	50.2%	49.7%	0.5%	
Any college degree	31.2%	32.1%	-0.9%	
English level				0.802
Low	46.0%	47.0%	-1.0%	
Low-intermediate	18.2%	17.7%	0.5%	
Intermediate	20.7%	21.6%	-0.9%	
High-intermediate	15.2%	13.8%	1.4%	
Average years resided in the U.S.	7.4	7.4	0.08	0.864
Employment status				0.999
Employed full-time	26.7%	26.7%	0.0%	
Employed part-time	19.6%	19.6%	-0.1%	
Had prior U.S. employment, but not employed at intake	31.4%	31.2%	0.2%	
Never employed in the U.S.	22.4%	22.5%	-0.1%	
Average earnings during the two years prior to random assignment (in 2021 dollars)	\$16,357	\$17,284	-\$927	0.398
Custodial parent of child under age 18	47.1%	45.7%	1.4%	0.544
Other sources of income				
SNAP	20.7%	20.3%	0.4%	0.826
Unemployment insurance	2.8%	3.4%	-0.6%	0.474
Other household members' earnings	38.1%	37.6%	0.5%	0.823

Notes: Statistics based on Mobility analysis of JVS program intake data. Data are weighted to account for the change in the randomization ratio made on December 1, 2017. P-values based on Pearson chi-squared tests for index variables and Wald tests for continuous variables.

Analysis

The study uses an intent-to-treat analysis framework to assess program impacts; that is, we examined differences in the outcomes of all participants randomly assigned to the EfA treatment group, regardless of whether or not they received the intended services, and to the control group. The study estimates average impacts over all individuals in the study sample. All sample members are treated equally regardless of program location. To improve the precision of the impact estimates, we used multivariate regression analysis to estimate program impacts, and we report regression-adjusted results. The regression models included a binary variable for being a treatment group member, the site and month of random assignment, and the explanatory variables included in [Table A2](#). The full subgroup analysis included gender, age, race, citizenship/resident alien status, highest degree earned, English skill level, years of U.S. residence, employment status at intake, and whether participants had children under age 18. [Table A3](#) provides the impact estimates with standard errors and p-values.

Table A3 Regression-Adjusted Impact Estimates with Standard Errors and P-values

	Impact	Std. Err.	p-value
Average Earnings Post Random Assignment			
Year 1 – Overall	\$1,097**	\$544	0.044
Year 1 – Cohort 1	\$637	\$896	0.478
Year 1 – Cohort 2	\$1,361*	\$696	0.051
Year 2 – Overall	\$1,175*	\$684	0.086
Year 2 – Cohort 1	\$2,478**	\$1,082	0.022
Year 2 – Cohort 2	\$443	\$896	0.621
Years 1 and 2 Combined – Overall	\$2,273**	\$1,118	0.042
Years 1 and 2 Combined – Cohort 1	\$3,114*	\$1,826	0.088
Years 1 and 2 Combined – Cohort 2	\$1,804	\$1,436	0.209
Percentage Employed at Any Time during the Period			
Year 1 – Overall	3.9%**	1.6%	0.016
Year 1 – Cohort 1	4.0%	2.6%	0.122
Year 1 – Cohort 2	4.0%*	2.1%	0.059
Year 2 – Overall	3.8%**	1.8%	0.039
Year 2 – Cohort 1	8.4%***	2.8%	0.002
Year 2 – Cohort 2	1.3%	2.5%	0.611
Percentage Employed in All Four Quarters of the Year			
Year 1 – Overall	4.9%**	2.0%	0.016
Year 1 – Cohort 1	3.4%	3.1%	0.272
Year 1 – Cohort 2	5.9%**	2.7%	0.029
Year 2 – Overall	3.3%	2.1%	0.119
Year 2 – Cohort 1	6.7%**	3.2%	0.038
Year 2 – Cohort 2	1.5%	2.8%	0.596

Notes: Statistics based on Mobility analysis of DUA earnings data. Data are weighted to account for the change in the randomization ratio made on December 1, 2017. Statistical significance levels: ***p<.01, **p<.05, *p<.10

Cohort Definitions

In this report, we examined program impacts overall and by cohort based on whether or not participants' observation periods overlapped at all with the pandemic. Cohort 1 includes participants who enrolled from the start of the study through December 2017, and whose two-year observation periods ended prior to 2020 and, therefore, were unaffected by the pandemic. Cohort 2 includes participants who enrolled between January 2018 and September 2019, and whose two-year post-enrollment observation periods included from one to seven quarters in 2020 and/or 2021. We chose to include all cohorts with any post-enrollment quarters in 2020 or 2021, including the cohort whose last quarter in the observation period was January to March 2020, for the following reasons.

- The U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary declared a public health emergency due to the novel coronavirus on January 31, 2020, and restricted travel of foreign nationals who had recently traveled in China. On March 10, Massachusetts Governor Baker declared a state of emergency and, five days later, ordered schools to close and restricted large gatherings and eating at restaurants. Effective March 24, the governor issued a stay-at-home advisory and ordered all non-essential businesses to cease in-person operations.
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that, in March 2020, total nonfarm payroll employment fell by 701,000 and the unemployment rate rose by .9 percentage point over the previous month. About two-thirds of the decline in employment was in leisure and hospitality. In this sector, average weekly hours dropped by 1.4 hours. The survey reference periods were in the first half of March, prior to many coronavirus-related business closures. The BLS noted that while they cannot precisely quantify the effects of the pandemic on the labor market, it was clear that the changes in these measures reflected the effects of the coronavirus and efforts to contain it.³⁴
- The Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development reported that the private sector in Massachusetts lost 18,300 jobs in March 2020, noting that the monthly change was impacted by the coronavirus. More than three-quarters of the jobs lost were in leisure and hospitality.³⁵
- The National Bureau of Economic Research Business Cycle Dating Committee determined that the peak of economic activity occurred in February 2020 and the recession lasted two months, March and April 2020, with the subsequent expansion beginning in May 2020.³⁶
- Travel-related employment declined sharply in March 2020, and many MA Pathways participants were placed in jobs in the leisure, hospitality, and transportation industries. According to a Tourism Economics report, travel employment, including transportation, lodging, food services, recreation, retail, and travel planning, declined 35 percent from pre-crisis levels in March 2020 alone.³⁷

- The MA Pathways data indicate that, among Rapid Employment and EfA participants with at least one quarter of earnings data in 2020, earnings declined in the first quarter of 2020 after steadily increasing during 2019. The declines among Rapid Employment and EfA treatment group members' earnings from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the first quarter of 2020 were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

We presumed that the pandemic would have had only a small or no effect on employment rates in the first quarter of 2020 because participants are counted as employed if they had any earnings in the quarter. However, given the employment trends cited above and the evidence from the MA Pathways data, we expect that the pandemic did affect participants' earnings starting in the first quarter of 2020.

Receipt of Other JVS Services

At its downtown Boston headquarters, JVS offers over 35 programs to help individuals build skills, find employment, and advance in their careers. While control group members were not supposed to receive EfA services, they could apply for other JVS services, as could members of the EfA group. JVS records indicate that 2 percent of control group members and 2.2 percent of EfA group members received non-EfA services from JVS during their two-year observation periods. Two members of the control group enrolled in EfA prior to the end of their two-year observation periods.

English Proficiency Levels

JVS developed its own tool for assessing applicants' English skills. The skill levels that JVS used and are cited in this report are roughly equivalent to the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) functioning levels summarized in [Table A4](#).

Table A4 NRS Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels

Literacy Level	Listening and Speaking	Functional and Workplace Skills
<p>Low Beginning ESL Test Benchmark: CASAS scale scores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: 181-190 • Listening: 181-190 • Writing: 136-145 	<p>Individual can understand basic greetings, simple phrases and commands. Can understand simple questions related to personal information, spoken slowly and with repetition. Understands a limited number of words related to immediate needs and can respond with simple learned phrases to some common questions related to routine survival situations. Speaks slowly and with difficulty. Demonstrates little or no control over grammar.</p>	<p>Individual functions with difficulty in social situations and in situations related to immediate needs. Can provide limited personal information on simple forms and can read very simple common forms of print found in the home and environment, such as product names. Can handle routine entry-level jobs that require very simple written or oral English communication and for which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited computer knowledge and experience.</p>
<p>High Beginning ESL Test Benchmark: CASAS scale scores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: 191-200 • Listening: 191-200 • Writing: 146-200 	<p>Individual can understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary, spoken slowly with some repetition. Individual can respond to simple questions about personal everyday activities, and can express immediate needs, using simple learned phrases or short sentences. Shows limited control of grammar.</p>	<p>Individual can function in some situations related to immediate needs and in familiar social situations. Can provide basic personal information on simple forms and recognizes simple common forms of print found in the home, workplace, and community. Can handle routine entry-level jobs requiring basic written or oral English communication and for which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited computer knowledge or experience.</p>
<p>Low Intermediate ESL Test Benchmark: CASAS scale scores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: 201-210 • Listening: 201-210 • Writing: 201-225 	<p>Individual can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with frequent repetition. Can ask and respond to questions using such phrases and can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although with some difficulty. Shows some control of basic grammar.</p>	<p>Individual can interpret simple directions and schedules, signs, and maps and can fill out simple forms but needs support on some documents that are not simplified. Can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication and for which job tasks can be demonstrated. Individual can use simple computer programs and can perform a sequence of routine tasks given directions on technology use (e.g., fax machine, computer).</p>
<p>High Intermediate ESL Test Benchmark: CASAS scale scores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: 211-220 • Listening: 211-220 • Writing: 226-242 	<p>Individual can understand learned phrases and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly and with some repetition. Can communicate basic survival needs with some help. Can participate in conversation in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation; relies on description and concrete terms. There is inconsistent control of more complex grammar.</p>	<p>Individual can meet basic survival and social needs, can follow some simple oral and written instruction, and has some ability to communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects. Can write messages and notes related to basic needs and complete basic medical forms and job applications. Can handle jobs that involve basic oral instructions and written communication for tasks that can be clarified orally. Individual can work with or learn basic computer software, such as word processing, and can follow simple instructions for using technology.</p>

CASAS scores are from the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, a widely used adult education measurement grounded in real-world skills. Adapted from National Reporting System Implementation Guidelines. Accessed at: <https://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/NRSFunctioningLevelTable.pdf>.



M O B I L I T Y

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