Jumpstart Alumni Survey Results 2019

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RESULTS OF THE 2019 JUMPSTART ALUMNI SURVEY

OVERVIEW

Jumpstart’s vision is that every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. To achieve that goal, Jumpstart provides language, literacy, and social-emotional programming for preschool children from underserved communities and promotes quality early learning for all. Jumpstart’s program’s success depends on the commitment and dedication of thousands of college student volunteers who deliver its direct service program.

During their time with Jumpstart, the college student volunteers—called Corps Members—receive intentional training on child development, positive adult-child interactions, and the organization’s research-based curriculum alongside practical experience in the classroom with ongoing coaching and support. Jumpstart’s aim with Corps Members is to spark or deepen their knowledge and interest in the field of early childhood education—preparing them to become future teachers or champions of high-quality early education and advocates for young children in their communities. Jumpstart also strives to identify policy issues that affect the early education field at large and to support policies that would benefit children, college students, early educators, and communities, regardless of their direct participation with Jumpstart.

To gauge progress toward its goals, Jumpstart was eager to understand outcomes for its alumni (Corps Members who engaged in at least one term of service with Jumpstart). Of particular interest were the educational and/or career paths they took after participating in the program, their reasons for choosing these paths, and the impact they feel Jumpstart had on their development. Jumpstart conducted a confidential, online survey of alumni who served between 2013 and 2018. The purpose of the survey was to learn about:

- Alumni perceptions of the impact of Jumpstart service on their education and career development
- The professional paths alumni take and, in particular, the experiences of those who are currently employed as early childhood educators
- The opinions alumni hold about what makes the early childhood education field attractive
- The opinions alumni hold about the public policies that Jumpstart promotes
- Alumni’s interest in staying connected to Jumpstart

The findings reported here reflect the experiences of 1,147 alumni who responded to the survey. The authors are grateful for the time they took to share their perspectives. Their input is invaluable given that Jumpstart has had, until now, comparatively little information about the pathways of participants following their service. The alumni responses – and the analysis in this
report – will help Jumpstart shape future program offerings, advocacy strategies, and alumni engagement. These data will also help inform the broader conversation about the future of the early childhood education workforce and the necessary conditions for supporting and retaining a field of well-trained, appropriately compensated, and successful early educators – conditions that are required for providing high-quality early learning experiences for all children in this country.

The findings are presented in four sections. The first describes the characteristics of recent alumni and their experience with Jumpstart service. The second section focuses on their education, the third turns to their careers, and the fourth section describes alumni opinions about Jumpstart policy issues and their interest in remaining connected to Jumpstart.
SECTION 1: WHO ARE JUMPSTART’S RECENT ALUMNI?

Per the selection criteria for participation in the study, everyone who responded to the survey was a Corps Member during college and engaged in at least one term of service between 2013 and 2018. Respondents represent 13% of the 8,792 alumni who met the criteria for inclusion in the survey request. Demographically, respondents are a close representation to the overall population of recent Jumpstart alumni:

- The majority of the respondents identified as female (88%), while 10% identified as male and 2% identified as non-binary or self-described.
- Most—63%—were between 23 and 26 years old, while 17% are younger and 20% are older.
- In terms of race/ethnicity, 32% of the group identified themselves as White, 23% as Latinx or of Spanish origin, 21% as Black or African American, 13% as Asian, and 11% indicated “other” or identified with two or more races/ethnicities.
- 52% of the respondents said they were first-generation college students.

Alumni served in institutions all over the country, with the highest concentration attending college in California (26%), Massachusetts (17%), and New York (16%).

In terms of roles, 65% of respondents were Corps Members while 35% served as Team Leaders (Team Leaders are Corps Members who receive additional training in order to take on a leadership role both in the classroom and with their team of 5-7 peer Corps Members). Over half of the alumni surveyed served with Jumpstart for one year only (55%). The rest (45%) engaged in Jumpstart for two, three, or four (or more) years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years of service</th>
<th>(n=1140)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years or more</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</table>

1 These percentages come from the survey responses (gender, first-generation and race/ethnicity) and from the population data (age and college state). A comparison of the characteristics of respondents and the group overall show very similar distribution on all available data points.
The difference in years of service—one versus more than one—was used in the analysis as a proxy measure to represent “intensity” of Jumpstart involvement and to explore relationships with other variables (e.g., to explore variation in opinions about Jumpstart’s policy focus areas).
SECTION 2: JUMPSTART AND POST-SECONDARY EXPERIENCES

To help Jumpstart understand alumni’s perceptions of their Jumpstart experience, survey respondents were asked to rank a series of impact statements that completed the phrase, “As a result of participating in Jumpstart...” using strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

The results show that Jumpstart service enriched the college experience of most alumni by connecting them to their higher education institution and to people:

- 94% met people from their college or university that they would not have met otherwise.
- 68% report feeling more connected to the campus or university.

For many, the Jumpstart experience also supported their academic performance and helped shape their educational plans:

- 78% developed skills that helped in their courses.
- 67% said that Jumpstart helped them figure out their next steps in terms of educational goals.
- 51% reported that their focus of study shifted toward topics concerning young children.

The results further show that those who were more intensely involved with Jumpstart, represented by the proxy variable “years of service,” were more likely to strongly agree with each of the statements about Jumpstart’s impact on their post-secondary experience. The figure below compares the results for those serving one year versus those serving more than one year and consistently shows a higher percentage of the latter indicating “strongly agree” on each of the key elements.
AREAS OF STUDY, RETENTION, AND AFFORDABILITY

Jumpstart attracts students studying a wide array of disciplines. When asked what they studied in school as a major, minor, or concentration, 19% of the alumni selected early childhood education, and another 51% studied one or more topics related to their service (as indicated by a list of areas that Jumpstart considers related to the field, e.g., education, psychology). The remaining 30% of respondents studied neither early childhood education nor any of the related areas.

Retention

The question of whether Jumpstart supports college retention (defined here as continued enrollment and eventual degree completion within the same higher education institution) is one of great interest to the organization and to Jumpstart’s higher education partners. The majority of Jumpstart alumni (82%) report that they graduated from the institution where they participated in Jumpstart compared to a national average of 60% who earn a bachelor’s degree from the same institution where they started (NCES, 2020) or were still enrolled at their Jumpstart institution (4%), for a total of 86% retained by their Jumpstart institution compared to a national average of 71%-81% of full-time students starting at four-year institutions who return to the same institution (NCES, 2019; NSC Research Center, 2018).
The survey results suggest that a portion of respondents believe their Jumpstart experience contributed to college retention. Forty-one percent (41%) of alumni agree or strongly agree that they were in a better position to stay in school through graduation than they would have been without Jumpstart.

**College Affordability and Financing**

Related to retention is another important concern: college affordability and financing. This is among the most pressing issues for students, families, and the nation overall and is an element of Jumpstart’s policy agenda. The survey results show that it is an important issue to alumni, with almost all (96%) agreeing that college should be more affordable so that more people can attend and obtain a degree without taking on debt.

When it comes to financing their education, Jumpstart alumni relied on a variety of sources, with most receiving grants and scholarships, loans, and work-study positions. A little under half used their own earnings (salary/wages) to pay for their education.
Among responding alumni, 54% report carrying (or expecting to carry) less than $25,000 in student loan debt, while 46% report carrying more than $25,000 (represented by the two right-most bars in the figure below). For context, the federal government authorizes undergraduates to borrow up to $57,500 for subsidized and unsubsidized loans and, according to Forbes (2020), the average student debt across the United States is $32,731.

Analyses showed some expected differences in debt levels. For example, those with higher levels of education were more likely to hold more student loan debt than their peers. Forty-one percent (41%) of those who pursued further education beyond a bachelor’s degree were carrying over $50,000 in loans, compared to just 19% with a bachelor’s degree and 10% of Jumpstart alumni who had not earned a four-year degree.
The data also show that there are significant differences by race, with a higher percentage of alumni who identify themselves as White or African American taking on more than $50,000 in debt than alumni from other groups. These differences held, regardless of education level.

The majority (65%) of Jumpstart alumni agree that the cost of attending college had an impact on their career plans. Those with higher levels of debt were associated with the largest percentages of those agreeing.

### Compensation

Overall, 80% of alumni received some form of compensation for their Jumpstart service, with some receiving multiple forms of compensation. The most common sources of compensation
were an AmeriCorps Education Award (70%) and Federal Work Study (65%). About a quarter (27%), received a Jumpstart stipend.

Seventy-six percent (76%) who received compensation for their Jumpstart service report that the financial compensation was important or very important to their ability to continue their education.

As shown in the figure below, compensation for Jumpstart services appears to be even more important among alumni who identified themselves as first-generation college students.

As such, Jumpstart contributes to college retention in a financial respect as well.
SECTION 3: JUMPSTART AND CAREER PATHS

The survey also posed a series of questions to understand alumni’s perceptions of Jumpstart’s impact on their career development.

The statements concerning career exposure and the development of job skills received the most agreement from alumni overall:

- 91% acquired skills that are useful in the job market through their participation in Jumpstart.
- 91% learned what it was really like to work in the early childhood education field.
- 84% said that their experience with Jumpstart deepened their interest in working with young children.

Other significant impacts included:

- For 65% of the alumni, Jumpstart provided a “defining professional experience” that confirmed or changed their career goals.
- 57% reported that Jumpstart encouraged them to seriously consider a career in early childhood education.
- 53% made connections in the field through Jumpstart that would help them in their careers.

The data (shown below) demonstrates that alumni who are currently working or have ever worked in the field of early childhood education are more likely to agree that Jumpstart had an impact on their career paths. The finding holds for each of the impact statements listed on the survey, further establishing alumni’s perception of Jumpstart’s role in their decision to pursue careers in this field.
EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

When asked about their current situation, the data show that 35% of the alumni responding to the survey indicate that they are enrolled in school, but the rest—65%—are not. Looking at those not currently pursuing an academic degree, 91% are employed full-time (77%) or part-time (14%). Just 7% were looking for work when they completed the survey and 2% were not in the labor force.

Over half (54%) of Jumpstart alumni are working, have worked, or are currently looking for work as an early childhood educator. Forty-six percent (46%) have never been professionally connected to the field.
Whether or not they have ever worked in the early childhood education field, the data show that most alumni remain connected to another component of Jumpstart’s mission – working in underserved communities. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of Jumpstart alumni have worked in an organization that serves a community in which a high proportion of households qualify as low income, either currently (40%) or in the past (34%).

These findings offer evidence of a commitment among alumni to work in the types of communities Jumpstart cares about most deeply. Alumni reflections on Jumpstart policy statements also suggest an alignment with Jumpstart’s mission: they express overwhelming agreement (96%) with the importance of early childhood education in breaking the cycle of poverty.

**Areas of Undergraduate Study and Career Paths**

The findings show that of those alumni who are currently working in the field of early childhood education (n=254), slightly less than half (46%) studied early childhood education in college. Forty-two percent (42%) studied one or more related fields (e.g., child development, education, education policy, psychology), while 13% did not study any of the related fields.

![Percentage of those currently working in the field of early childhood education by area of study (n=254)](chart)

As a note, of those who previously worked in early childhood education but have since left the field, only 18% studied early education in college (61% studied another relevant field, 21% did not study any of the listed related fields).

**TEACHING CREDENTIALS**

Regardless of their current career, 36% of all the alumni respondents hold (20%) or are working toward (16%) a teaching credential. Looking just at those who are currently working full-time as
early childhood educators, the percentages are much higher, with 76% holding (51%) or working toward (25%) credentials.

Two-thirds of the alumni who hold or are working towards a teaching credential earned it as part of a bachelor’s degree (35%) or master’s degree program (31%). Only 25% report earning their teaching credentials through an alternative program, and 8% were credentialed through an associate degree program. Thirty-nine percent (39%) were able to leverage their Jumpstart experience to earn their teaching credential(s); that is, the hours they served with Jumpstart or the course credit they earned through the program counted toward the practicum/work experience and/or education requirement they needed to receive their credentials.

Of those with credentials (223 respondents), 46% of them hold an infant/toddler/preschool credential, and 37% hold a certificate for teaching in the early elementary grades.
Of the 49% of alumni who selected “Other Grade Level”:

- 33% are certified to teach at the elementary school level
- 23% are certified for middle or high school grades
- 22% are certified as special educators (sometimes indicating a grade, but not always)
- 6% are certified social workers or school counselors, and
- 6% are certified (or aspiring to be certified) to teach as a substitute teacher or in a post-secondary setting.

### Alumni Currently Working as Early Childhood Educators

A series of specific employment-related questions was posed to the group of 254 alumni who are currently working as early childhood educators.

Most of this group (77%) works full time, while the rest (23%) works part time in their current positions. There is a wide range of experience levels among the members of this group: 28% have been employed as an early childhood educator for less than a year, 34% for 1-3 years, 25% for 4-5 years, and 14% have been working in the field for more than five years. Given that the oldest survey respondents had participated in Jumpstart no earlier than 2013, this distribution of tenure is expected.

In terms of their current position, two-thirds report being teachers (49%) or assistant teachers (19%). The rest are teacher aides (11%), family childcare providers (5%), early intervention/child development specialists (4%) or “other” (12%). The “other” category includes a range of positions such as a behavior specialist, substitute teacher, and after-school teacher.
Alumni currently working as early childhood educators report working with different age groups: 63% work with preschool-aged children, 41% with elementary-aged children, 29% with infants/toddlers, and 12% work with other ages, including older elementary and even middle schoolers.

### Ages of children with whom current early childhood educators work (n=248)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Aged</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Aged</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infants/Toddlers</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Age Group</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jumpstart alumni working as early childhood educators report that they are employed in a variety of settings:

- 28% are in a public program,
- 22% are in a private non-profit program,
- 16% are in private for-profit program, and
- 9% are in a family childcare setting.

One quarter responded that they work in another setting, which included public or private schools (17% of the 25%), community agencies, churches, as independent employees in a household, or as a contract worker with an agency.

The range of positions held, age groups engaged, and variety of work settings highlights the extended impact that the Jumpstart experience can have on Corps Members and their enduring commitment to education and careers connected to Jumpstart’s mission.

**Compensation**

Alumni were asked about their annual income from their current early childhood education position and were given ranges of response options from “$20,000 or less” to “$80,000 or higher” per year. For those employed full-time in early education, most (66%) report making between $20,000 and $49,999. Few report earning the higher salary figures.
The salaries of alumni vary based on a number of expected variables such as education and experience levels. For example, those with higher levels of education report earning higher salaries than their peers with fewer degrees. Eighty-six percent (86%) of those with less than a bachelor’s degree are earning less than $35,000 compared to 57% of those with a bachelor’s degree and only 18% of those with a degree higher than a bachelor’s.

The data also show salary variation by factors related to the jobs alumni hold, such as grade levels taught or the setting in which they work. As expected, those teaching elementary-aged students report earning more than their peers teaching younger students. More specifically, 63% of those teaching elementary school students earn over $35,000 per year compared to 44% of those teaching preschoolers and 30% of those teaching infants.
Persistence in the Field

Among those alumni who choose to work as early childhood educators, most (76%) share that they are likely or highly likely to stay in the field. Just 5% indicate that they have definite plans to leave. The percentage is higher (85%) for those who studied early childhood education in college and those who have earned teaching credentials. These Jumpstart alumni embrace an early childhood education professional identity and express clearly that their experiences as Corps Members have influenced this path.

ALUMNI OPINIONS ABOUT THE ECE FIELD

As an organization committed to cultivating a high-quality early education workforce—both by supporting the development of the next generation of early childhood educators as well as by advancing policies that allow the field to attract and retain highly qualified individuals—it is important for Jumpstart to understand the elements that may encourage new workers to enter the field as well as the barriers that stand in their way. This section focuses on both.

Opinions of Early Childhood Educators

The chart below shows the opinions of alumni currently working in the field of early childhood education and how influential various factors were on their decision to become early childhood educators. The experience of being a Jumpstart Corps Member stands out as an important factor for nearly all of them (98%). Career networking through Jumpstart was also an influential factor for 80% of this group.
Regardless of whether they have ever worked or wanted to work in the field, alumni indicate that higher salaries (66%) and loan forgiveness (57%) would be “very important” in making early childhood education an attractive field in which to work. National data help illustrate why these two factors are such a high priority for so many respondents: currently, an early educator earning the nationwide average salary ($34,410) and having the average amount of student debt ($32,731) will spend 16% of their after-tax income on school debt payments ($363 monthly debt service from $2,316 monthly take-home pay), leaving them with only $1,953 per month to pay for all other expenses such as housing, food, and transportation.

In addition, two-thirds of alumni who are currently working in the field say that financial assistance to help pay for the credentialing process and classroom coaching and mentoring would be “very important” to making the field more attractive to them.

**Opinions of Those Not in the Field of Early Childhood Education**

A series of questions was posed to alumni who are not currently working in early childhood education, including those who had worked in early childhood education in the past, those currently trying to find a job in the field, and those who have never worked in early childhood education. The data show different reasons for leaving or not engaging in this work, though salary concerns are among the top reasons for all groups:

- The most common reason among those who left the field was “inadequate salary” (66% of this group).
- The most common reasons among those who never entered the field are “not interested in this kind of work” (65%) and “inadequate salary” (59%).
Among those looking for work in the field, the most frequent barrier is “unable to acquire the needed credential” (53% of this group), followed by inadequate salary (42%) and too much student loan debt (41%).

When asked about elements that would make the early childhood education field more attractive overall, the top three items include:

- Higher salaries for early childhood education jobs (66%),
- Student loan forgiveness for early childhood education professionals (57%), and
- Financial assistance to help pay for the process of gaining needed credentials (56%).

The results demonstrate the need for a professional, stable, and well-compensated early education workforce to support the development and extend the tenure of professionals in the field, both of which are necessary to provide high-quality early education opportunities for all children.
SECTION 4: JUMPSTART CHAMPIONS

Whether or not alumni enter the workforce as early educators, Jumpstart aims to spark or deepen their passion as champions of high-quality early education and advocates for young children in their communities. Jumpstart’s advocacy efforts focus on the areas of early childhood education access, the early education workforce, higher education, and national service. Jumpstart alumni overwhelmingly agree with statements related to all these policy areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of alumni who agree with Jumpstart's policy issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of poverty. (n=1014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College should be more affordable so that more people could attend and obtain a degree without taking on debt. (n=1011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National service programs play an important role in addressing social problems at the community level. (n=1012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would vote for a tax increase if it was going to support comprehensive early education for children in my state. (n=1013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there is widespread agreement with all of the Jumpstart policy priorities, alumni who had more Jumpstart exposure (e.g. had engaged in more than one year of service) are even more likely to strongly agree with the Jumpstart policies regarding the importance of early childhood education, national service, and a tax increase to support early childhood education in their state. There is no significant difference in opinions about college affordability, however, as this issue seems to be highly important to all.
Continued Engagement with Jumpstart

Most alumni say they are interested in continuing to be engaged in Jumpstart. Most say they would be likely or very likely to:

- Engage in advocacy efforts with Jumpstart (76%),
- Be part of a job search network (56%), and
- Attend alumni networking or training events (57%).

A little less than half say they would participate in alumni training webinars (45%) or make a donation during an annual appeal (43%). Not surprisingly, those who are currently working as early childhood educators are more likely to report that they would engage in Jumpstart alumni activities. Interestingly, there is no difference in the likelihood of donating to an annual appeal by those who are and are not employed in the early childhood education field.
CONCLUSION

Through the survey, Jumpstart alumni shared their opinions, described their educational and career paths, and reflected on Jumpstart’s key policy issues. The results suggest that, as a group, alumni look back at their Jumpstart experience as an impactful one that helped them gain valuable skills and experience and shaped their career paths. Alumni agree that their experience as Jumpstart Corps Members influenced them in myriad ways, from deepening the connection they felt to their college or university community to exposing them to the realities of careers in early childhood education. The impact of Jumpstart was felt and reported both by those who chose to enter the field of early childhood education and those who did not. While the data show stronger perceptions of impact among those who had more intensive Jumpstart experiences, there is overall agreement that the Jumpstart experience was a valuable one. This retrospective feedback is consistent with what Jumpstart has learned from annual post-service surveys of Corps Members and suggests that the future career plans and views about early education that Corps Members form during their Jumpstart service persist post-service.

Results also indicate that financial factors play a large part in alumni’s decisions to enter and remain in the early childhood education field and that advocating for higher salaries and loan forgiveness will be critical elements of Jumpstart’s policy agenda in order to support and grow the early education workforce. Finally, the data from these surveys together paint an important picture about the ways Jumpstart can achieve its vision of the day all children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed: by supporting its alumni and cultivating a highly qualified early childhood education workforce through intentional programmatic offerings and a robust policy agenda.