



How Walmart helps employees build lifelong careers with tuition-free education and career pathways

Guild

Walmart 

As the world's biggest employer, Walmart paved the way for other industry leaders to transform traditional education benefits into strategic programming aligned with skills gaps and company goals. Offering tuition-free education helps Walmart drive frontline enrollment, attract talent for in-demand roles, and staff cybersecurity positions nationwide.

The problem

To level up the business, Walmart needed to evolve the skills and learning programs available to employees

Walmart Inc., an American multinational retail corporation, ranks #1 on the Fortune 500 list of companies as the world's largest employer. With over 2.3 million associates worldwide, and nearly 1.6 million associates in the U.S. alone,¹ Walmart is committed to creating growth opportunities for its employees and designing pathways that move workers into valued, high-demand, and often higher-paying positions.

In 2018, Walmart partnered with Guild to design and launch an education benefits program, known as Live Better U (LBU). Full- and part-time U.S.-based associates had access to fully-funded associate's and bachelor's degrees by contributing a dollar a day toward tuition and books. All hourly frontline associates who had spent at least 90 days with Walmart could choose from 57 educational programs ranging from high school completion to degrees in business administration and supply chain management. In the course of a year since launch, over 12,000 associates enrolled in various programs.¹



#1

World's largest employer

2.3M

Associates worldwide

1.6M

Associates in the U.S. alone

And in June 2020, Walmart opened access further by removing the eligibility criteria of 90 days of employment. Meaning, all Walmart employees could begin taking advantage of LBU on day one.

Enrollment numbers were strong, but less than the number of people expressing interest in continuing education. Walmart began to rethink the partial funding of education programs, originally designed under the belief that a financial “skin in the game” approach drives accountability and commitment. In fact, out-of-pocket expenses are a blocker to continuing education: **The total financial burden associated with enrolling in an education program remains the number one barrier to enrollment and the primary reason for dropping out.** For Walmart, the dollar a day investment was especially prohibitive for a primary target group — hourly associates, specifically people of color.



Enrollment

among frontline workers increases



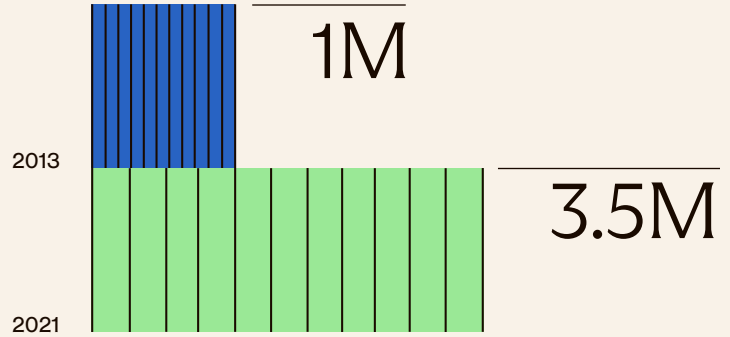
Wage

increases 2.4x higher

Data shows that **enrollment among frontline workers increases** with a tuition-free program that eliminates out-of-pocket expenses. And, employees who participate in tuition-free education programs are rewarded with a **2.4x higher wage** increase relative to non-students in their first year of student enrollment.³

At the same time Walmart was considering making LBU tuition-free, the retail giant recognized a glaring skills gap that was expected to grow in the coming years: the need for cybersecurity professionals. The demand for cybersecurity professionals has been growing rapidly, even faster than companies can hire: the number of unfilled cybersecurity jobs worldwide grew 350% between 2013 and 2021, from 1 million to 3.5 million.⁴

The number of unfilled cybersecurity jobs worldwide grew 350%



The solution

Tuition-free education to increase access and upskill associates into growth areas

Intent on expanding access to continuing education for frontline workers, as well as encouraging employees to consider cybersecurity as a career option, Walmart eliminated the “dollar a day” requirement in July 2021.

The cost of tuition and books is now fully paid for.

Through LBU, Walmart associates can enroll in degree, certificate, and bootcamp programs like business, supply chain, technology, skilled trades, and health and wellness. A wide range of short-form programs offer skills in project management, frontline leadership, HR management, and much more. And foundational programs within LBU include high school completion, English language learning, and even ACT/SAT test preparation.

As the largest U.S. private employer, Walmart has committed to invest nearly \$1 billion over the next five years in career-driven training and development.³



Nearly \$1 billion

committed to be invested over the next five years in career-driven training and development

Increased promotion rates at LBU

One of the many ways LBU demonstrated clear value was increased promotion rates²

87.5%

of Black program participants were more likely to earn a promotion

80%

of white hourly participants were more likely to receive a promotion than non-participants

70.7%

of Hispanic/Latino associates were more likely to earn a promotion

17%

of Black program participants were more likely to earn a promotion

~17%

of male participants gained a promotion, 95% more than non-participating men

16.9%

of program participants were promoted

The results

Tuition-free education attracts talent, drives mobility, and staffs cybersecurity roles

Since removing the requirement of \$1-a-day, Walmart witnessed a 66% increase in enrollment.⁵ And, 2 out of 3 of existing employees engaging with the program had been with the company for over a year, demonstrating that the \$1-a-day was indeed a financial barrier.³

LBU also attracts talent in a tight labor market. New hires are opening an LBU account within 30 days of hire at nearly 2x higher rate year-over-year. Reflecting its broad appeal, the new hires enrolling in the program are 1.2x more likely to be employees of color than the Walmart associate population as a whole.³ And, Walmart's hourly associates who participated in LBU are leaving the company at a rate 4x lower than non-participants.²

Since the launch of LBU in 2018, Walmart associates have saved an estimated \$333 million in tuition costs, and over 89,000 Walmart associates have participated in LBU. More than 15,000 students have completed a degree or programs⁵ and over 1,500 of those employees earned an associate's or bachelor's degree in an in-demand field.⁶ To date, more than a dozen associates have been hired into Home Office Cybersecurity roles, and Walmart plans to grow this program further in 2022.⁷

“Our education offerings tie directly to our growth areas at Walmart, and what better way to fill the pipeline of future talent than with our own associates. This investment is another way we can support our associates to pursue their passion and purpose while removing the barriers that too often keep adult working learners from obtaining degrees.”

Lorraine Stomski
Senior VP of Learning and
Leadership, Walmart



\$333M

Saved in tuition costs

+89k

Enrolled in the program

+15k

Completed LBU programs

+1.5k

Earned an associate's or
bachelor's degree



Career pathways, internships, and a talent marketplace

Looking ahead, the world's largest retailer has plans to continue expanding and optimizing Live Better U. Recognizing that education and skills are only the first step to future-proof careers, Walmart is beginning to create opportunities for internships and fellowships for its graduates.



“Live Better U is not just an education benefit. It is an opportunity for Walmart associates to build better careers for themselves and better lives for their families. It is gratifying for Walmart as an organization to see associates talking about how this door to education that was once shut with innumerable barriers stacked up against it, has suddenly been knocked down, and they can just walk through it toward a better future.”

Beth Williams-Moore
Director, Live Better U

Fast facts



Industry

Retail



2.3M+

Across Walmart companies



Employee cost

No cost to employees for tuition, books, or fees



Program launch

Walmart officially launched with Guild in 2018



Programs

High school completion, college prep, certificates, language learning, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees

Sources

- 1 [Walmart](#)
- 2 [Lumina Foundation](#)
- 3 [HBR](#)
- 4 [Fortune](#)
- 5 [Walmart Blog](#)
- 6 [Walmart ESG](#)
- 7 [Walmart ESG Data](#)

Guild helps Fortune 1000 employers align their workforces with the economy of the future through thoughtful education benefits programs designed to attract, retain, and advance talent. To learn more, visit [guild.com](https://www.guild.com).

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