

# APPENDIX B

## RESEARCH STUDY OF SKILLS CENTER ACCESS Second Substitute Senate Bill 5717

### Findings and Options

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### Final Report October 2006

Submitted to the  
**Washington State  
Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board**

By

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# **RESEARCH STUDY OF SKILLS CENTER ACCESS**

**Second Substitute Senate Bill 5717 (2006)**

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# RESEARCH STUDY OF SKILLS CENTER ACCESS

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## Background

The 2006 Washington State Legislature passed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5717 (2SSB 5717) directing the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) to conduct a study and report back to the 2007 legislature regarding how best to provide increased opportunities for students living in areas of the state that are not currently adequately served by a skills center.

The Workforce Board contracted with CTE Services of Olympia, Washington to conduct the research portions of 2SSB 5717 related to the following questions:

1. *What are the best options for providing students in rural and remote areas increased access to a skills center programs?*
2. *What are the difficulties in providing adequate skills center services to high-density areas of the state and how can they be addressed?*
3. *What additional funding or different funding methods are necessary to implement findings and recommendations identified in questions 1 & 2 or to enhance the current efforts of skills centers?*

CTE Services, in collaboration with the study advisory committee comprised of representatives of skills centers, Washington Association of Career and Technical Education (WACTE), Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Workforce Board, determined five basic assumptions which helped guide the study and will assist in development of recommendations reported to the 2007 legislature. These assumptions are:

1. There is an increasing need for access by students in rural, remote and certain high-density areas of Washington to the specialized career and technical programs and services offered by skills centers.
2. To provide adequate access for all high school students, skills centers will need to consider new, enhanced, or modified instructional and learning methodology for delivery of programs and services.
3. To provide increased skill center opportunities to students, new levels of collaboration and integration with higher education, business, and labor must be achieved.
4. Additional funding or new/different funding sources will be necessary to provide all students with adequate access to skills center programs and services.
5. The changes necessary to increase student access to skills center programs and services will not occur unless the legislature, state agencies, school districts, skills centers, colleges and communities develop the leadership capacities necessary to support those changes.

## Research Methodology

For each of the study topics listed above, a set of research questions was developed and approved by the study advisory committee. The ten existing skills centers were provided and questionnaires relating to research questions 1 & 3. The five skill center feasibility studies (Seattle, northeast King County, Pierce County, Moses Lake and Skagit County) authorized by Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6384 (the 2006 Capital Budget) were also provided questionnaires. The Seattle, northeast King County, Pierce County groups received

questionnaires addressing research questions 2 & 3. Moses Lake and Skagit County received questionnaires relating to research questions 1 & 3. All ten existing skills centers provided responses to the questionnaire. Four of five feasibility groups responded to the questionnaires.

To obtain additional or supplemental background information, telephone or onsite interviews were conducted with representatives of the ten existing skills centers and five feasibility study groups. A group interview was also conducted with the skills center directors to solicit their collective input. Interviews were also conducted with OSPI administrators responsible for career and technical education, capital budget, apportionment and financial services to collect data and information related to skills centers, rural and high-density schools.

Contributions to this study were also received from school superintendents, career and technical education directors, district business managers, and school board members representing both rural and high-density schools.

# 1. Skills Center Programs for Rural and Remote Students

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## Summary of Findings

Following is a summary of responses to a study questionnaire provided to directors of the ten existing skills centers in Washington State. The questionnaire was designed to collect data and information relating to access to skills center programs by students living in rural and remote areas. For purposes of this study, the U.S. Census Bureau definition of rural and remote areas was used: “small town communities outside of metropolitan areas with a population of 25,000 or less.”

All ten existing skills centers responded to the questionnaire. Follow-up telephone and onsite interviews were also conducted with the skills center directors and/or staff members to gather additional information. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the proposed Skagit County Technical Skills Center and the Moses Lake School District to solicit their input on their plans/methods for creating access for students in the rural outlying areas of their geographic areas. The Moses Lake School District received funding through 2006 Legislature to conduct a feasibility study for a skills center serving central Washington.

## Definitions

Throughout this report the terms “satellite program” and “branch campus” are frequently used. For purposes of this report, these terms are defined as follows:

Satellite program – A skills center program provided at a location away from the core skills center facility.

Branch campus – A specifically designated facility or location away from the core skills center facility which provides three or more skills center programs at that site.

## Current Effort

Skills center’s historical role has been to serve students from their cooperative or consortium schools. Nine of ten existing skills centers in Washington State indicate that no special emphasis is currently being placed on providing skills center programs to non-cooperative students attending rural and remote schools in their geographic area. Since skills centers were created by cooperatives of districts to serve students from those districts with high-cost, specialized programs simulating business and industry, skills centers continue to view their primary mission as serving students from their cooperative schools. However, all skills centers indicate they welcome and serve students from non-cooperative rural school at their skills centers.

- Programming targeted specifically toward rural students (non-skills center cooperative schools) through satellite programs/branch campuses, distance/online learning or summer and evening sessions is not currently available from or provided by:
  - Clark County Skills Center, Vancouver
  - New Market Skills Center, Tumwater
  - North Central Technical Skills Center, Wenatchee
  - North Olympic Peninsula Skills Center, Port Angeles
  - SeaTac Occupational Skills Center, Burien
  - Sno-Isle Skills Center, Mukilteo
  - Spokane Area Professional-Technical Skills Center, Spokane

- Tri-Tech Skills Center, Kennewick
  - West Sound Skills Center, Bremerton.
- Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center is currently serving approximately 28 full-time equivalent (FTE) students from four non-cooperative districts in the Lower Yakima Valley (Grandview, Granger, Prosser, and Sunnyside) through satellite programs in cosmetology and nursing. Instruction for the nursing program is provided through a cooperative agreement with Yakima Valley College. Cosmetology students attend a program provided by a private contractor.
  - Based on September 2006 counts, the North Central Technical Skills Center (NCTSC) in Wenatchee is serving 54 FTE through four satellite programs in Moses Lake. The Moses Lake School District is not a member of the NCTSC cooperative. The FTEs generated through the Moses Lake satellite programs represents approximately 35 percent of the NCTSC's total FTEs.
  - The North Olympic Skills Center, Port Angeles currently operate satellite programs serving students approximately 18 FTE though their Forks and Sequim satellite programs. The Forks and Sequim schools districts are member of the North Olympic Skills Center cooperative.
  - Six skills centers indicated that they serve an average of five to seven students per year from non-cooperative outlying rural schools. Two skills centers in high-density areas reported they have not served any non-consortium rural students.
  - Students from rural and remote schools represent less than 2 percent of the annual student population attending skills centers.

### **Planning Underway**

Eight of ten skills centers indicate they are not planning for or expect to implement programs specifically targeted to serve rural and remote students in the next five years.

- Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center has received funding from OSPI and will be conducting a feasibility study for a Lower Yakima Valley branch campus in 2009. This branch campus will serve rural schools who are not currently members of the skills center cooperative. Construction of a site, possibly in Sunnyside is scheduled for 2011.
- Upon completion of technology upgraded completed as part of its current capital construction project, New Market Skills Center is planning to make available portions of an online construction trades apprenticeship program to both cooperative and non-cooperative students. Program would be available to students statewide and would be counted as New Market students.

## Challenges to Providing Services

Specific challenges and/or barriers listed by skills center directors preventing or limiting their centers from providing or increasing programming to students in rural and remote areas:

- **Transportation time and logistics in getting to the skills center.** For students more than twenty driving miles to from a skills center, the time necessary to travel to and from the skills center is most often limited by a combination of factors—their required schedule at their home high school, participation in sports or extracurricular activities, traffic congestion, availability of transportation, after school work, etc. They simply cannot fit the daily three-hour skills center program into their schedule if they either self-transport or ride transportation provided by their home district.
- **Funding.** Many rural schools may limit the number of students who can attend a skills center or do not encourage students to attend a skills center program because they will lose the .6 FTE to the skills center. Skills center directors unanimously agree that the current 1.0 FTE funding lid (.4 FTE retained by the high school sending a student to a skills center and .6 FTE going to the skills center) is the major barrier limiting participation by students from smaller, rural schools. Small schools cannot afford to lose the FTE. Connection to the K-20 network and technology infrastructure capacity.
  - Nine of ten skills centers are not connected to the K-20 network. New Market Skills Center, Tumwater currently is the only skills center having K-20 connection. These nine skills centers have limited capacity or are currently unable to host or provide distance and online learning applications for portions of or entire programs.
  - Technology infrastructure and capacity varies tremendously between skills centers. In the case of Tri-Tech Skills Center in Kennewick, bandwidth capacity is limited to a shared T-1 line. By comparison, the Spokane Skills Center has a state-of-the-art fiber optic network. Skills Center technology infrastructures are typically provided and maintained by the hosting district.
- **OSPI Skills Center Policy Guidelines.** Start-up and operation criteria for skills centers are contained in non-codified policy guidelines established by OSPI. Since creation of the first skills center in 1966, this modest criterion has undergone minor modifications - the most recent in 1998. These guidelines are credited by skills centers with helping to maintain their unique role, identity, and contribution to workforce development. However, these guidelines have not been strictly adhered to or enforced by OSPI. Specific operational criteria contained in these policy guidelines cited by skills center directors as potentially limiting factors to serving students in rural and remote areas include requirements that skills centers:
  - *“Have a core facility with a minimum of 70 percent of students enrolled on the core campus.”* This requirement limits the number of students a skills center could serve through satellite programs, branch campuses, distance learning integrated programs with colleges, programs at business location, off-campus after-school, summer and evening programs, etc.
  - *“Have class sessions equivalent to three consecutive 50-minute class with 0.2 funding priority given to each 50-minutes Skills Center class period.”* This forty year-old block “seat time” model limits conflicts with the recent movement amongst skills center’s ability to implement authentic competency or performance based programs (competency or mastery obtained in less than 540 hours of attendance per year). This requirement may also limit the type of online learning or hybrid learning (combination of online and on-campus learning) a skills center might provide.
  - *“Member districts are responsible for equipment replacement, facility maintenance and ongoing operation of the skills center.”* Non-cooperative districts having

- significant numbers of students participating in skills center programs would not be required to contribute to the costs listed above.
- *“Member districts would provide ancillary services to the skills center.”* Non-cooperative districts having significant numbers of students participating in skills center programs would not be required to contribute supplemental services.
  - *“Member districts will follow policies and procedures to avoid duplication of programs and services between the Skills Center and member districts.”* Once the number of skills center student from a non-cooperative district reached a certain participation level in a satellite program or branch campus, nothing would preclude that district from seeking approval from OSPI to begin a similar career and technical education program in their district. Once that program was created, the skills center would lose the enrollment and much of the investment made to create that program. Lacking the power of enforcement for these guidelines by OSPI, this could become a significant problem for skills centers.

Concerns communicated by two of the smaller, newer skills centers, Wenatchee and Port Angeles, related to the OSPI policy guideline requirements for maintenance of 150 annual student FTE and 70 percent of students being served at their core campus. At the time of this study, the North Central Technical Skills Center serving approximately 35 percent of its total enrollment at its Moses Lake High School satellite programs - slightly below the 70 percent threshold. The North Olympic Peninsula Skills Center also expressed similar concern with potential growth of its Forks and Sequim satellite programs with addition of a Medical Careers program at each. Further growth in the percentage of student enrollment in these satellite programs would put them out of compliance with that requirement.

## **Opportunities**

Five significant areas of opportunity were identified by questionnaire and interview respondents for increasing access of rural and remote students to skills center programs:

**Satellite/Branch Campus Programs.** Skills center directors pointed out that not all programs they provide are suitable or feasible for delivery through a satellite programs or a branch campus. High cost facilities and equipment intensive programs such as automotive, culinary arts, collision repair, welding, etc. will limit the scope of what could be offered through satellite programs and branch campuses. For both satellite programs and branch campuses to be viable, a minimum threshold for student enrollment would be required.

Program areas related to medical careers, natural resources, information systems technology, criminal justice, finance, cosmetology, fire science, graphic design, pre-veterinary tech and construction trades were examples provided by directors as programs feasible for delivery through satellite programs or branch campuses.

**Distance/Online Learning.** All skills centers see considerable opportunity for delivery of all or portions of selected programs by means of web-based or interactive television distance learning applications. Directors cautioned that for some programs, distance learning cannot be completely substituted for hands-on learning in a laboratory. To implement distance or online learning, skills centers need:

- Adequate, up-to-date technology infrastructures, high volume servers, digital media equipment and production facilities, etc.
- K-20 network or other high-capacity network connectivity
- Instructor training for development of online curriculum and teaching.
- Support staff for operation and maintenance of the technology.

**Collaboration with Higher Education.** All skills centers have established articulation agreements with community and technical colleges within their areas for awarding college credit to students transferring to those institutions. Two skills centers currently utilize shared/use funded facilities for one or more programs. Three skills centers contract with a college for instruction or share instructors with a college program.

Examples cited as potential collaborative activities between skills centers and colleges to increase access for students in rural and remote areas include:

- Use of college branch campus facilities as sites for delivery of skills center programs.
- Contracted instruction provided by a college at a college branch campus.
- Joint curriculum development and instructional delivery for selected online programs. Students would earn joint skills center and college credit.
- College branch campus facilities used for summer, late afternoon, or evening skills center programs.

1) **Collaboration with Business and Labor.** All skills centers indicate they currently collaborate with businesses and labor for provision of either on-site campus or off campus training programs (e.g., health occupations programs as medical facilities, fire service programs at fire stations, contracted programs with private cosmetology schools, pre-apprenticeship programs, etc.). Eight of ten skills centers indicate they have not specifically explored the use of these collaborative business or labor programs to serve students in rural areas. However, there is consensus that this might be a viable option.

2) **Link with Career Pathways.** Skills centers typically have not worked with non-cooperative schools to link their career pathways to skills center programs since the non-cooperative schools do not send students to skills centers. Most rural high schools meet OSPI standards by aligning their exploratory programs to surrounding community college programs or other postsecondary professional-technical programs. However, all center directors concur that connecting skills center programs to rural high school pathway programs through distance learning applications or satellite programs would create a more meaningful pathway system for these students.

## **New Initiatives**

Following are initiatives suggested for consideration by study respondents that would positively impact program quality and delivery of skills center programs. Suggestion represent the combined input received from skills centers, representative of a recently completed skills center feasibility study, and representatives of the four new skills centers feasibility studies authorized by the 2006 legislature. These initiatives would provide benefits to all skills center students – those in current cooperatives, students in rural and remote areas, and students served in the future in high-density areas.

**Link to College Centers for Excellence.** The Washington State Legislature has provided funding for grants administered by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to flagship colleges for building and sustaining Washington's competitive advantage through statewide workforce development leadership. Each Center focuses on a targeted industry that drives the state's economy and is designed to provide fast, flexible, high-quality education and training programs. A targeted industry is identified as one that is strategic to the economic growth of a region or state. Centers are guided by industry representatives to lead collaborative and coordinated statewide education and training efforts to build a competitive workforce in a global economy. To date, 11 Centers for Excellence have been created representing eleven different high-demand occupational areas. More are in the planning stage. Current skills

centers programs align with the occupational emphasis of nine college Centers for Excellence. Benefits cited by study participants for skills center collaboration with the Centers for Excellence include access to:

- Innovation and responsive education and training delivery to targeted high-demand industries.
- Information and resources related to targeted industries.
- Industry research into best practices.
- System coordination, coaching, and mentoring to assist in building seamless educational and work-related systems.
- Assistance with focusing programs on driver industries in Washington State.

**Create a Skills Center “Center for Excellence.”** Study participants stressed that as the number of skills centers increase and expectations intensify for skills centers to focus on high-demand programs and academic enrichment, there will be a need for a skills center hub for facilitating delivery of high-quality programs and services. Presently, each skills center creates and delivers programs and services as an independent entity. Coordination of programs between skills centers presently occurs through a limited number of annual “job alike” sessions or through inservice sessions conducted as adjunct activities at related conferences. Each skills center develops curriculum and provides professional development independently. Other than regularly scheduled skills center director meetings, a formal network or system to enhance skills center programs does not exist. Suggested functions envisioned for a skills center type center for excellence include:

- Serving as a hub for collaborative development of curriculum, exchange of information, and a repository for best practices.
- Facilitating joint professional development through online programs or interactive television (I-TV).
- Providing opportunities for skills centers to provide simulcast instruction and access the wide array of I-TV training programs provided by industry.
- Serving as the access point for students (cooperative, rural, and high-density) to participating in online and distance learning opportunities. Students accessing this state-wide electronic skills center portal could select and choose the online program of their choice – provided by any of the skills center. Various skills centers could be also be designated as “flagship” centers for delivery of specialized distance education programs.
- Functioning as the virtual connecting mechanism to the college centers for excellence, business, industry and labor.

## **Best Options: Serving Rural and Remote Students**

Study findings reveal that increasing access to skills centers programs for rural and remote students can be accomplished through one, or combination of the options described below. However, all study participants strongly emphasized that maintaining the current skills center funding model, definition and operational criteria while attempting to provide programs to presently unserved rural students will severely limit or prevent their efforts. Recommended strategies for addressing challenges and issues are included with each option.

### ***Option 1 - Establish Skills Center Branch Campuses***

Creating skills center satellite programs or branch campuses clearly emerged from this study a viable and the preferred option for increasing access to students living in rural and remote areas.

- Seven skills centers located in the less urban areas of the state as well as the Moses Lake feasibility study group indicated satellite programs or branch campuses would be a highly effective way of delivering skills center programs. Study participants strongly felt that by creating satellite programs or branch campuses, students could participate in the same high-quality, applied learning provided at the main skills center.
- Analysis of the Geographic Information Study (GIS) data collected as part of this study reveals that there are several rural areas of the state with sufficient student populations to potentially support a skills center satellite program or branch campus. In the case of six skills centers located in the less urban areas of the state, GIS data appears to validate a “brainstorming” question that was posed to skills center directors during interview sessions. Based on their knowledge of rural student populations and career and technical education programs provided by rural schools in their geographic area, director were asked to identify possible sites for skills centers satellite programs or branch campuses. It should be noted that, with the exception of the Yakima Valley, New Market and North Central Skills Centers, formal discussions with schools in a potential branch campus area have not taken place. Potential locations for satellite programs or branch campuses identified by skills centers include:
  - **Clark County Skills Center** – Possible satellite programs and/or branch campus in Cowlitz County.
  - **New Market Skills Center** – Possible satellite programs or branch campus locations in the Centralia/Chehalis and Grays Harbor areas. (Note: New Market arranged for fire science program to be delivered in Montesano through a collaborative effort with the local fire department. Sufficient enrollment was not achieved. Primary reason cited was lack of support from local high schools because of the loss of .6 FTE to the skills center.)
  - **North Central Technical Skills Center** – Discussions currently underway related to a possible fire science program in Omak. Possibility for other satellite programs in Omak. Another potential location for a satellite programs would be in Waterville to serve students from several rural high schools in that area.
  - **North Olympic Peninsula Skills Center** – Possible satellite program location in the Port Townsend area (Currently operating a contracted cosmetology program in Port Hadlock.)
  - **Tri-Tech Skills Center** – Possible satellite location in the Walla Walla area.
  - **Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center** – Planning underway for a branch campus in the Lower Yakima Valley. Another potential location for satellite programs or a branch campus would be Ellensburg.

## Strategies to Consider

- Review the following OSPI skills center policy guidelines in relation to limitation they may place on serving rural students through expansion of skills center programs by means of satellite programs or branch campuses:
  - Operational Criteria #12 – “*The vocational skills center will have an identifiable core campus 70 percent maximum.*” The language is confusing and is being interpreted as meaning a core campus with a minimum of 70 percent of the student enrollment on the core campus. The 70 percent minimum enrollment on the core campus would effectively limit the number of students a skills center could serve through satellite programs or branch campuses.

Modify and codify this guideline as necessary.

- Provide an incentive for skills centers to conduct OSPI approved feasibility studies for serving non-cooperative rural students in their geographic areas.
- Encourage developmental planning for branch campuses. Currently unserved rural areas could partner with an existing skills center to create satellite programs or a branch campus. Once the branch campus reached sufficient enrollment to become self-sustaining, it could spin-off and become a separate skills center or remain an extension of the founding skills center.
- Correlate programs offered through satellite programs and branch campuses to locally identified high-demand programs.

## Option 2 - Create Infrastructure for Distance/Online Learning

Delivery of all or portions of selected skills center programs by means of web-based, interactive television or other distance learning applications would significantly increase opportunities for rural students state-wide to participate in skills center programs. Online programs could be accessed by students 24/7/365.

## Strategies to Consider

- Review the following OSPI skills center policy guideline in relation to limitation they may place on serving students (both rural students and students within their cooperatives) through distance learning applications:
  - Operational Criteria #12 – “*The vocational skills center will have an identifiable core campus 70 percent maximum.*” The language is confusing and is being interpreted as meaning a core campus with a minimum of 70 percent of the student enrollment on the core campus. The 70 percent minimum enrollment on the core campus would effectively limit the number of students a skills center could serve through distance learning.

Modify and codify this guideline as necessary.

- Develop a master plan that identifies the standards and resources for creating the necessary technology infrastructure for connecting all skills centers to the K-20 network. Connection to the K-20 network will be essential for delivery of distance learning.
- Provide state-level leadership and resources through OSPI for distance learning curriculum development, including the creation of skills center “Centers of Excellence” focusing on training programs for high-demand occupations. The skills center’s “Centers of Excellence” should be created in collaboration with the targeted

industry Centers for Excellence established by technical and community colleges in Washington State. Connecting the skills center's "Centers of Excellence" with the college's Centers for Excellence will facilitate program integration and allow for seamless transition of skills center students to high-demand college programs. The skills center's "Centers of Excellence" would also serve as the distance learning portal for statewide student access to integrated programs focused on driver industries.

### ***Option 3 – Collaborative Programs with High Schools, Higher Education, Business and Government***

Considerable opportunities exist for collaborative ventures between skills centers, high schools and both public and private institutions of higher education in providing skills center program access to students in rural areas. Possibilities include:

- Linking skills center programs to career pathway programs in rural school. Skills center programs enhance learning opportunities within those pathways by providing in-depth, industry aligned/standards based curriculum a rural school typically cannot provide.
- Utilization of existing local career and technical education facilities in non-cooperative rural high schools for delivery of regular day, late afternoon, or evening skills center programs. (Two skills centers currently utilize existing facilities of their cooperative schools to provide satellite programs. Schedules at these schools have been arranged to accommodate the length of skills center programs).
- Utilization of college branch campus facilities. Several skills center currently and successfully utilize college facilities and instructors for delivery of programs on main campuses. College branch campuses presently exist in several of the underserved areas identified in the skills center GIS study. Co-location of a skills center branch campus on a college branch campus should be given consideration to encourage program integration, shared use of facilities, etc. Arrangement for rural students to use college branch campus distance learning facilities for participation in skills center programs is also a possibility.

Skills centers also utilize facilities and provide programs through contractual or cooperative arrangements with businesses, local and state government agencies. Some of these programs are conducted at the business sites or agency location (e.g., medical careers/health occupations, cosmetology programs, fire science, etc.). Providing skills center programs through these arrangements have proven to be cost-effective and mutually beneficial. Many businesses and agencies are also willing to provide internships or serve as mentors to students. Possibilities exist in some rural areas for students to complete a portion of their skills center program in cooperation with local business or agencies. Internships or structured work-based learning experiences could be an integral part of skills center distance learning programs.

### **Strategies to Consider**

- Include a feasibility study requirement for skills center desiring to expand programming in rural areas through satellite or branch campus programs to explore and pursue collaborative opportunities with area high schools, colleges, or college branch campuses for shared use of existing or planned facilities prior to requesting capital construction funding for a skills center branch campus.
- Correlate, where possible, programs offered through collaborative efforts with colleges with the appropriate college Center for Excellence to access and utilize available resources and industry networks.

- Create an incentive for skills centers to create collaborative learning opportunities for rural students through contractual or cooperative arrangements local businesses or government agencies. For example, provide competitive grant awards to skills centers for purposes of creating learning partnerships with rural business and government agencies. Funds would help defray additional costs associated with supplemental services and supervision.

#### ***Option 4 – Summer and Evening Programs***

Skills centers are very supportive and interested in expanding programs to rural students through summer, late afternoon (third session) and evening sessions. These programs could be delivered through collaboration with rural high schools and college branch campuses. Most career and technical education program facilities in rural high schools are not utilized during the summer months.

##### **Strategies to Consider**

- Create a financial incentive for skills centers to provide summer school programs to rural students aligned with regionally identified high-demand occupations. For example, 200 FTE could be added onto the regular skills center summer school FTE allocation targeted toward rural students. Skills centers would then submit competitive proposals for delivery of high-demand summer programs.
- Changes to the skills center funding model proposed in Section 3 would provide an incentive to both the rural high school and skills centers to create late afternoon or evening programs for delivery of skills center programs.

## 2. Skills Center Services in High-density Areas

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### Summary of Findings

Study questionnaires designed specifically to identify difficulties and challenges associated with providing adequate skills center services in high-density areas were sent to the three entities who were awarded funding for feasibility studies through Substitute Senate Bill 5717 (2006 Budget Bill) – the Seattle School District, Pierce County/Bethel School District, and the North East Vocational Area Cooperative (NEVAC). NEVAC has served as a cooperative comprised of school districts in north east King County region for twenty-five years. Since funding for these studies only became available in July 2006, recipients were in the very early stages of organizing their feasibility studies and were only capable of providing very limited information through questionnaire responses. To supplement this information, interviews were conducted with representatives of each of the three feasibility groups.

Following is a summary of historical information and findings compiled from the questionnaires and interviews. Commonly identified difficulties, challenges and perceived barrier are presented as well as challenges relating to a specific school district or locale.

### History

**NEVAC:** In 1997, NEVAC submitted a feasibility study to OSPI for creation of the High Technology Skills Center. The 1998 Legislature, responding to an increasing number of requests to establish skills center, directed OSPI to conduct a study to clarify the definition of a skills center and determine the unique costs of operating a skills center. As part of that study, feasibility studies for the NEVAC High Technology Skills Center and North Olympic Peninsula Skills Center (Port Angeles) were reviewed. The NEVAC skills center was not approved on the basis that its proposal did not meet the OSPI policy guideline criteria for skills center start-up and operation. Minor changes had been made to the policy guidelines by the study. Specific rationale referenced in the study report for not approving the proposal was that NEVAC was proposing a skills center “with out” walls, lacked a core facility, and exceeded the maximum of 70% of student FTE from a single district.

**Pierce County:** Prior to 2006, no formal or informal effort to establish a skills center in Pierce County can be identified. For many years, prior to the Vocational Technical Institutes (VTIs) moving from the K-12 system to the community college system, high school students in the county were able to access occupational training programs at Clover Park and Bates Vocational Technical Institutes. When Clover Park and Bates became part of the state community and technical college system, attending programs at these institutions became less of an option for Pierce County high school students. Subsequently, the larger Pierce County school districts (Puyallup, Bethel and Tacoma) began to develop programs that were on par with what students could access previously at the VTIs. These districts did not see a need for a skills center.

**Seattle School District:** Career and technical education programs in the Seattle School District have traditionally been delivered through the comprehensive high schools. The concept of a Seattle skills center has been discussed informally at various points in time but has never surfaced as a district priority. Emphasis has been placed on creating strong, engaging, and relevant CTE programs at the high schools. The district views some of these programs as comparable to those offered by skills centers

## **Common Challenges to Providing Skills Center Services**

Major challenge areas all three high-density feasibility study groups will be addressing are:

**Transportation.** Complications resulting from increasing traffic congestion and travel time to and from a centralized skills center facility were cited as the largest challenge and potential barrier to student participation. Students commuting to the skills center from their home high schools may not have enough time in their skills center program due to sitting in traffic and arriving well after class begins. Based on the current OSPI requirement for a daily three-hour block of instruction, high-density skills center may have to create a four hour session so students may begin their allotted three hours starting once they arrive or use rolling start times to compensate for late arrivals. The complexity resulting from transportation issues will require these skills centers to look at session time frames differently.

All three feasibility study groups indicated that the solution to transporting students to skills center programs was not to put more school buses on the streets. Public or self-transportation will be the primary way students would get to a skills center program.

**High Cost of Land Acquisition and Construction in an Urban Area.** All high-density feasibility study groups indicated that there will be multiple issues and complexities related to obtaining a parcel of land large enough for a traditional centralized skills center facility if they are required to follow the current OSPI policy guidelines. Availability and competition for property suitable for a campus, zoning issues, and costs associated with providing the required parking were major issues cited.

Study participants representing the NEVAC and Pierce County feasibility study groups indicated that master plans for districts in their areas have designated use for all district owned land to accommodate projected growth. King County is currently experiencing a decrease in enrollment and has a surplus of school property. The Seattle School District may need to look at repurposing existing schools for skills center use rather than constructing new facilities. Constructing a new skills center while closing schools may not be politically possible.

**Flexibility to deviate from the tradition skills center model.** Creating successful skills centers in high density areas will require departure from the standard Washington State skills center model. Different approaches will require the use of:

- Multiple locations (satellite programs or branch campuses) for delivery of programs.
- Use of existing career and technical education program facilities
- Utilization of community and technical college facilities.
- Programs delivered at business locations.
- Programs contracted with vendors.
- Significant use of technology to facilitate learning (e.g. interactive television, online programs, vendor supplied online programs, etc).
- Roving instructors
- Mobile labs for sharing of equipment
- Expanded summer school sessions, and extensive use of late afternoon and evening sessions. (Possibly offering year-round programs).

**Collaboration with Stakeholders.** Collaboration with regional stakeholders (higher education, business and labor) will be a critical component of high-density skills center efforts – Work-based Learning opportunities (internships, job shadowing, mentoring, site-based education, etc); joint online programs; pre-apprenticeship partnerships, shared facilities, shared curriculum development and staff development, etc. Creating a skills center in a high-density area will require new, different, and much higher levels of collaboration than have existed.

**Competition with Existing CTE Programs.** All high-density skills center feasibility study groups anticipate that a skills center will be perceived as competition for existing career and technical education (CTE) programs in area high schools. Districts have recently invested heavily in upgrading CTE programs, facilities and equipment. Getting high schools to cooperate in sending students will be a challenge.

**Funding.** High-density feasibility study groups are well aware of the challenges presented by the current skills center funding model. Urban schools face the same funding challenges all other schools experience. Home high schools losing .6 FTE for every student attending the skills center may not be motivated to send students.

**WASL Remediation.** Since skills centers serve 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, they may be viewed as a natural place for students who did not pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and do not intend to, or those students who need to prepare to retake some or all portions of the WASL. Interview participants indicated this could either be a positive or negative role for skills center. Positive in that skills centers could provide the contextualized academic learning needed by many students and facilitate retesting through meaningful alternative assessments. However, it potentially might be negative in that skills centers could become labeled as a WASL retake or dumping ground.

## **Locale Specific Challenges to Providing Skills Center Services**

### **Seattle School District**

- Integrating the skills center concept into the district culture
- OSPI skills center policy guidelines requiring:
  - A centralized core facility.
  - Seventy percent of students attending programs at the core facility.
  - Requirement for two or more districts for formation of a skills center cooperative. With the exception of Vashon Island, most school districts in the area are currently part of either a skills center consortium or area cooperative. Seattle is the state's largest school district with a student population substantially larger than most existing skills center cooperatives.
- Complexities/Issues related to where a skills center might be located. Locating a skills center in one part of the city (e.g., the north or south end) may determine to a great extent the student population served. Due to demographic differences in parts of the city, the location of the skills center may be an issue for some students and may result in the center serving a larger representation of certain socio-economic and ethnic groups.
- Career and technical education in the Seattle School District is still commonly perceived as "second class" education. Creating a skills center would require considerable effort and marketing directed toward image building to attract the type of student who could benefit most.
- Creating higher levels of collaboration, integration and alliance with business.

### **NEVAC (North East King County)**

- OSPI skills center policy guidelines requiring:
  - A centralized core facility.
  - Seventy percent of students attending programs at the core facility.

- Pulling students out of their home high schools. Current NEVAC philosophy is to keep students close to where their academic education is provided. This would help minimize the perception that skills center programs are “less academically rigorous.”
- Desire to integrate as much as possible with educational programs and services provided by the comprehensive high schools (Maintain the student sense of belonging).
- Maintaining the high-level, multi-district buy-in and investment in CTE programs that NEVAC districts currently provide. The comparison provided was that with most existing skills centers, the host district “owns” the facilities and equipment which has created unique situations and challenges to achieving “buy-in” from some participating districts. In the NEVAC model, each participating district owns the facilities used by the cooperative and takes responsibility for making sure they provide adequate, up-to-date facilities and equipment.
- Ability to increase efficiency and utilization of facilities and equipment beyond the 8:00 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. time period most skills centers currently provide. In order to be successful, the skills center will need to provide innovative, flexible scheduling for expanded day, or late afternoon, evening programs and summer sessions. Skills center programs will need to be available to all students when, where, and how they can access them.

### **Pierce County/Bethel School District**

- To be successful, skills center programs must build on academic and CTE programs in area high schools. Skills center programs will not replace or duplicate existing high school CTE offerings. The skills center focus will be on aligning programs with regional high-demand occupations. In the case where there may be a duplication (e.g., automotive), a memorandum of understanding will be used with high schools to determine which students would benefit by participating in the skills center program.
- Competition for suitable land/locations for facilities. Due to the rapid pace of residential and commercial growth in Pierce County. Sites suitable for constructing a centralized skills center facility have been gobbled up by developers or have zoning restrictions preventing construction of a non-tax based school. Two avenues will need to be explored. Both may significantly set back the time-line for construction:
  - Acquiring surplus state or government property through a purchase or transfer process.
  - Obtaining capital funding from Legislature for purchase of land. To date no other skills center has required that.

### **Strategies to Consider**

- Review current OSPI skills center policy start-up and operational guidelines in relation to limitation they may place students in high-density areas:
  - Skills Center Definition – *“A vocational-technical skills center is a regional education and training partnership that serves multiple districts, is operated by a local host district, and has an identifiable core facility.”* The guideline may limit the ability of the Seattle School District to create a skills center in regard to its ability to secure commitments from other districts for creation of a skills center located within the Seattle School District.
  - Start-Up Criteria #2 – *“Two of more member districts are necessary for the formation of a skills center cooperative.”* The guideline may limit the ability of the Seattle School District to create a skills center.

- Start-Up Criteria #13 – *“Skills centers are designated as central facilities with no more than one member district exceeding 70 percent of each skills center’s enrollment within two years of start-up.”* The guideline may limit the ability of the Seattle School District to create a skills center.
- Operational Criteria #9 – *“Member districts will follow policy and procedural agreements to avoid duplication of programs between the skills center and member districts.”* This guidelines needs to be codified to prevent a participating district from creating a new program similar/identical to that offered by the skills center. (Similar language is contained in Start-Up Criteria #10).
- Operational Criteria #12 – *“The vocational skills center will have an identifiable core campus 70% maximum.”* The language is confusing and is being interpreted as meaning a core campus with a minimum of 70 percent of the student enrollment on the core campus. The seventy percent minimum enrollment on the core campus would effectively limit the number of students skills centers in Seattle, North King County, and Pierce County could serve through satellite programs, branch campuses and distance learning. Transportation issues in high-density areas may make it impractical or impossible for students to commute to a central skills centers campus. The use of satellite programs, branch campuses and hybrid learning (combination of distance and classroom/laboratory learning) may be necessary for these centers to be successful.

Modify and codify these guidelines as necessary.

- Changes to the skills center funding model proposed in Section 3 would create incentives to high-density area high school to encourage student participation in skills center programs.

### **3. Additional Funding Needs or Different Funding Methods**

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#### **Background**

Washington Skills centers were created to provide high cost career and technical preparatory program for students from participating school districts. They have operated on a “patch work” of school district FTE (Full Time Equivalent) funding allocations and state sources since the first skill center established in the Highline School District opened its doors in 1966. Skills centers have never enjoyed a comprehensive funding model and have built their current assortment of allocations based on specific needs or by persuasion of the legislature. This section addresses an analysis of the current funding structure and proposes strategies to provide increased access to skills centers by rural and high-density area students.

#### **Analysis of Funding**

##### **FTE Allocation**

Current limits on how school districts and Skills Centers report student FTEs and the time they are served, provides a disincentive for school districts to send their students to a Skills Center. Existing rules only permit any student to be served as one full time equivalent. Skills Center programs are largely .6 FTE programs; leaving .4 FTE for the sending school district. If a student takes more than two classes at the sending school in addition to the skills program, the sending school is not reimbursed for classes beyond the first two.

Some sending schools within districts may limit the number of students who can enroll in skills center programs because of the loss of the .6 FTE. This is particularly true for students in schools with declining enrollments, districts experiencing budget issues or small high school populations. Schools can control the number of students who attend a skills center by not electing to provide transportation, setting a maximum enrollment number, or by simply not including the skills center option into their school schedule or publications.

All skills center directors participating in this study as well as representatives of the five skills center feasibility study groups concurred that the current structure will not facilitate increased student access to programs – for students from rural and high-density areas or skills center cooperatives. Study participants stressed that to encourage and increase access to skills center programs, stronger financial incentives will be needed to entice rural and high-density school districts to participate. They suggested that a funding model similar to the Washington State Running Start Program would significantly help to increase student participation in skills center programs. If the rule is changed and students are funded for all classes taken (typically, 1.2 FTEs), as in Running Start, districts will have an incentive to continue sending students to the skills center and be reimbursed for the cost of the courses provided at the high school.

##### **Strategy to Consider**

- Expand the definition of an FTE in OSPI Washington Administrative Code (WAC) to allow high schools and skills centers to receive funding for all classes they provide. This would immediately serve as an incentive for participation by rural and high-density students as well as for students in existing skills center cooperatives.

## Summer School

Since 1984 the legislature has provided support for skills center summer school programs through an annual line item FTE allocation in the OSPI budget to the initial eight skills centers. Since 1996, two additional skills centers have opened. However, the annual summer school FTE allocation for skills centers was not increased proportionally to accommodate for the new skills centers. There have been minor increases to the allocation since 1996. The net result of splitting essentially a slightly larger pot more ways has resulted in effectively limiting the number of students each skills center can serve in their summer programs. Collectively, the ten skills centers served approximately 3700 FTE in their 2006 summer school programs. Skills centers estimate that over 1,500 additional students wanted to attend the summer programs went unserved because of this funding limitation.

The current FTE allocation for skills center summer school programs is not meeting student demand. Study participants see creating additional summer school programs specifically targeted to students in rural and high-density areas as very needed and viable. These satellite summer programs could be offered through collaborative arrangements with rural and urban schools and utilize facilities in these schools not typically used during the summer months.

### Strategies to Consider

- Increase the skills center summer school FTE allocation to reflect the current and increasing demand for these programs.
- Create a financial incentive for skills centers to provide summer school programs focused on high-demand occupations to students in rural and high-density areas through a competitive grant awards process. For example, add an additional 200 FTE onto the current regular summer school FTE allocation targeted toward serving rural and high-density students.

### After-Hours and Evening Sessions

Most skills centers have historically offered a limited number of late afternoon (third session) programs. A fewer number of evening sessions have been offered. These programs have been attractive to students who could not, for a variety of reasons, fit a skills center program into regular high school schedule. A significant number of these programs have been targeted toward dropout prevention or designed to teenage students who have dropped out of school. These programs have demonstrated high rates of success. Students enrolled in these programs are counted as the same .6 FTE as described above. Students who participate in a full instructional day (five periods) at their home high school cannot be claimed for any additional hours of instruction they receive at the skills center in after school or evening programs. Or, a student claimed for four instructional hours (.4 FTE) at their high school can only be claimed for one instructional hour (.2 FTE) by the skills center. The skills center can offer afternoon and evening programs, but will only be able to claim the unused portion of 1.0 FTE or will take away .6 FTE from the home high school. Limiting serving a student to a maximum of 1.0 FTE effectively limits a student's access to skills center afternoon and evening programs.

### **Strategy to Consider**

- Expand the definition of an FTE in OSPI WAC to allow high schools and skills centers to receive funding for all classes they provide would significantly increase the ability of skills centers to offer after-school and evening programs. This would also be an incentive for skills centers to offer late-afternoon or evening satellite program to students in rural areas. Rural school can only offer a limited number of career and technical education programs because of their small of numbers students and high cost of programs. Creating satellite after school and evening program accessible to students from several rural schools within reasonable commuting distance would be a viable means of delivering skills center programs.

### **Initiative 728**

Four of the six allowable purposes for expenditure of I-728 are applicable to skills centers: to provide extended learning for student; reduce class sizes in grades 5-12; provide additional professional development for teachers; and provide additional improvements to school facilities to help reduce class size and extend learning opportunities. This funding is designed to help schools achieve the new state learning standards. Based on responses to the study questionnaire, only two of ten existing skills centers is currently receiving I-728 funds through their host school districts. Skills center students are counted into the host school district I-728 state funding allocation. However, in the case of most skills centers, the I-728 funds generated by the skills center are not returned to the skills center. For 2006, each skills center student generated approximately \$375 in I-728 fund.

All skills center programs are held accountable to improve student basic skills. The skills center accessing portions of these funds is using the money to add literacy, reading and mathematics support services to the programs via extended learning activities or professional development for instructors.

### **Strategy to Consider**

- Facilitate skills center contribution to providing extended learning and increased professional development opportunities for staff by requiring that all I-728 funds generated by skills centers are returned to skills centers to help meet state learning standards.

### **K-20 Network Readiness**

As discussed in section two of this research report, this study revealed that nine of ten existing skills center do not have access to the K-20 network. Part of the primary role and purpose of skills centers is to provide skills training and access to the state-of-the-art technology used by business and industry. Most skills centers currently cannot provide that because of their limited access to high-capacity internet networks. Two skills centers indicated their total bandwidth capacity was limited to one shared T-1 line. Many homes today are connected to high-speed networks with capacity greater than that of an entire skills center,

As presented in sections 1 and 2 of this study, implementation of distance learning will be a key component of their ability to increase access to rural and high-density students – as well as students in their existing cooperatives. Connection to the K-20 network will be essential to their ability to provide any form of distance learning.

## Strategies to Consider

- Provide funding through OSPI for a standards-based process for conducting a technology infrastructure needs assessment of all skills centers. A uniform, state-wide set of skills center technology standards will be necessary for effective delivery of instruction through online programs, interactive television or other distance learning application.
- Obtain capital improvement funding to connect all skills centers to the K-20 network.
- Provide funding through OSPI to create a state-wide master plan for delivery of skills center programs by means of distance learning.
- Provide funding through OSPI for state-level leadership, resources, and assistance to skills center to for development of innovative distance learning curriculum and support which incorporates direct application/hands-on learning- the strength of skills center programs.
- Fund through OSPI, a skills center “Center for Excellence” to serve the hub and portal for access to skills center distance education programs.

## Capital Construction (minor and major)

Eight of ten skills center cooperating school districts provided an initial capital matching percentage for initial facilities construction and/or program start-up. Their initial investment served to create the buy-in and a vested interest in the success of the skills center. Over the years a few additional school districts, on their own, financially bought into existing skills center cooperatives. The two most recent skills center additions, Wenatchee and Port Angeles, secured one-hundred percent of the funds used for skills center facilities acquisition and start-up from state capital funds. These skills centers, indicated through interviews conducted as part of this study, that they now are experiencing significant challenges with participating districts adhering to their commitment stated in their signed participation agreement for sending students to the skills center. The lack of initial buy-in is now returning in the form of a lack of commitment for enrollment and maintenance funding. Future skills centers created under these same conditions may experience the same difficulties.

Prior to 2006, skills center requiring minor and major capital facilities improvement depended on their powers of persuasion to secure appropriations from the legislature. Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6364 (the 2006 Capital Budget) directed the State Board of Education to develop a plan to include skills center capital requests within the state construction assistance programs. Skills centers are now working with the state board and OSPI on development and incorporation of a ten-year capital construction plan. This represents a significant step forward for skills centers in providing adequate and maintained educational facilities.

## Strategies to Consider

- Review OSPI policy guidelines relating to the requirement of establishing cooperative districts to contribute a percentage of initial capital facilities and program start-up costs and enforcement of signed cooperative agreements by member districts. Modify and codify as necessary.
- Develop and fund a master plan, as part of the skills center capital requests, for increasing access of rural and high-density students to skills center programs.
- Codify OSPI skills center start-up criteria to include the requirement that feasibility studies for creation of a new skills center or a branch campus include development of comprehensive instructional, business and operational plans which will assist in determining the viability and sustainability of the skills center or branch campus.

## Conclusion

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Washington skills centers are at an exciting and potentially expansive point in their history. Skills centers are experiencing unprecedented attention and interest from the legislators, school districts, economic and workforce development entities, business, labor, students and parents. Several areas of the state have expressed interest or are pursuing establishing new skills centers. This spotlight of awareness is not an accident. It is the result of an outstanding track record for providing high-quality career preparation programs, increasing levels of academic rigor, a student product that meets or exceeds employer expectation, willingness to work collaboratively with all stakeholders, and effective marketing by the dedicated staff and administrators of these centers. The success stories of skills centers are well documented.

Substitute Senate Bill 5717 asks the question “What will it take to provide increased access to skills centers programs for rural and remote students and students living in high-density areas?” The answer to that question will not only impact high school students in rural and urban areas, it will significantly increase access for all students in our state who desire to participate in the career preparatory education and training provided by skills centers.

To help achieve increased access, three key initiatives must be undertaken:

- 1) OSPI policy guidelines for skills center start-up and operation need to be reviewed, rethought, modified and codified in Washington Administrative Code (WAC). Continuing to do business in the forty year-old practice of “flying under the radar” will not facilitate development of new skills centers or growth of existing centers; allow for the flexibility needed to best serve students; or facilitate implementation of technology mediated teaching and learning. New ‘business plan’ for skills center is needed.
- 2) A new model for funding skills centers must be created. The current “patchwork” of funding pots and mechanisms will not bring about the desired increase in access.
- 3) Provide state-level leadership within OSPI devoted specifically to the growth and success of skills centers. Expanding the role of skills centers by creating Centers of Excellence, establishing new skills centers and developing stronger alliances with higher education, business, labor and communities will require more time and effort.

The options and opportunities presented in this study are the chance to begin holistic solutions that increase the contribution skills center closer to the integrated, world-class, learner-focused system envisioned for Washington.