A Strategic Plan for Skill Centers

A Report to the Legislature
by the Workforce Training and
Education Coordinating Board

Submitted December, 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Washington State skill centers are at an exciting and potentially expansive point in their history. Skill centers are experiencing unprecedented attention and interest from 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 skill centers. This spotlight on skill centers is the result of providing career preparation programs that are in demand by industry, infusing new levels of academic rigor into their programs, and a willingness to work collaboratively with all stakeholders.

In ***Substitute Senate Bill 5717,*** The Legislature asked the Workforce Board to provide 1) recommendations for increasing access to skill centers in rural and high density areas of the state and identification of funding needs or different funding methods necessary to implement the recommendations, 2) recommendations on how best to integrate core academic content into skill center programs, and 3) recommendations on the role that skills centers can play as a promising dropout prevention/retrieval program. The Board was also directed to explore the feasibility of creating satellite sites, creating joint programs between high schools and community colleges, using the K-20 network, and offering additional evening and summer programs.

The Workforce Board is recommending a number of actions be taken by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Legislature. These recommendations will not only impact high school students in rural and urban areas, they will significantly increase access and improve CTE programming for <u>all</u> students in our state who desire to participate in the career preparatory education and training provided by skill centers.

1. Recommendations to Increase Access:

OSPI Policy affecting the start-up and operation of skill centers needs to be reviewed and modified. All students in the state should have access in some manner to K-12 career and technical education (CTE) programs of study that help prepare them for careers, apprenticeships, and postsecondary education. Implementation of the following recommendations will help ensure skill center core facility success and facilitate the creation of branch campuses, satellite programs, and distance learning opportunities to improve access.

- **Population Threshold:** We recommend that OSPI establish in policy, as the threshold for the creation of a core skill center facility, a student population of 5,000 ninth to twelfth graders within 20 miles.
- **Attendance at Core Facility:** We recommend that OSPI review, and modify as necessary, the skill center policy guideline that requires a skill center to have a minimum of 70 percent of its students enrolled on the skill center core campus in order to facilitate serving rural students through expansion of skill center programs by means of satellite programs or branch campuses.
- **High Demand and Skill Center Development:** We recommend that OSPI, in their policy guidelines, encourage development of programs offered through satellite programs and branch campuses to address locally identified high-demand programs and developmental planning of branch campuses.
- **High Density Policy:** We recommend that OSPI review current skill center policy guidelines in relation to limitations they may place on serving students in high-density areas and modify the guidelines as necessary.

- **Technology Infrastructure:** We recommend that OSPI develop a state-wide master plan that identifies standards and resources needed to create a technology infrastructure for connecting all skills centers to the K-20 network.
- **Non-cooperative Students:** We recommend that the Legislature provide funding for skill centers to conduct OSPI approved feasibility studies for serving non-cooperative rural students in their geographic areas.
- **Encouraging Collaboration:** We recommend that OSPI:
  - **a.** adopt a feasibility study requirement for a skill 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 skill center branch campus.
  - **b.** modify skill center policy guidelines to encourage, where possible, collaborative efforts between skill centers and the appropriate college center of excellence to access and utilize available resources and industry networks.
  - **c.** modify skill center policy guidelines to provide an incentive for skill centers to create collaborative learning opportunities for rural students through contractual or cooperative arrangements with local businesses or government agencies.

2. Identification of Skill Center Funding Needs (to implement recommendations)

Disincentives in the current funding formula and lack of resources for the summer school program are barriers to increased access to CTE programming.

- **FTE Allocation:** OSPI should consider expanding the definition of an FTE to allow high schools and skill centers to receive funding for all classes attended by students. This action will require additional funding by the Legislature.
- **Summer School FTEs:** The Legislature should consider increasing the skill center summer school FTE allocation to reflect the current and increasing demand for these programs.
- **Capital Construction:** We recommend that OSPI review and modify as necessary policy guidelines relating to the requirement of establishing cooperative districts to contribute a percentage of initial capital facilities and program start-up costs.

3. Recommendations on Academic Integration

As expectations intensify for skill centers to provide rigorous coursework that includes academic enrichment there will be a need for skill centers to facilitate delivery of high-quality CTE programs and services and develop stronger alliances with comprehensive high schools, higher education, business, labor and communities.

- **Skill Centers of Excellence:** We recommend OSPI develop a leadership role for designating and supporting “Skill Centers of Excellence,” akin to the nine Centers of Excellence created by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, in key economic sectors of regional significance.
- **Running Start for CTE:** We recommend the Legislature establish a Running Start for CTE grant program that partners skill centers with community and technical colleges to develop and implement model, articulated CTE programs of study in high demand fields.
- **I-728 and PAS funds:** We recommend the Legislature facilitate skill centers’ contribution to additional learning opportunities for students by requiring that all I-728 and PASS funds generated by skill centers be returned to skill centers to help meet state learning standards.

4. Recommendations on Dropout Prevention/Intervention

Based on existing research, CTE programs, and skill center preparatory programs in particular, play a significant role in reducing the likelihood of dropping out. Skill centers could be a major contributor to local efforts to improve high school graduation rates.

- **Barrier Reduction Funding**: We recommend the legislature increase barrier reduction funding to skill centers and specifically mandate that the funds be used for a dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval program for at-risk students and dropouts.
- **Local Collaboration:** We recommend the Legislature require skill centers, as a condition of receiving barrier reduction monies, to collaborate with local community partners in providing a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval program for at-risk students and dropouts.

INTRODUCTION

SSB 5717

The 2006 Legislature passed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5717 directing the Workforce Board, in collaboration with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) 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 currently not adequately served by a skill center. **The study is to address the following issues:**

1. A report on current skill center geographic coverage and what geographic gaps in service area currently exist.

2. Recommendations on how best to provide students in rural and remote areas increased access to a skill center program as well as how best to address the difficulties in providing adequate services to high density areas of the state. In making these recommendations, the Workforce Board was directed, at a minimum, to explore the feasibility of creating satellite sites, creating joint programs between high schools and community colleges, using the K-20 network, and offering additional evening and summer programs. The Board's report is also to provide an analysis on any additional funding needs or different funding methods necessary to implement the recommendations.

3. Recommendations on how best to integrate core academic content into skill center programs and how to determine and report skill center course equivalencies for the purpose of meeting high school graduation requirements.

4. Recommendations on the role that skills centers can play as a promising dropout prevention/retrieval program.

Study Process

The Workforce Board contracted with the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University to map current skill center coverage and the geographic gaps in service. Appendix A is a set of maps that display their findings.

The Board also contracted with CTE Services to examine and make recommendations on the best options for providing students in rural and remote areas increased access to a skill center program and the difficulties in providing adequate skill center services to high density areas of the state and how can they be addressed. CTE Services was also asked to provide an analysis on any additional funding needs or different funding methods necessary to implement the recommendations. The Board formed an advisory committee of two skill center directors, the Executive Director of the Washington Association of Career and Technical Education (WA-ACTE), and OSPI to review the bidding process and comment on the draft findings and recommendations in the CTE Services report. CTE Services' report is attached as Appendix B.

Workforce Board staff, in collaboration with OSPI, prepared background information and recommendations on the integration of academic content into skill center programs (see Appendix C) and the role skill centers play in dropout prevention and retrieval (see Appendix D).

1. Skill Center Geographic Information Analysis

Findings

The analysis of current skill center coverage revealed that 95% of students attending a skill center are drawn from within 18.7 miles. Using this travel distance, the number of ninth to twelfth grade students in the catchment areas of the existing skill centers range from a low of 2,100 for Port Angeles to a high of 70,000 for Highline. Wenatchee has about 4,100, after which it jumps to 8,000 and 9,000 for Yakima and Tri-Cities, respectively.

Appendix A is a set of maps that identify ninth to twelfth grade student population densities around the state that meet threshold populations of 5,000 and 8,000. Based on these maps, areas that meet the 5,000 threshold include Pierce County and the Whatcom/Skagit/North Snohomish belt. Marginal sites (just below the 5,000 threshold) include the Cowlitz/Lewis area and the lower Yakima Valley. These areas are best suited for branch campus development in their initial stages (see discussion of branch campuses, below).

Skill centers that draw on student populations of less than 5,000 ninth to twelfth graders in their catchment area have had and will have difficulty in maintaining sufficient FTES at their core facility.

Recommendations on Skill Center Siting

> **Recommendation 1.1** We recommend that OSPI establish in policy, as the threshold for the creation of a core skill center facility, a student population of 5,000 ninth to twelfth graders within 20 miles. This policy should be modified to accommodate the development of branch campuses, satellite programs, and distance learning per the recommendations below.

2. Skill Center Programs for Rural and Remote Students

Background

Skill centers' historical role has been to serve students from their cooperative or consortium schools. Nine of ten existing skill 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. Eight of ten skill centers indicate they are not planning to implement programs specifically targeted to serve rural and remote students in the next five years.

Challenges

Skill center directors identified the following key barriers to providing programs in rural and remote areas:

- **Transportation time and logistics** in getting to the skill center.
- **Funding.** Skill center directors unanimously agree that the current 1.0 FTE funding lid (.4 FTE retained by the high school sending a student to a skill center and .6 FTE going to the skill center) is the major barrier limiting participation by students from smaller, rural schools.
- **OSPI Skill Center Policy Guidelines.** The following operational criteria contained in OSPI policy guidelines are cited by skill center directors as potentially limiting factors to serving students in rural and remote areas:

1. Requiring a minimum of 70 percent of skill center students be enrolled at the core campus.
2. Requiring three consecutive 50-minute classes at skill centers that receive a funding priority (0.2 funding per class) relative to classes at the member high school.
3. Requiring member districts to be responsible for equipment replacement, facility maintenance and ongoing operation of the skill center.
4. Requiring member districts to provide ancillary services (health services, etc.) to the skill center.
5. Requiring member districts to follow policies and procedures to avoid duplication of programs and services between the skill center and member districts.

Opportunities

Satellite/Branch Campus Programs. Skill center directors pointed out that not all programs they provide are suitable or feasible for delivery through a satellite program or a branch campus. However, 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 are feasible for delivery through satellite programs or branch campuses.

Distance/Online Learning. All skill centers see considerable opportunity for delivery of all or portions of selected programs by means of web-based or interactive television distance learning applications. To implement distance or online learning, skill centers need up-to-date technology infrastructures, K-20 network connectivity, instructor training on curriculum and teaching, and support staff for operation and maintenance of the technology.

Collaboration with Higher Education. Skill center directors identified a number of potential collaborative activities between skill centers and colleges to increase access for students in rural and remote areas. Possible joint activities include using college branch campus facilities as sites for delivery of skill center programs, contracted instruction provided by a college at a college branch campus, joint curriculum development and instructional delivery for online programs, and using college branch campus facilities for summer or evening skill center programs. Students could earn joint skill center and college credits through many of these collaborative ventures.

Collaboration with Business and Labor. Eight of ten skill centers indicate they have not specifically explored the use of collaborative business or labor 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.) to serve students in rural areas for provision of either on-site campus or off campus training programs. There is, however, consensus that this might be a viable option.

Creating CTE Program of Study Options. All skill center directors concur that connecting rural high school programs (normally exploratory) to skill center preparatory programs through distance learning applications or satellite programs would create meaningful CTE program of study options for students in rural and remote areas.

Building "Skill Centers for Excellence." Current skill centers programs align with the occupational emphasis of nine college Centers of Excellence. Skill center directors indicated that skill center collaboration with the Centers of Excellence would provide access to: responsive education and training targeted at 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 education; and assistance with focusing programs on driver industries in Washington State.

Study participants stressed that as the number of skill centers increase and expectations intensify for skill centers to focus on high-demand programs and academic enrichment, there will be an increasing need for skill centers to deliver high-quality programs and services. Suggested functions envisioned for a "skill center of excellence" include: functioning as the connecting mechanism to the college centers for excellence, business, industry and labor; serving as the access point for students to participate in online and distance learning opportunities; developing articulated curriculum with college centers of excellence and exchanging best practices; and facilitating joint professional development through online programs or interactive television exchange of information.

Recommendations for Improving Access for Rural and Remote Students

Develop Skill Center Branch Campuses. Creating skill center satellite programs or branch campuses clearly emerged from this study as a viable and the preferred option for increasing access to students living in rural and remote areas. Seven skill 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 skill center programs. Also, analysis of the 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 skill center satellite program or branch campus.

> **Recommendation 2.1** We recommend that OSPI review and modify as necessary the skill center policy guideline that requires a skill center to have a minimum of 70 percent of its students enrolled on the skill center core campus in order to facilitate serving rural students through expansion of skill center programs by means of satellite programs or branch campuses.
>
> **Recommendation 2.2** We recommend that the Legislature provide funding for skill centers to conduct OSPI approved feasibility studies for serving non-cooperative rural students in their geographic areas.
>
> **Recommendation 2.3** We recommend that OSPI encourage, in their policy guidelines, developmental planning for branch campuses. Under-served rural areas could partner with an existing skill 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 skill center or remain an extension of the founding skill center.
>
> **Recommendation 2.4** We recommend that OSPI, in their policy guidelines, encourage programs offered through satellite programs and branch campuses to address high-demand fields.

Create Infrastructure for Distance/Online Learning. Delivery of all or portions of selected skill center programs by means of web-based, interactive television or other distance learning applications would significantly increase opportunities for rural students statewide to participate in skill center programs. A uniform, statewide set of skill center technology standards will be necessary for effective delivery of instruction through online programs, interactive television or other distance learning applications.

> **Recommendation 2.5** We recommend that OSPI review and modify as necessary the skill center policy guideline that requires a skill center to have a minimum of 70 percent of its students enrolled on the skill center core campus in order to facilitate serving

students (both rural students and students within their cooperatives) through distance learning applications.

Recommendation 2.6 We recommend that OSPI develop a state-wide master plan that identifies standards and resources needed to create a technology infrastructure for connecting all skills centers to the K-20 network.

Recommendation 2.7 We recommend that OSPI provide state-level leadership and resources for distance learning curriculum development, including the creation of "Skill Centers of Excellence" focusing on training programs for high-demand occupations. The Skill Centers of Excellence should be created in collaboration with the targeted industry Centers of Excellence established by community and technical colleges.

Collaborative Programs with High Schools, Higher Education, Business, and Government. Opportunities exist for collaborative ventures between skill centers, high schools and both public and private institutions of higher education in providing skill center program access to students in rural areas. Skill centers can utilize facilities and provide programs through contractual or cooperative arrangements with businesses, local and state government agencies.

Recommendation 2.8 We recommend OSPI adopt a feasibility study requirement for a skill 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 skill center branch campus.

Recommendation 2.9 We recommend that OSPI modify skill center policy guidelines to encourage, where possible, collaborative efforts between skill centers and the appropriate college Center for Excellence to access and utilize available resources and industry networks.

Recommendation 2.10 We recommend that OSPI modify skill center policy guidelines to provide an incentive for skills centers to create collaborative learning opportunities for rural students through contractual or cooperative arrangements with local businesses or government agencies.

Summer and Evening Programs. Skill centers are very supportive and interested in expanding programs to rural students through summer, late afternoon (third session), and evening sessions. These programs also provide opportunities for dropout prevention and retrieval programs by offering programs that accommodate teens' working schedules and provide credit retrieval opportunities.

Recommendation 2.11 We recommend the Legislature consider funding for skill centers to provide summer school programs to rural students aligned with regionally identified high-demand occupations.

3. Skill Center Services in High-density Areas

Background

The study conducted interviews and sent questionnaires to representatives of the three urban entities who were awarded funding for feasibility studies in the last legislative session—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 25 years. In 1997, NEVAC submitted a feasibility study to OSPI for creation of the High Technology Skill Center. The NEVAC skill center was not approved on the basis that its proposal did not meet the OSPI policy guideline criteria for skill center start-up and operation. Specific rationale referenced in the study report for not approving the proposal was that NEVAC was proposing a skill center "without" walls, lacked a core facility, and exceeded the maximum of 70 percent of student FTE from a single district.

Pierce County: Prior to 2006, no formal or informal effort to establish a skill center in Pierce County can be identified. For many years, high school students in the county were able to access occupational training programs at Clover Park and Bates Vocational Technical Institutes (VTIs). When Clover Park and Bates became part of the state community and technical college system, the larger Pierce County school districts (Puyallup, Bethel, and Tacoma) began to develop programs that students could access previously at the VTIs.

Seattle School District: Career and technical education (CTE) programs in the Seattle School District have traditionally been delivered through the comprehensive high schools. The concept of a Seattle skill center has been discussed informally at various points in time but has never surfaced as a district priority. Emphasis has been placed on creating career and technical education programs at the high schools.

Common Challenges

Transportation. Complications resulting from increasing traffic congestion and travel time to and from a centralized skill center facility were cited as the largest challenge and potential barrier to student participation.

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 skill center facility if they are required to follow the current OSPI policy guidelines.

Flexibility to deviate from the tradition skill center model. Creating successful skill centers in high density areas will require departure from the standard Washington State skill center model.

Collaboration with Stakeholders. Collaboration with regional stakeholders (higher education, business, and labor) will be a critical component of high-density skill center efforts.

Competition with Existing CTE Programs. All high-density skill center feasibility study groups anticipate that a skills center will be perceived as competition for existing CTE programs in area high schools.

Funding. High-density feasibility study groups are well aware of the challenges presented by the current skill center funding model.

Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) Remediation. Since skill centers serve 11th and 12th grade students, they may be viewed as a natural place for students who did not pass the 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 of negative role for skills center.

Locale Specific Challenges to Providing Skill Center Services

The following challenges reflect particular concerns of the urban areas examined in this study:

Seattle School District:

- Integrating the skill center concept into the district culture;
- OSPI skill center policy guidelines requiring a core facility, requiring 70 percent of students attend programs at the core facility, and the requirement that two or more districts form a skill center cooperative;
- Complexities/Issues related to where a skill center might be located; and
- The need for extensive marketing of CTE programs.

NEVAC:

- OSPI skill center policy guidelines requiring a centralized core facility and 70 percent of students attending programs at the core facility.
- Pulling students out of their home high schools.
- The desire to integrate as much as possible with educational programs and services provided by the comprehensive high schools.
- Maintaining the high-level, multi-district buy-in and investment in CTE programs that NEVAC districts currently provide.
- Ability to increase efficiency and utilization of facilities and equipment beyond the 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. time period most skills centers currently provide.

Pierce County/Bethel School District

- The skills center focus will be on aligning programs with regional high-demand occupations.
- Competition for suitable land/locations for facilities.

Recommendations on Providing Services in High-density Areas

> **Recommendation 3.1** We recommend that OSPI review current skill center policy guidelines in relation to limitations they may place on serving students in high-density areas and modify the guidelines as necessary.

4. Skill Center Funding Needs and Methods

FTE Allocation. Current limits on how school districts and skill centers report student FTEs and the time they are served provide a disincentive for school districts to send their students to a skill center. Study participants stressed that to encourage and increase access to skill 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 skill center programs. Under funding rules for Running Start, students are funded for all classes taken at the high school and at the college or university up to 2 FTE. For instance, when a student enrolls in three classes at the high school and three at their local community college, each institution receives a .6 FTE.

Recommendation 4.1 We recommend that OSPI consider expanding the definition of an FTE in Washington Administrative Code to allow high schools and skill centers to receive funding for all classes they provide. We also recommend the Legislature provide the funds necessary to implement this rule change. 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. The current FTE allocation for skill 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.

Recommendation 4.2 The Legislature should consider increasing the skill center summer school FTE allocation to reflect the current and increasing demand for these programs. Per **Recommendation 2.11,** the Legislature could focus additional funding on providing summer school programs to rural students.

After-Hours and Evening Sessions. Most skill centers have historically offered a limited number of late afternoon (third session) programs. A lower number of evening sessions have been offered. These programs have been attractive to students who could not, for a variety of reasons, fit a skill center program into regular high school schedule. A significant number of these programs have been targeted toward dropout prevention or designed for teenage students who have dropped out of school. These programs have demonstrated high rates of success. However, limiting the funding of a student to a maximum of 1.0 FTE effectively limits a student's access to skills center afternoon and evening programs.

Recommendation: Improving the funding formula in **Recommendation 4.1** would also be an incentive for skill centers to offer late-afternoon or evening satellite program to students in rural areas.

Capital Construction. Eight of ten skill center cooperating school districts provided a match 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 skill center. The two most recent skill center additions, Wenatchee and Port Angeles, secured 100 percent of the funds used for skill center facilities acquisition and start-up from state capital funds. These skill 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 skill center. The lack of initial buy-in is now returning in the form of a lack of commitment for enrollment and maintenance funding.

Recommendation 4.3 We recommend that OSPI review and modify as necessary policy guidelines to require cooperative districts to contribute a percentage of initial capital facilities and program start-up costs and enforcement of signed cooperative agreements by member districts.

5. Skill Centers and Academic Integration

Background

SSB 5717 also directs the Workforce Board, in collaboration with OSPI, to report the following to the 2007 legislature:

> ***"Recommendations on how best to integrate core academic content into skill center programs and how to determine and report skill center course equivalencies for the purpose of meeting high school graduation requirements."***

OSPI policy standards for career and technical (CTE) programs require approved CTE programs to apply and contextualize the related Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) including skills needed to meet state assessments. The 2006 Legislature recognized the role that CTE courses play in supporting academic enrichment in the passage of SHB 2973 which requires school districts to adopt course equivalencies for career and technical education (CTE) high school courses offered to students at the high school. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not recognize a CTE role when it provided $28 million dollars for the Promoting Academic Success (PAS) program to provide additional learning opportunities for students who failed to pass the WASL. Also, four of the six allowable purposes for expenditure of Initiative-728 are applicable to skill centers. This funding is designed to help schools achieve the new state learning standards. However, in the case of most skills centers, the I-728 funds generated by the skills center are not returned to the skill center. I-728 PAS and I-728 monies are allocated to school districts on a per pupil basis, but there is no recognition of the role that skill centers can play in providing a "hands-on" alternative to learning fundamental academic skills.

Given the new OSPI standards, CTE "preparatory" programs provided by comprehensive high schools and skill centers can play a prominent role in providing an alternative, "hands-on" route for students to meet the WASL requirement, achieve a high school diploma and pursue education and training beyond high school.

The recent reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 requires high schools receiving funding under the law to offer not less than one CTE program of study that includes "***coherent and rigorous content aligned with challenging academic standards*** [***emphasis added***]" and relevant career and technical content in a coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses that align secondary education with postsecondary education and identifies and addresses current or emerging occupational opportunities. Skill centers are in a unique position to be the leaders in developing CTE programs of study in high-demand fields of study and the connecting mechanism to the college centers for excellence, business, industry and labor.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.1 We recommend the Legislature facilitate skill centers' ability to provide coursework that assists students in meeting the WASL standards by requiring that all PAS funds and I-728 monies generated by skill centers be returned to skill centers.

Recommendation 5.2 We recommend that the Legislature fund a leadership role in OSPI to establish and support "skill centers of excellence" in key economic clusters. OSPI should broker the development of skill centers of excellence and identify their roles

in developing curriculum and methodologies for reporting skill center course equivalencies for purposes of high school graduation.

Recommendation 5.3 We recommend the Legislature establish a Running Start for CTE grant program to develop and implement model, articulated CTE programs of study in high demand fields. Grant recipients should be partnerships of skill centers of excellence, community college centers of excellence, Tech Prep programs, and industry advisory committees, and skill panels in the related industry. Grant recipients should be expected to develop and assist in the replication of model CTE programs of study. The CTE programs of study developed should be consistent with the new federal Perkins law requirements.

6. Skill Centers and Dropout Prevention/Intervention

Background

SSB 5717 also directs the Workforce Board, in collaboration with OSPI, to report the following to the 2007 legislature:

> ***"Recommendations on the role that skills centers can play as a promising dropout prevention/retrieval program by increasing student engagement through meaningful curriculum and effective instruction, providing opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations, and helping students see the connections to their own futures."***

Because skill centers are the only mechanism to deliver secondary preparatory CTE courses for many secondary schools in the state, they have received attention as a means to prevent dropouts. In the mid-nineties, the legislature began an appropriation of $1 million annually to the skill centers intended to provide funds for dropout prevention and retrieval programs. Over the years, this "barrier reduction" money has been reduced to $850,000 annually and is not necessarily targeted for dropout purposes.

The Workforce Board contracted with the Upjohn Institute to determine whether taking a CTE course at a skill center reduced the likelihood of a student dropping out of high school. ***The results of Upjohn's net impact analysis show that enrolling at a skill center is highly significant in reducing the likelihood of dropping out.***

One particular model for a more active skill center role in dropout prevention and intervention has been developed at New Market Skill Center in Tumwater. New Market leverages barrier reduction monies, the BEA allocation and a Workforce Investment Act (WIA) grant to serve students from thirteen different K-12 districts. The New Market program is a unique way for skill centers to play a prominent role in dropout prevention and intervention. CTE programs in comprehensive high schools, counselors, and intervention specialists in school districts, alternative schools, community organizations, community colleges, and educational service districts all can play, and have played, a role in providing a continuum of services for students at risk of dropping out and dropouts.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6.1 We recommend the Legislature increase barrier reduction funding to skill centers and specifically mandate that the funds be used for a dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval program for at-risk students and dropouts.

Recommendation 6.2 We recommend the Legislature require skill centers, as a condition of receiving barrier reduction monies, to participate in an evaluation that is designed to quantify results and identify best practices, collaborate with local community partners in providing a comprehensive program, and provide matching funds from BEA or other dollars.