

APPENDIX C SKILL CENTERS AND ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

SSB 5717 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.”

Background:

In 2004, OSPI adopted new policy standards for career and technical education (CTE) programs. These standards require approved CTE programs to apply and contextualize the related Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade Level Expectations including skills needed to meet state assessments. These standards also require CTE programs to provide occupationally specific skills, and integrate leadership and employability skills into their programs.

The 2006 Legislature enacted two programs to assist students in passing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). SB 6475 directs OSPI to develop an alternative assessment method to the WASL that consists of an evaluation of a collection of work samples prepared and submitted by the applicant. The Legislature anticipated that CTE coursework would provide the learning environment for the collection of evidence option by providing an additional alternative assessment based on a collection of evidence in CTE programs that lead to industry certification. Skill center students were active participants in the project administered by OSPI that piloted the collective of evidence assessment. The Legislature also provided \$28 million dollars for the Promoting Academic Success (PAS) program to provide additional learning opportunities for students who failed to pass the WASL. The PAS money is 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 these fundamental academic skills.

Four of the six allowable purposes for expenditure of Initiative-728 are applicable to skill 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. Skill center students are counted into the host school district I-728 state funding allocation. However, in the case of most skill 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 funding. All skill center programs are held accountable to improve student basic skills. Skill centers accessing portions of the I-728 funds are using the money to add literacy, reading and mathematics support services to the programs via extended learning activities or professional development for instructors.

While CTE programs can provide an alternative route for students to meet the WASL requirement, the “preparatory” programs provided by some comprehensive high schools and skill centers play an even more prominent role in preparing students with the skills needed for technical careers in today’s work environment. CTE “preparatory” programs have been incorporating a higher level of academics (and technical skills) into their coursework, as evidenced by the new OSPI program standards. The Legislature has funded the Higher Education Coordinating Board to identify the academic skills needed by all students who plan on entering postsecondary education, a route increasingly necessary to obtain a living wage technical job. The Workforce Board has been working to implement a nationally recognized “work readiness credential” that will measure the work readiness skills demanded of all entry level workers by employers. National standards have also been developed that identify the academic and technical skills needed for entry level positions in the sixteen broad “career clusters” that account for virtually all occupational choices. Today’s CTE preparatory programs play a key role in helping students prepare for these increasingly demanding skill sets.

The 2006 Legislature did recognize 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 CTE high school courses offered to students at the high school. A career and technical course equivalency may be for whole or partial credit. The current Congress has recognized the need for more rigorous CTE options for students that incorporate academics as well in the recent reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006. That Act requires high schools receiving funding under the law to offer as an option for students the appropriate courses of not less than one career and technical 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 to adequately prepare students to succeed in postsecondary education
- may include the opportunity for secondary education students to participate in dual or concurrent enrollment programs or other ways to acquire postsecondary education credits
- leads to an industry-recognized credential or certificate at the postsecondary level, or an associate or baccalaureate degree
- identifies and addresses current or emerging occupational opportunities.

These actions by the 2006 Legislature, Congress, and OSPI to improve and expand access to CTE will present challenges to school districts throughout the state in providing CTE programs of study with rigorous academic content that goes beyond the WASL and is aligned with postsecondary education or training.

Recommendations:

Skills centers can play a pivotal role in providing coursework that integrates the academics needed to pass the WASL, achieve a high school diploma and pursue education and training beyond high school. As noted in previous sections of this study,

skill centers, through branch campuses and satellite programs, are uniquely positioned to provide high quality, CTE programs of study to rural and remote school districts. In addition, they are in a position to be leaders in CTE curriculum development in high demand fields of study and the connecting mechanism to the college centers for excellence, business, industry and labor.

An example of this “center of excellence role” that skill centers can play in developing and implementing rigorous CTE programs can be found at New Market Skills Center in their leadership in developing the Running Start for the Trades program passed by the 2006 legislature under 2SHB 2789. This program aligns secondary technical training in the construction industry to postsecondary training, specifically apprenticeships. The Running Start for the Trades concept provides an example of how we can enhance the transition of secondary students into the construction industry—an example that needs to be duplicated in other key industries in this state.

Recommendation 1: The Legislature should facilitate skills centers’ ability to provide coursework that assists students in meeting the WASL standard by requiring that all PAS monies and I-728 funds generated by skill centers be returned to skill centers.

Recommendation 2: The Legislature should fund a leadership role in OSPI to establish and support “skill centers of excellence” in key economic sectors of regional significance. 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 3: The Legislature should establish a Running Start for CTE grant program to develop and implement CTE programs of study in high demand fields. Grant recipients should be partnerships of skills 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 expectations in the new federal Perkins law.