

APPENDIX D

SKILL CENTERS AND DROPOUT PREVENTION/INTERVENTION

SSB 5717 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.”

Background:

In “Promising Programs and Practices for Dropout Prevention” a December, 2005 Report to the Legislature, OSPI noted that CTE “...can help increase the relevance of high school for some students and the likelihood they will remain in school.” They cite a number of studies in the report that indicate CTE programs and career-themed schools help students at-risk of dropping out stay in school. In an October, 2005 paper from the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, the authors (Stephan Plank, et al) found “..for students who are of normal or young age upon high school entry, a CTE-to-academic credit ratio of approximately 1 to 2 was estimated to minimize the risk of dropping out....”

A recent study by the Workforce Board has shown the effectiveness of skill centers, in particular, in reducing the dropout rate. The Workforce Board contracted with the Upjohn Institute under its statutory obligation to study the net impact of workforce development programs. We asked the contractor to determine whether taking a CTE course at a skill center reduced the likelihood of a student dropping out of high school. The study compared the dropout status of students who took at least one course at a skill center to students who took at least one CTE course at a comprehensive high school. The results of this net impact study show that enrolling at a skill center is highly significant in reducing the likelihood of dropping out.

Because skill centers are often the only mechanism to deliver a concentration or sequence of secondary CTE courses for many secondary schools in the state, they have received attention as a means to prevent dropouts in the past. 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. OSPI does require the monies be used for either students who have been out of school for at least two months or for students needing supplemental services to be able to attend a regular program. These funds can be used for school supplies, classroom resources, transportation, food, clothing, child care, contracts with social services agencies, or counselors or advocates.

One particular model for an active skill center role in dropout prevention and intervention has been developed at New Market Skills Center in Tumwater. New Market

leverages barrier reduction monies, the BEA allocation and a Workforce Investment Act (WIA) grant to serve students from 13 different K-12 districts. The enhanced program supports an education advocate position to provide students with a strong adult relationship and a family services advocate to coordinate the necessary “wrap-around” support services. Whether students are credit deficient, already have their GED, or are seeking to earn their diploma, New Market provides a full spectrum of educational opportunities with a career focus. An added advantage for New Market is their agreement with Tumwater School District that enables New Market to issue diplomas earned by their graduates.

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. With the limited programs and resources devoted to dropout prevention and intervention in existence, collaboration at the local level between all who have a role in keeping kids in school should be encouraged by the Legislature.

Recommendations:

In their 2005 Report to the Legislature on dropouts, OSPI stated that increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates will require additional resources to fund “wrap around” services for students...” They also suggest that providing funds to support more rigorous evaluations would help identify the most promising programs and practices for preventing dropouts.

OSPI also specifically suggested in the 2005 report that an increase in the barrier reduction funds may be a wise investment in helping students successfully complete their schooling. In order for skill centers to maximize use of those funds, it may also be necessary to remove the funding disincentives for sending students to skill centers, as noted in an earlier portion of this report, particularly since skill centers other than New Market do not have the ability to provide a high school diploma.

We suggest the following steps be taken by the Washington Legislature to more actively involve skill centers in dropout prevention and retrieval:

Recommendation 1: Increase barrier reduction funding to skill centers and specifically mandate that the funds be used for a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval program for at-risk students and dropouts.

Recommendation 2: 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 to provide a comprehensive program; and provide matching funds from BEA or other dollars.