



STATE OF WASHINGTON

December 14, 2017

The Honorable Pat McCarthy
Washington State Auditor
P.O. Box 40021
Olympia, WA 98504-0021

Dear Auditor McCarthy:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the State Auditor's Office (SAO) performance audit report on Leading Practices for the State's Secondary Career and Technical Education Programs. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) worked with the Office of Financial Management to provide this response.

We commend your staff for their efforts to evaluate our state's complex career and technical education (CTE) system and the report's emphasis on better aligning CTE courses more directly with high-wage, in-demand occupations.

We wholeheartedly agree that Washington students must be exposed early to a full range of career options — including well-paying careers that require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree. As the report shows, Washington employers are struggling to find enough people to fill jobs that require such mid-level of education.

We also agree with the need to make better use of labor market data to guide high school CTE efforts, and to create seamless connections between high school and community and technical college programs. We support expanding dual-credit opportunities for CTE programs as well as strengthening and expanding local articulation agreements. Articulation agreements are formal agreements that provide a smooth transfer of credits to college programs. We also recognize the need to use sound data in determining the labor market value of particular CTE courses, and whether they should be expanded or reduced.

The SAO used readily available data crosswalks from the Economic Development and Employer Planning System (EDEPS). However, this system, which directly links any single CTE course to the outcomes from a small number of jobs, has significant limitations and can confound results. A better method is needed to provide accurate career guidance information.

For example, EDEPS shows only two occupations for the family and consumer sciences career cluster; both are at or above the bachelor's degree level. This suggests family and consumer sciences is a CTE course that leads to above-average wages. At the same time, data entry — the course group with the highest CTE enrollment in Washington schools — shows below average wages because it is linked solely to basic data entry jobs, despite computer skills being foundational for most modern occupations, including those at the highest wage levels.

We recommend further research and analysis that focuses on career pathways so students planning their future can more fully understand the potential labor market. Complementary analysis at the course level

should distinguish different “types” of CTE courses: separating career and education planning courses; distinguishing between exploratory and preparatory courses in programs of study; and identifying broadly applicable foundational skill courses while distinguishing those primarily applicable within technical education from those with general applicability to education.

The recommendations in your report align well with the mission and goals of the state strategic plan for workforce development — Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP). We invite the SAO to present its findings and recommendations to the Workforce Board, which oversees TAP implementation, and discuss potential strategies to advance recommendations.

With regard to legislative recommendation No. 2, we appreciate that you called upon the Legislature to fund the proposed work group. If funded, we ask that the Legislature consider the work, structure and relationships already established as it outlines the structure and responsibilities for the group.

The Workforce Board is the legislatively designated coordinating body for policy and strategy linking Washington’s secondary and postsecondary education systems. For many years, the Workforce Board has advocated creating multiple pathways to economic self-sufficiency and engaged stakeholders in secondary and postsecondary education regarding articulation policy. The business- and labor-led Workforce Board is well situated to provide staff support and coordination for the work group.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and SBCTC, as governing bodies for high schools and colleges, are in a strong position to leverage partnerships and bring faculty together to forge successful articulation agreements. (The [“Bridge to College”](#) courses are a good example). Superintendent Reykdal and Executive Director Yoshiwara have already directed staff to develop a dual-credit pilot program that could be adopted by multiple districts and colleges. It is important to note that credit acceptance policy and curriculum rests with the colleges and their faculty according to accreditation standards spelled out by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Articulation agreements cannot be mandated by the SBCTC, the Workforce Board or OSPI. That said, SBCTC has a proven track record in facilitating system-wide initiatives and has the trust, experience and understanding to navigate faculty and institutional roles.

We recommend starting with a smaller pilot project to identify barriers and opportunities. Creating a statewide articulation agreement and common course numbering among 30 community and technical college districts and 295 school districts — all governed by their own local boards of trustees — will be complex and time-consuming.

SBCTC and the colleges have a deep level of experience in engaging employers through program advisory committees, centers of excellence, job skills and customized training programs. More than 2,000 employers serve on program advisory committees.

We would be pleased to explore a more coordinated approach to advisory committees. Advisory committee structure is defined in statute (RCW 28B.50.252) and under SBCTC policies. Additionally, colleges have longstanding, effective advisory committees. Regional and combined advisory committees are permissible under SBCTC guidelines, but *requiring* a regional or statewide approach is unlikely to achieve the desired outcome as employers are often loyal to specific programs and institutions. Consideration can be given to increasing the presence of high school faculty on college advisory committees and vice versa, better coordination of employer engagement and regional entities, where warranted.

We also respectfully suggest that success would be better measured by including the number of students who articulate from high school CTE programs to college professional-technical programs, not solely by the number of articulation agreements that are in effect. Also, it would likely be impossible to measure success in terms of cost savings because of the complexity and time involved in designing robust articulation agreements.

Your report on the state's CTE system demonstrates opportunities to help ensure more students gain earlier access to career planning, a more unified and expanded range of high school-to-college dual credit opportunities, a renewed focus on engaging business to ensure coursework is current and connected to the real world, and more CTE courses that better align with the high-wage, high-demand jobs available in Washington.

SBCTC and the Workforce Board remain committed to working closely together — with OSPI — to expose students to the exciting array of career options before them and to supply the relevant, research-based programs to move them into those careers. With that in mind, we are providing the attached response to recommendations in the audit report.

Please extend our thanks to your staff for exploring innovative approaches here in Washington and in other states and for gathering numerous perspectives for this report.

Sincerely,



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State Board for Community and
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This coordinated management response to the State Auditor's Office (SAO) performance audit report received November 21, 2017, is provided by the Office of Financial Management, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board).

SAO PERFORMANCE AUDIT OBJECTIVES:

The SAO designed the audit to identify school districts that are providing effective Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that meet the needs of students and employers and develop a set of leading practices that may be useful to other districts across the state. It asked:

1. Are secondary CTE programs and courses aligned with the needs of students and employers?
 2. Are there leading practices that could improve the success of the state's secondary CTE programs?
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SAO found the following conditions that could improve the alignment between the courses students that are offered in secondary CTE programs and job opportunities:

1. Improving career guidance given to students and providing it in a classroom setting in the seventh or eighth grade.
 2. Strengthening employer engagement could better align CTE programs and courses with high-wage industry-needed skills.
 3. Updating the list of high-demand programs, strengthening the review of local labor demand data and clarifying laws may help reduce the skills gap.
 4. Expanding the number of CTE dual-credit opportunities to increase the number of pathways from high school to college.
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SAO directs recommendations 1-4 to the Legislature and 5-7 to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

SAO Recommendation 8 to the Workforce Board: Gather input from OSPI and the State Board of Education to enhance the Career Bridge website. This website should include information about CTE and dual-credit opportunities in high school.

STATE RESPONSE: The Workforce Board agrees with the recommendation and will gather input from OSPI and the State Board of Education on improving the Career Bridge site. We agree with the report's emphasis on Career Bridge as a useful tool for career and education planning for students. The Workforce Board has been working on creating new components to Career Bridge that demonstrate the value of secondary career and technical education as well as developing concepts such as a digital portfolio, where students can save their resumes and letters of recommendation, along with other career-connected learning efforts. These features would make the site much more valuable for middle and high school students.

The Workforce Board also will reach out to OSPI and the State Board of Education to retrieve data on dual-credit opportunities and CTE. This will take place on a regular basis once information is available and contingent on additional funding to support the creation and maintenance of additional webpages on Career Bridge.

The Workforce Board is also interested in working with its stakeholders on other resource and revenue models for Career Bridge. Currently, Career Bridge does not have a sustained or predictable funding source.

Action Steps and Time Frame

- The Workforce Board will consult with OSPI and the State Board of Education for feedback about ongoing efforts to make Career Bridge a more useful tool for students. *By March 31, 2018.*
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SAO Recommendation 9 to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC): Share with OSPI and the Workforce Board the labor market data and analysis that colleges and SBCTC consider when developing postsecondary CTE programs and courses.

STATE RESPONSE: The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges agrees with the recommendation. Due to the large number of programs, it is not practical to share program-specific data. We will share tools and processes used by the community and technical colleges when developing postsecondary CTE programs and courses.

Action Steps and Time Frame

- SBCTC will share with OSPI and the Workforce Board the labor market data tools and professional-technical program approval process used by community and technical colleges when developing postsecondary CTE programs and courses. *By March 1, 2018.*
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