

Employment and Workplace Safety Subcommittee Hearing November 28, 2007

Testimony of David Harrison, Chair, Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

Honorable Chairman Senator Murray and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and present written remarks to the Employment and Workplace Safety Subcommittee of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee... Senator Murray, your leadership on workforce development issues has been a beacon to the Washington workforce community. We appreciate your commitment to helping students prepare for careers and meeting the workforce needs of industry. We believe that enhancing career pathways for students is an indispensable strategy both to help students succeed and to help companies compete. As promising as are the efforts we will all discuss today, they represent only a beginning of a job that must be done.

A vital role of Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) is to identify the skill and training needs of businesses in Washington State and the supply of trained individuals provided by educational institutions and to advance strategies to close the gap between the two. Our analysis based on projected job openings and employer surveys have consistently shown that the greatest gap in meeting employer demand is for mid-level postsecondary training – training that is more than one year but less than four years in length. Such training is provided by our community and technical colleges, apprenticeship programs, career and technical education programs in comprehensive high schools and “skills centers” (local school district collaboratives that focus on CTE preparatory coursework). Since 1998, this system has only been meeting from 66% to 77% of projected employer demand annually for persons completing these mid-level programs. In order to close this skill gap at the mid-level by 2010, we would need 26,000 more community and technical college student FTEs than were enrolled in 2005.

Under Governor Gregoire's leadership, we have been redoubling the efforts to close the gap. At the community and technical college level, we have addressed “high employer demand programs of study” which are undergraduate certificate or degree programs in which the number of students prepared for employment per year is substantially less than the number of projected job openings in that field – statewide, or in a sub-state region. In Washington, these high demand programs of study include accounting, aircraft mechanics and technicians, auto diesel mechanics, construction trades, education, healthcare practitioners, science technology, transportation, and installation, maintenance and repair.

In addition, we have sought to expand access to this outstanding community and technical college system. A major success toward accomplishing this objective was an appropriation of \$25 million in the 2007-2009 state operating budget to expand the “Opportunity Grant Program” which provides wrap-around support services and financial aid to low-income adults for one year

of training in mid-level high demand programs of study. This will enable low-income students to reach the “tipping point” of education required for economic self-sufficiency.

The initiatives to confront the skill shortage at the earlier steps of the pathway are equally critical, as too many high school students face a situation where no path is clear to them. In *“High Skills, High Wages,”* Washington’s 2006 Strategic Plan for Workforce Development, the Board has established the following system objective:

“There should be secondary CTE programs throughout the K-12 system that enable students to explore career pathways and complete preparatory coursework that matches their aspirations. The career pathways should be articulated with postsecondary education and training and result in industry certification.”

The recently re-authorized Perkins Act is a tool in furthering this objective. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 provided for the development and implementation of career and technical education (CTE) “programs of study” that include a nonduplicative progression of courses that align secondary education with postsecondary education. The Workforce Board and its K-12 and community and technical college partners are in the process of planning the implementation of the Perkins Act, including designing a process for development and approval of CTE programs of study.

The focus of the No Child Left Behind Act, on the other hand, has presented obstacles to furthering career pathways. Many local school districts are assigning more coursework centered on test performances, causing a reduction in skills courses in some districts. In response, the Workforce Board is working on a number of initiatives with its partners to ensure career pathways are available to students throughout the state, including the following:

- We completed a study and recommendations for the 2007 legislative session on improving access to “skills centers” and many of those recommendations are being implemented;
- In preparation for the upcoming legislative session, we are working with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to secure funding for implementing “high demand” CTE programs of study and the development of articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary programs that provide a program of sequenced courses and ensure all students have access to dual enrollment options;
- The Board is part of a legislatively-mandated advisory committee to the Legislature that is examining how CTE programs can guarantee rigorous academic content and thus be recognized as meeting academic course equivalencies; and
- The State Legislature has implemented a grant program that enables local school districts to work with apprenticeship councils on aligning curriculum to provide direct or preferential entry for students who complete pre-apprenticeship programs.

While we are making important progress in this state in building multiple career pathways for students, much remains to be done. Tech Prep programs have developed a number of articulation

agreements between individual high schools and individual community colleges. The skills centers in the state have been increasing their course alignment with postsecondary opportunities as well – New Market and Sno-Isle Skills Centers have been leaders in this effort. However, more resources need to be allocated to the development of model curriculum and accompanying articulation agreements that can be replicated statewide. This is a time-intensive process that involves bringing business, labor, and K-12 and postsecondary faculty together to establish standards and develop curriculum frameworks. While some states (California and South Carolina) have been successful in securing significant state resources for this work, additional monies allocated through the Perkins Act would go a long way to making sure these opportunities exist throughout the state.

An important part of career pathways for students is work-based learning. We need to do more to involve business and labor and provide opportunities for students to learn at workplaces. This can take the form of co-ops, internships, pre-apprenticeship programs and other strategies. Some examples in this state include the mentoring by Electroimpact in the robotics program in the Mukilteo School District and the “Youth Works” internships provided by Memorial Hospital for a number of high school students in Yakima County. Much more needs to be done in this respect. Congress should explore providing incentives to business and other mechanisms to increase to work-based learning opportunities for students.

It is critical that we continue to acknowledge the vital role that career and technical education plays in providing opportunities for secondary students to achieve academic success and prepare for careers. We know that secondary students must be engaged and motivated to learn. Career and technical education provides the relevance for many students needed for their engagement, as well as an opportunity to learn academics in a “hands-on” manner. Career and technical education programs of study options are a necessary tool for ensuring all students learn the skills they need to be successful in today’s economy.