Introduction

The 2008 Legislature passed Engrossed Senate Substitute Bill 6295 that directs the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) to review best practices for workplace-based learning with “electronically distributed learning components,” and to work with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to study and make recommendations on digital learning programs.¹ The Workforce Board is to provide a preliminary report to the Legislature by December 1, 2008 and a final report by December 1, 2009. This is the preliminary report.

Adults Need More Education and Training

The purpose of the studies that the Legislature has requested of the Workforce Board and SBCTC is to identify ways to expand access to education and training for Washington residents, especially adults.

We know that better than one out of three Washington high school graduates do not carry on with their education in the year following graduation. Instead, they go directly to work, relying exclusively on their high school diploma to gain entry into mostly low-wage, low-skill jobs.² Employers who hire these young people report that too many lack basic workplace or employability skills, and the specific job skills that employers are looking for.³

Many adults will continue to postpone their plans for further education because of the need to work and support themselves and their families. Yet, we have evidence that, on average, an individual needs at least one year of postsecondary education and a

¹ There are number of ways to reference the concept of using computer technology and resources to expand the reach of our education system. For this paper, we will use the term digital learning for electronically distributed learning, eLearning, digital textbooks and other related services that support computer-support education.
credential to have a job that pays enough to support oneself and one’s family.\textsuperscript{4} To ensure more working-age adults access education and training, we need to develop more portable and flexible education delivery methods through digital learning, including providing education and training at the workplace.

**Progress to Date**

- **Evaluation of Workplace-Based Digital Learning Programs.** The Workforce Board contracted with the Social and Economic Science Research Center at Washington State University to review national best practices and key issues in workplace-based digital learning. The review is completed and included in this report.

- **Convened an Executive Advisory Team and key stakeholders.**
  1. The Workforce Board convened key industry and education stakeholders and the Executive Advisory Team as per the authorizing legislation on December 2, 2008 at a facilitated session to scope industry and education needs and develop continuing work for 2009. (See Attachment A)
  2. The Workforce Board created an online workplace-based learning network for stakeholders and Executive Advisors to continue the conversation started in December 2008 (http://workplacebasedlearning.ning.com/).

- **Completed a Strategic Technology Plan for the community and technical colleges.** SBCTC convened a Technology Transformation Task Force and has completed a Strategic Technology Plan for the Community and Technical College system. This document contains detailed system plans for digital learning and free textbooks.

- **Preparing to convene a digital learning subgroup of the Executive Advisory Team.** SBCTC is in the process of convening a subgroup, as per the authorizing legislation, to:
  1. Review digital learning best practices;
  2. Recommend methods to increase student access as well as identify barriers to participation and completion;
  3. Determine methods to increase the supply of open course materials;
  4. Recommend methods to increase the availability of free, open textbooks; and
  5. Review and report demographic information on digital learning programs including enrollments, retention, and completion.

• **Pursuing and contributing to open educational resources.**

1. SBCTC joined and is actively participating in the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources: [http://cccoer.wordpress.com](http://cccoer.wordpress.com)

2. SBCTC is participating in the Community College Open Textbook Project: [http://www.collegeopentextbooks.org](http://www.collegeopentextbooks.org)

3. SBCTC contributed to a national, student-run report on Open Textbooks titled: “Course Correction: How Digital Textbooks are Off Track and How to Set Them Straight”: [http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.org/course_correction.pdf](http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.org/course_correction.pdf)

4. If funding is available, SBCTC plans to redesign, with open content and open textbooks, 75-100 system shared courses in 2009.

• **Raising faculty and leadership awareness**: SBCTC continues to raise faculty and college leadership awareness though presentations and a blog on open educational resources: [http://blog.oer.sbctc.edu](http://blog.oer.sbctc.edu)

**What is in this Preliminary Report?**

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Part 1: National review of workplace-based digital learning programs - Summary

The Workforce Board contracted with the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC) at Washington State University to identify and evaluate current national private employer workplace-based digital learning--programs with electronically distributed learning components--provided by public and private colleges and universities.

In this exploratory assessment, the SESRC identified and reviewed literature and contacted practitioners who are involved with workplace-based education and training programs. The SESRC specifically looked for programs that are connected to a public or private college or university, and have electronically distributed components (including either web based/online and non-web based such as DVD, software, etc.). The Workforce Board provided coordination, consultation, and liaison services to facilitate the exploratory assessment.

In the full report (Attachment C), the SESRC identifies several “key strategies” for program success that emerged from its review of case studies and conversations with program managers. These strategies are part of what might become the “best practices” for workplace-based education programs with a college connection.

Key Strategies for Workplace-Based Education Program Success

1. Strengthen the community college position to reach out to the low wage/lower skilled workers.

2. Integrate remediation, basic skills development and ESL into the postsecondary curriculum.

3. Obtain “buy-in” from the top down at both the college and the employer company or organization.

4. Build a solid partnership between the college and the employer company or organization.

5. Develop workplace-based education programs with a work-based learning approach.

6. Involve college faculty members in the design and implementation of the workplace-based education programs.
7. Incorporate on-site supervisors or “faculty extenders” as instructors in the workplace.

8. Provide academic mentors for low wage/lower skilled workers.

9. Connect low wage/lower skilled workers to community organizations, social services, and public health resources.

10. Provide an incentive hierarchy for the workers progressing through the program.

11. Use E-Learning and other electronic components to enhance or facilitate the learning process for low wage/low skilled worker education programs.

12. Allow ample time at the outset for planning and design phase of workplace-based education programs.

13. Accommodate unique aspects of various work settings in program design.
Part 2: WA Community and Technical Colleges’ Strategic Technology Plan – Executive Summary

Our state’s most urgent need:
Educate more people to higher levels

Washington needs more people with higher levels of education and skill to sustain our prosperity, our democracy, and our diverse and innovative culture. To achieve this goal, we can no longer simply wait for people to enroll in our colleges; we must reach out to all those who can benefit from further education, and help them succeed at learning.

Community and technical colleges are at the center of this challenge. Our open door policy meets people wherever they are on their educational journey, whether they are high school dropouts, new immigrants, high school graduates seeking a college degree or job skills, or mid-career professionals retraining for new opportunities.

Fuller use of information technology is key to making education more accessible and user-friendly for every kind of learner. But we are late to recognize the educational impact and potential of the Internet, late to take advantage of the shift to open, student-centered, web-based applications, and late to listen to what our students and faculty are telling us about what they need to thrive in the 21st century.

Even though we are ahead of many other states in our use of online learning, we are far behind the level of technological sophistication of today’s workplaces, and far behind in mobilizing technologies that could help increase student learning, provide friendlier, faster student services, and improve administrative efficiency, data analysis, and accountability.

One, single-minded goal:
To mobilize technology to increase student success

This plan addresses all of these deficits. But while most strategic plans have many goals, this plan has only one: to mobilize technology to increase student success. It lays out clear principles, strategies, and action steps that will transform our use of technology for the benefit of all learners and the faculty who teach them.

These principles, strategies and action steps are the result of an 18-month analysis conducted by the Technology Transformation Task Force of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. The Task Force conducted extensive surveys, focus groups and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and education and information technology experts and educators from across the country and around the world. It also analyzed the community and technical college system’s successes and mistakes in the deployment of information technology during the past 25 years. We are now implementing what we can with existing resources and seeking funds for additional needed investment.
The Task Force's work dealt with three major areas of technology deployment: student learning, student services, and administration. In all three areas, the Task Force found a need for greater uniformity across the 34 colleges in the system and with our partners in the broader P-20 education system.

Today's patchwork of programs often requires students to learn multiple online learning programs and use multiple passwords. Not all colleges use WashingtonOnline, the system-wide platform for online learning, because they must pay to do so. The result is a constriction in the number of online courses that are available to students throughout the state. Students also must pay an extra fee to take an online class. This plan proposes to end both fees and to fund online learning not as a special add-on, but part of the baseline of expected service.

This plan also recommends a shift from locally developed software and hosting services. Today, the private sector and public, open source communities have developed applications and hosting services for online learning, student services, and administration that include automatic updates that continue to add functionality. We will not try to do what others can do better, faster, and for less money. We will shift our best and brightest IT staff from software developers to integration experts who tie together best-of-breed applications.

But the biggest shift called for in this plan is cultural. In the end, catching up with today's information technologies is not about technology itself; it is about a new world of open, online sharing where everyone has the power to create and disseminate their ideas, courses and textbooks and to re-mix and use others' work. It is about simultaneous collaboration with peers across the hall and around the world. To be a part of this world – and to help create it – both our students and our faculty need new tools, new competencies, and an education system that is organized to support the fullest possible use of the vast new learning resources available at their fingertips.

Five strategies for transformation

I. Create a single, system-wide suite of online teaching and learning tools that provides all Washington students with easy access to “anywhere, anytime” learning.

II. Create a seamless P-20 system for personalized online student services including: recruitment, retention, advising, course catalogue, transfer, and financial aid management.

III. Create a system of lifelong learning and change management for faculty, staff and college leadership.

IV. Use data to drive continuous improvement in both student success and administrative efficiency.
V. Treat information technology as a centrally funded, baseline service in the system budget.

Part 3: Next Steps

Stakeholder Development Event -- Late Spring 2009
In late spring 2009, the Workforce Board, in partnership with the Executive Advisory Team, will convene work groups of industry and education stakeholders to create an implementation plan based on the models for workplace-based learning developed during the December 2008 facilitated sessions (Attachment A).

This event will seek to engage employers and organized labor with educational institutions in both the pedagogical matters and practical, technical and financial requirements of creating viable workplace based learning initiatives. Workforce Board staff will work in consultation with the Executive Advisory Team to prepare recommendations on models that are feasible for implementation.

Initiative Launch -- Second Half of 2009
The current plan is to launch pilot workplace-based digital learning projects in the second half of 2009. While pilot projects were included in the enabling legislation, they were not funded. The need for pilot project “seed funds” will be included in the analysis of barriers to implementation conducted by the Workforce Board in consultation with the Executive Advisory Team.