

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board Executive Director's Report

Meeting No. 234
March 11, 2020

1. Credential Transparency Initiative continues forward:

Two important happenings are furthering the advancement of credential transparency in Washington. Our advisory committee, with representatives from across postsecondary education, had their inaugural meeting on February 19. The progress of the Career Bridge pilot project, coupled with the launch of Google Pathways in WA, is motivating significant interest among the various sectors of higher education, including 2- and 4-year public and private institutions, and state registered apprenticeship. We also had representation from OSPI, as credential transparency may aid the creation of a true multiple pathway system toward high school graduation, dual crediting, and articulation to postsecondary education. This advisory committee will work with us to develop policy recommendations to support institutions moving toward a new credential taxonomy.

Second, we've signed an MOU with Merit International to be able to test the value of a digitized credential portfolio platform—a virtual credential wallet for individuals. Merit has developed a platform with wide applicability that allows people to continuously access, accurately track, and easily organize their credentials and accomplishments all in one place. We believe this model may help to level the economic mobility playing field, especially for underserved populations. Merit has granted us pro-bono use of their platform for 6 months to implement evaluatable pilots. We are currently in the process of recruiting organizations that might be willing to help us test this concept. You can learn more about the Merit platform at <https://www.merits.com/about-us>.

2. King 5 Investigation "School of Broken Promises:"

This ongoing investigation looks at a particular private school, licensed by the Workforce Board, that primarily serves injured workers needing to be retrained for reemployment opportunities. Office Careers has been operating since 1994, and has consistently met the criteria for licensure. The school's programs do not, however, meet the completion, employment, and earnings criteria to be listed on the Workforce Board's Eligible Training Provider List. We were pleased to see references to—and highlights from—our Career Bridge website and the Eligible Training Provider List throughout the report.

King 5 investigative reporter, Susannah Frame, identified a growing number of graduates of Office Careers that lost their workers' compensation benefits after completing an Office Careers program, even though they could not find gainful employment. These students filed appeals to the WA Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals, and most saw the workers' compensation decision reversed. The Workforce Board had not received any student complaints, but is now using the information compiled by Ms. Frame to begin a thorough investigation of the school's practices. We are also working closely with the Department of Labor and Industries (LNI) to gather information on the retraining plans of the affected students. LNI began an audit of the school in July 2019, expected to be completed in two to three months. We expect our investigation to take about six months. At any point, with sufficient evidence, the Workforce Board can suspend the school's ability to enroll new students, or go as far as revoking the school's license to operate. Our first priority, though, is to ensure students are able to

either complete their chosen program at Office Careers or at another school with a similar offering. You can follow the story on the King 5 website at <https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/state-orders-halt-on-sending-injured-washington-workers-to-unaccredited-online-school/281-20c8c1c1-e3ea-42cb-9303-8e4733abc3ec>.

3. WIOA Reauthorization:

The Workforce Board has a statutory responsibility to inform Congress and federal agencies about the potential impact of current or developing legislation. It seems like just yesterday that the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted. But it will soon reach its sunset date. A federal law can continue past its sunset date, but the law becomes vulnerable to easy elimination. The predecessor to WIOA, WIA, went 12 years past its sunset date, and was considered for elimination during that period.

Congress has begun working on WIOA reauthorization or replacement. We have been fielding a number of inquiries from our congressional delegation offices and from the US House Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. You'll recall that Nova Gattman provided testimony to the House Subcommittee on Education and Labor this past December on workforce development issues related to the Future of Work.

While a final reauthorization or replacement bill is not likely to move in Congress before the November elections, we should be ready to provide a comprehensive analysis to our state's delegation by late summer or early fall. We have been asked to provide input to the National Governors Association by mid-March to help inform their WIOA policy agenda. We are soliciting quick input from across our system for the NGA, which must have unanimous support from all 50 governors before they submit their policy agenda to Congress and the White House. We will continue input gathering and analysis throughout the spring and early summer to have a final set of recommendations for the Board and Governor to consider by mid-September.

4. Research Improving People's Lives:

One of the Board's legislative requests this year was for funding to bring on an IT business analyst consultant to map current data structures across multiple agencies, and develop recommendations and specifications to build out a secure data-sharing and integrated case management system. That request did not go forward, but we continue to look for sources of support to facilitate meaningful data-sharing across agencies and programs.

We've been working with an organization called Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL) that has been innovating use of public administrative data to spur better outcomes for customers. They can help create new data relationships, help make data analytics more efficient through automation, or help bring meaningful data to citizen users. Staff of the Workforce Board and ESD have been meeting with RIPL to explore a potential partnership that may be supported by National Science Foundation funding. RIPL has received Phase I funding and has been invited to request Phase II funding. This is how they describe their current work:

Under the National Science Foundation (NSF) funded Future of Work project, RIPL will help states employ their own administrative data to create scientifically accurate measures of returns to training and reskilling programs. RIPL will provide an easy-to-use, easy-to-understand, user-centric web and mobile platform to share these measures with workers, training providers, and government. Workers will be able to use the measures to make informed choices to gain valuable skills. Policy leaders can know which

programs work and invest in them. The result is better opportunities and outcomes for all workers per dollar spent on training.

5. WIOA Target-Setting

Each year, Board staff work with the state's Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) and Employment Security Department to develop an approach to analyzing current participant data, and a preliminary set of targets for WIOA Titles I and III. Generally, this information is presented to the Board for review at the April Board meeting, and for the Board's approval in May or June. This gives the Board a chance to seek clarification or provide direction on desired modifications before taking final action. These preliminary targets and data analysis are then used in our negotiation with USDOL to determine the state's performance targets for the following program year. Negotiations with the Department of Labor (DOL) will be in May (specific date yet to be determined). This year, the Board's retreat is also scheduled for May, which leaves only the April 15th meeting for Board review and approval.

We have been holding weekly calls with WDC staff to answer questions and to develop the best approach to determining performance targets for WIOA Titles I and III. We don't yet have complete data, as ESD continues to work on the participant reporting system, but we expect to have a sound proposal ready for the Board's review at the April 15th meeting. We will aim to have the target-setting proposal out to Board members at least a week in advance of the April meeting, and will also provide a pre-meeting video presentation of the package to help clarify each of the proposed targets and the potential impact of these targets on each WDC and the state. We hope to be able to answer all member questions either prior to or at the April 15th meeting. However, if significant questions or concerns arise that can't be resolved at the April meeting, the Board can choose to convene a special Board meeting prior to USDOL negotiations.

We take the Board's Target-setting negotiator role very seriously. USDOL target negotiators use a standard analytical framework for all states when developing state targets. While our proposed (state-level) targets are often fairly close to those provided by USDOL, even a small difference at the aggregate state level can have a consequential impact on an individual WDC.