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Assembly
California Legislature



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Members

Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Members of the Committee:

I respectfully request your approval for an audit of the K-12 Strong Workforce Program administered by the Office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. Given the limited funding available to support K-12 career technical education programs (CTE), it is essential to ensure that all local educational agencies have fair and equitable access to these funds and to the support necessary to ensure high quality CTE programs and pathways.

Recent history of K-12 Career Technical Education (CTE). Prior to 2013-14, Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROCP) was the state's largest high school CTE program. In 2013-14, the state shifted ROCP funding into the newly enacted Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). In the first two years of LCFF implementation, districts were required to spend no less on ROCPs than they did in 2012-13. In 2015-16 the state established the CTE Incentive Grant (CTEIG) to fund K-12 CTE programs for a period of three years. The state allocated a total of \$900 million to the program over the course of those three years. In 2018, the state converted CTEIG into an ongoing program and created the K-12 Strong Workforce Program (SWP) to create, support, or expand high-quality career technical education CTE programs at the K-12 level aligned with the workforce development efforts.

The 2018 Budget provided \$150 million in ongoing funds for the CTEIG program and \$150 million in ongoing funds for the newly established K-12 SWP. An additional \$12 million in ongoing funding was appropriated to the Chancellor's Office for K-12 Workforce Pathway Coordinators and K-14 Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs) for the Strong Workforce Program. Finally, \$2 million was appropriated to support administrative costs of the K-12 Strong Workforce Program consortia.

The K-12 SWP initiative allocates funds to eight California regional consortia, each of which forms a K-12 Selection Committee that, guided by the regional priorities in the SWP regional plans, awards K-12 SWP funds to eligible and qualifying local educational agencies (LEAs) in its region through a competitive grant process.

Critical importance of CTE. CTE prepares students for the world of work by introducing them to key workplace skills. Participation in CTE classes motivates students to attend school more frequently and be more engaged, which improves their overall academic outcomes. Partnerships are developed between high schools, businesses, and postsecondary schools, providing pathways to employment as well as associate, Bachelor, and advanced degrees. Programs that provide quality career exploration and guidance, and appropriate student supports prepare students to transition smoothly into postsecondary education as well as directly into the workforce.

Limited funding available for CTE. Adequate funding of high quality CTE programs is essential to serve the needs of all students and to meet the state’s labor market demands. In 2018-19, requests for funding for both the CTEIG and K-12 SWP totaled \$619 million, however, only \$300 million was available to fund these requests. In 2019-20, total requests for the two programs totaled \$1.18 billion, while \$300 million in funding was available. Given the limited amount of funding available, some LEAs have questioned the reasoning behind splitting K-12 CTE funding into two separate funding streams: CTEIG and K-12 SWP.

Lack of technical assistance to support CTE pathways. There is a need to ensure that local educational agencies (LEAs) have ready access to technical assistance in order to support the development and growth of high quality K-12 career pathways. Prior to the establishment of the K-12 SWP, CTE technical assistance was provided to LEAs through regional leads at seven county offices of education (COEs), with a total funding allocation of \$3 million per year through the CTEIG program. As of June 30, 2019, this funding was eliminated and the state has allocated \$12 million in ongoing funding to support one K-12 Workforce Pathway Coordinator at each of the 72 community college districts and one K-12 Technical Assistance Providers in each of the eight SWP regions. State law requires that the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Chancellor’s Office jointly administer a competitive process to select K-12 Workforce Pathway Coordinators. However, as of January 2020, most of these positions were unfilled, leaving LEAs without the necessary support to ensure they were able to establish and continue to provide high quality CTE opportunities for students.

Inconsistency among regional selection committees impacting LEAs. Legislation authorizing the K-12 SWP requires that decisions on the distribution of resources for the program be made exclusively by the K-12 Selection committee in each region, made up of representatives of LEAs, relevant industries, community colleges, and other stakeholders. However, “consortia are encouraged to collaboratively develop a uniform grant application process that includes a process for grant renewals and for a grant applicant to appeal a grant award decision of the K-12 Selection Committee.” To our knowledge, there is no uniform process in place between the regions.

LEA representatives report a variety of issues relating to inconsistencies between regions in processes, policies, and training of selection committee members that have impacted the equitable access to K-12 SWP funds by LEAs. In addition, there have been suggestions that

conflict of interest issues have plagued certain K-12 selection committees, as members of the selection committees include representatives of LEAs applying for the funds.

Potential audit questions. I request that the audit consider the following questions relating to the K-12 SWP:

- 1) To what extent was the \$12 million in annual funding to support 72 Workforce Pathway Coordinators and 8 K-12 Technical Assistance Providers used for that purpose for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 fiscal years?
 - a) How many of these positions have been filled?
 - b) Were any funds not used to fill these positions provided to each consortium and used to support CTE programs as required by state law? If not, how were these funds used?
- 2) To what extent have the K-12 Selection committees acted to ensure they awarded funds appropriately and consistently?
 - a) Have the K-12 Selection committees developed processes for grant applications, awards, and appeals? Are these processes consistent across all of the committees?
 - b) Has each K-12 Selection committee received sufficient training and instruction for those scoring the applications to ensure reliable and consistent adherence to scoring rubrics?
 - c) Does each K-12 Selection committees have adequate protections and processes in place to avoid conflicts of interest in the awarding of grants?
- 3) For a selection of K-12 Selection committees, were the grants the committees awarded to LEAs in the last two fiscal years awarded fairly and appropriately?
- 4) Has the bifurcation of K-12 CTE funding between the CTEIG program and the K-12 SWP impacted the fair and equitable distribution of CTE funding to LEAs?

I respectfully request that you approve an audit of the K-12 Strong Workforce Program to address the issues outlined above. If you have any questions, please contact my staff, Debbie Look at Debbie.look@asm.ca.gov or (916) 319-2087.

Sincerely,


Patrick O'Donnell
Assemblymember, 70th District