



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Running Start Data

2025

Authorizing Legislation: **SHB 1316(1)(4)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report examines statewide Running Start enrollment for school year (SY) 2023–24, as required by [Substitute House Bill \(SHB\) 1316\(1\)\(4\)](#) and codified in [Revised Code of Washington \(RCW\) 28A.600.402\(4\)](#) (Running start program – Funding levels - Report).

Disaggregated data for the 2023–24 school year is presented in the [accompanying data tables](#), and longitudinal data from a variety of other sources was utilized to provide additional context. The sources utilized in this report include the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s (OSPI) Comprehensive Education and Data Research System (CEDARS), OSPI apportionment data, the State Board for Community and Technical College’s (SBCTC) [Enrollment Data Dashboard](#), and four-year baccalaureate institutions’ Public Centralized Higher Education Enrollment System (PCHEES) data compiled by the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC). Much of the data provided is also available through the Dual Credit dashboard of OSPI’s [Washington State Report Card](#).

As demonstrated by ERDC’s [Annual Report on Dual Credit](#), SBCTC’s Enrollment Data Dashboard, and OSPI’s Washington State Report Card, Running Start enrollment slowed during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, but has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. The 30,959 Running Start students reported as enrolled by colleges in fall of 2023 compares favorably to the program’s high-water mark of 31,991 reflected in the OSPI Report Card for 2020–21. According to SBCTC’s Enrollment Data Dashboard, Running Start enrollment has steadily increased over the past three years in almost every college and term.

The summer quarter of 2024 was the first in which summer Running Start was fully implemented, leading to a fivefold increase in enrollment. By average monthly headcount, 6,204 students enrolled using available full-time equivalent (FTE) capacity (“standard” summer Running Start), made possible by the shift to a 1.40 FTE. An additional 611 enrolled as “after-exit” students who had met the 1.40 AAFTE limit or needed to take additional classes to complete their associate degree, which was made possible by additional proviso funding from the legislature. Combined, summer Running Start students attempted over 50,000 college credits.

The Legislature’s investment in Running Start has provided many students with an invaluable opportunity to get a head start on their postsecondary pursuits, and they are taking advantage of it by enrolling in higher numbers and for more credits. The added flexibility afforded by the increase to a 1.40 FTE limit and the opening of summer quarter Running Start has resulted in a noteworthy increase in enrollment and the number of credits attempted (based on FTE). To achieve this, multiple agencies collaborated closely to quickly implement summer quarter Running Start, redesign policies and practices to respond to a new FTE limitation, and provide extensive guidance and professional development. The cross-sector partnership demonstrated throughout the process is indicative of a strong, shared commitment between K–12 and higher education, as well as non-governmental organizations, to increase equitable access to quality dual credit programs for ready and interested students.

INTRODUCTION

In 2021–22, the Running Start program experienced its first enrollment decline in over a decade. This was due, in large part, to pandemic-related school and college closures and the impact of these interruptions on students' advanced course-taking. Additionally, some students whose early high school years were disrupted chose to stay in high school to experience a more traditional junior and senior year instead of accessing Running Start. At community and technical colleges, according to SBCTC's Enrollment Data Dashboard, enrollment declined 14% from fall 2020 to fall 2021 before rebounding modestly in 2022 and nearly returning to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

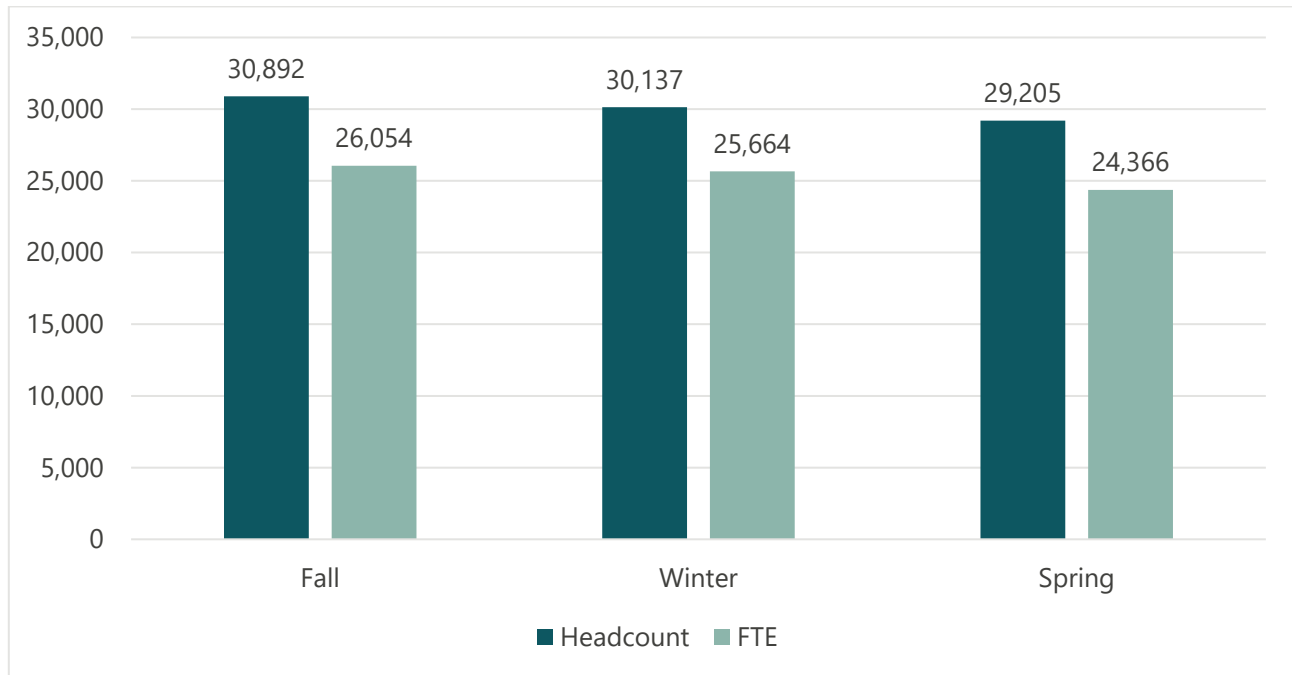
Amid that recovery, the Legislature passed SHB 1316, raising the combined maximum enrollment in Running Start to 1.40 FTE and opening the summer college term to Running Start students. In 2024, eligibility for summer quarter Running Start was formally extended to students completing the 10th grade ("rising juniors") through [Substitute Senate Bill \(SSB\) 5670](#). Including the "after-exit" proviso (first introduced in 2022) which also funded summer Running Start for graduating seniors within 15 college credits of an associate degree and those who exceeded the 1.40 FTE limit, the Legislature's investment in Running Start was generous and well timed.

Included in SHB 1316 was a requirement that OSPI would collaborate with higher education partners, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), and the ERDC on annual tracking of the combined FTE experience of students participating in Running Start programs, including course load analyses and disaggregation by high schools and institutions of higher education eligible to offer Running Start ([RCW 28A.600.300](#)). (These institutions, whether public four-year colleges and universities or community and technical colleges, will be referred to as "colleges" throughout the report.) This report aims to satisfy this requirement and provide recommendations for additional policy and funding options that can further support the legislature's intention to ensure equitable access to dual credit opportunities.

STATEWIDE RUNNING START PARTICIPATION DURING THE STANDARD (SEPTEMBER–JUNE) SCHOOL YEAR

Headcounts, FTE, and Attempted Credits 2023–24

Figure 1: K–12 Running Start Average Monthly Headcount and FTE



Source: Form P-223, OSPI School Apportionment/Financial Services Division, December 19, 2024.

The 30,892 students enrolled in Running Start in 2023–24 was the highest total since 2020–21 (31,991 according to the OSPI Report Card). Running Start enrollment traditionally declines from fall to spring each year, but as demonstrated in SBCTC’s Enrollment Data Dashboard, each term’s respective enrollment has increased annually since 2021–22 at community and technical colleges and, in 2023–24, both headcount and FTE were up 15% from the previous year. Although the OSPI Report Card displays Running Start participants as a proportion of all high school students in grades 9–12, between 15% and 17% of all eligible 11th and 12th grade students participate in Running Start annually. This has been consistent since the 2016–17 school year.

In alignment with the community college quarter system, headcounts and FTE are disaggregated by high school (547) and college (36) in the [accompanying data tables](#). Minor inconsistencies between K–12 and college counts are typically due to differences in the timing of the data extraction and the fact that K–12 enrollment data are reflected as monthly averages.

Figure 2: Running Start Credits Attempted, by College

Organization Name	Credits Attempted for Fall 2023	Credits Attempted for Winter 2024	Credits Attempted for Spring 2024
Bates	0.00	0.00	56.01
Bellevue	37,153.71	37,586.39	36,247.70
Bellingham	1,395.48	1,342.37	1,227.27
Big Bend	6,746.96	6,613.08	6,289.44
Cascadia	9,893.94	9,769.77	8,850.79
Centralia	7,040.00	7,040.60	6,809.02
Clark	23,833.73	22,779.20	20,974.46
Clover Park	2,060.13	2,132.40	2,016.30
Columbia Basin	20,655.05	20,444.73	18,522.78
Edmonds	13,255.56	13,396.82	12,136.83
Everett	17,361.06	16,592.30	15,477.75
Grays Harbor	5,510.76	5,621.72	5,240.05
Green River	29,882.55	29,601.90	28,050.78
Highline	18,336.42	18,346.14	16,697.70
Lake Washington	2,974.56	2,764.83	2,787.83
Lower Columbia	5,682.26	5,814.51	5,606.92
Olympic	16,026.00	16,290.06	15,611.27
Peninsula	4,264.01	4,201.13	3,982.24
Pierce	28,687.35	26,117.72	23,619.26
Renton	1,812.48	1,648.77	1,422.84
Seattle Central/SVI	7,692.87	7,537.56	6,622.62
Seattle North	5,605.32	5,584.44	5,007.09
Seattle South	6,057.02	5,750.43	5,523.67
Shoreline	3,971.19	3,890.21	3,721.41
Skagit Valley	8,268.83	8,120.27	7,466.88
South Puget Sound	18,321.15	17,998.13	16,855.33
Spokane	10,201.38	9,875.27	9,130.72
Spokane Falls	11,651.99	11,445.98	10,486.52
Tacoma	16,372.16	16,063.52	15,347.39
Walla Walla	3,350.13	3,388.55	3,277.49
Wenatchee Valley	10,791.32	10,699.32	10,028.10
Whatcom	10,988.34	10,621.62	9,694.02
Yakima Valley	11,447.73	11,249.96	10,536.71

Central Washington University	4,715.00	3,889.00	3,870.00
Eastern Washington University	8,517.00	7,777.00	7,019.00
Washington State University	1,935.00	NA	1,770.00
Total	392,458.39	381,995.62	357,984.19

Source: For community and technical colleges, SBCTC Enrollment Data Dashboard, December 2024. For four-year baccalaureate colleges and universities, PCHEES, as obtained through data sharing with ERDC, August 2024.

In 2023–24, Running Start students attempted between 357,984 (spring) and 392,458 (fall) college credits each term, which is equivalent to 71,597 to 78,492 five-credit courses, respectively. When divided by the quarterly headcount, it appears that students average about 2.5 Running Start classes per term, equating to roughly 12 college credits or 2.4 high school credits per quarter. A deeper dive into the data indicates that Running Start students attempt approximately 80% of all credits through college courses and 20% through high school courses. This figure appears to be relatively consistent from year to year.

Due to limitations in how Running Start course-taking is reported and stored in CEDARS, attempted credits cannot be attributed to individual schools; however, they are disaggregated by district (273) in the [accompanying data tables](#).

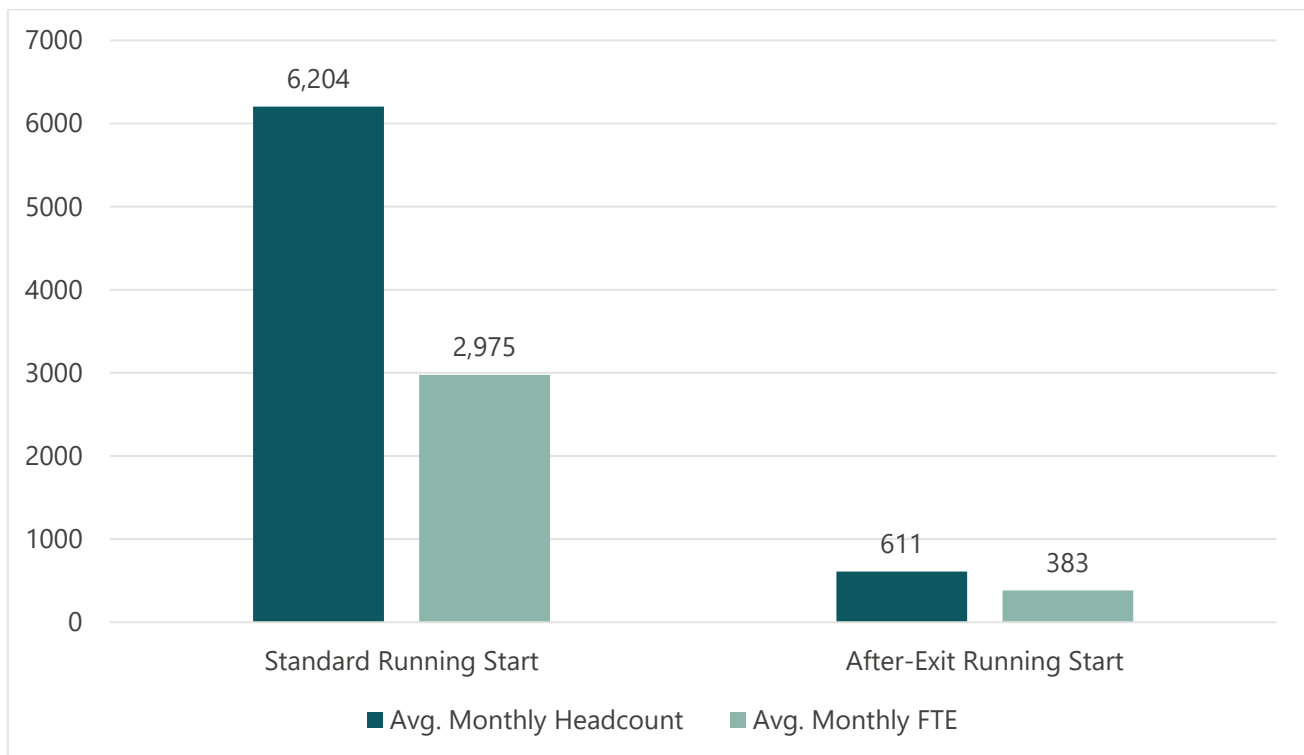
SUMMER RUNNING START PARTICIPATION

Background

Summer quarter Running Start was first initiated in 2022 when OSPI was instructed to adopt rules to allow students to participate in summer quarter Running Start through the introduction of the “after-exit” proviso, which provided \$3M to fund community and technical college Running Start enrollment for students graduating within 15 credits of an associate degree and those who exceeded Running Start enrollment limits. Annual programmatic changes detailed in the [2024 After-Exit Running Start Grants proviso report](#) provide context for significant fluctuations in summer Running Start enrollment, which dropped from 2,879 in 2022 to 1,372 in 2023.

In 2024, however, summer quarter enrollment increased almost fivefold with the introduction of the 1.40 FTE limitation, inclusion of rising juniors, and participation of public four-year institutions which were not included in the after-exit proviso. The increase can also be attributed to having a full year to provide agency guidance; fine-tune processes, forms, and resources; deliver professional development; promote summer quarter Running Start; and advise students about their eligibility and which courses to take. Summer 2024 Headcounts, FTE, and Attempted Credits

Figure 3: Standard and After-Exit Summer Headcount and FTE



Source: Form P-223 and After-Exit Funding Report, OSPI School Apportionment/Financial Services Division, December 19, 2024.

The 3,358 FTE (“standard” enrollment under the 1.40 limit and “after-exit” enrollment combined) reflected above equates to 50,370 college credits, and these credits average out to approximately

10,074 five-credit summer courses. Using a combined headcount of 6,815, students took an average of 7.39 college credits in the summer term, equivalent to 1.48 high school credits per student. With a maximum of 10 college credits available to most students (the only exception being those seniors graduating within 15 credits of an associate degree), there appears to be a healthy balance between those who are taking full advantage of the opportunity and those who opt to take a lighter courseload due to other summer commitments and/or the compressed timeline of the summer term.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Running Start enrollment has significantly increased since the pandemic, largely due to legislative support that expanded student participation and added flexibility to course scheduling. Over the past three years, enrollment and the number of credits attempted have risen in nearly every college and term. Overall enrollment growth is attributed to the increase in the FTE limit from 1.20 to 1.40, allowing students to exceed 1.0 FTE at their colleges, and the expansion of summer quarter Running Start.

The split of FTE among Running Start students' combined course load remained consistent in 2023–24, with Running Start students utilizing approximately 80% of their FTE in the colleges and 20% in the high schools. Likewise, the proportion of all eligible 11th and 12th grade students enrolling in Running Start has remained consistently between 15% and 17% across the years examined for this report. This may ease concerns among K–12 school counselors and administrators that the increased access to Running Start would adversely affect high school enrollment. Consistent with cohort trend data included in ERDC's Dual Credit Dashboard, 96.4% of Running Start students earned high school and college credit in 2023–24.

With respect to summer quarter Running Start, 6,815 students enrolled over 50,000 credits (3,358 FTE). 6,204 of these students had FTE capacity and were classified as "standard" Running Start and 611 (9%) were funded through the "after-exit" proviso. In total, this represented nearly a fivefold increase over the previous year. This increase is not likely to be repeated, as it reflects the first-time implementation of the 1.40 FTE limit, the inclusion of rising juniors, and an expansion of "after-exit" eligibility. However, the enrollment levels do establish a reasonable benchmark for future projections.

While all the 2023–24 data points are promising, the program is not without limitations. The rapid growth associated with the 1.40 FTE limit, the opening of summer quarter, and the inclusion of rising juniors has put a strain on high schools, districts, and colleges and exacerbated existing challenges. High school counselors and staff are managing an increasingly large population of Running Start students (including unfamiliar private and homeschool students) through outdated enrollment and apportionment processes while retaining only 7% of their basic education allocation (BEA). In addition, the college registration period conflicts with the busiest time of the school year and a summer term in which schools are not staffed, leading to challenges in communication, paperwork completion and routing, summer FTE reporting, and reimbursement.

Future Recommendations

OSPI recommends the following policy and funding solutions to ensure that schools, districts, and colleges are adequately supported in managing the expansion of the Running Start program, that students and families are provided with equitable and transparent opportunities to participate in it, and that it remains mutually beneficial and sustainable.

Apply a Multiplier to Raise the Running Start Rate: Applying a 6% multiplier to the Running Start rate in the prototypical school funding model to cover tuition, fees, and books would ensure

that students are not financially impacted for accessing their basic education through college coursework while ensuring participating colleges have the funding to address their operational needs. Participation gaps persist among students from historically marginalized groups and low-income families. One of the most significant barriers to participation is the out-of-pocket costs to students. Even though students are not charged tuition, they are responsible for course fees, books, and other costs that can amount to \$400–800 per quarter based on several college’s estimates and posted fees. A multiplier would also increase efficiency at the state and local levels by eliminating the need to administer fee waiver and subsidy programs. Finally, an increase in the Running Start rate would benefit school districts by increasing the amount they retain to administer Running Start programs and support the recent expansion of Running Start operations into the summer months.

Fund the Two-Count Summer Quarter at 150%: Summer Running Start enrollment increased substantially in 2024, exacerbating existing concerns about the summer reimbursement rate. To support college and district implementation of summer Running Start, an enrollment-driven increase to the prototypical school funding model is recommended to raise the summer term Running Start rate to 150% of the standard year rate. This ensures that colleges will receive reimbursement equal to that of the standard school year and districts will be able to utilize a larger overall sum from the 7% they retain to support summer operations.

According to our higher education partners, their costs are the same in the summer term as they are during the standard school year. However, colleges receive only two-thirds of what they are reimbursed during the standard school year because there are only two summer count days instead of the standard three counts in other terms. In 2024, the Legislature required OSPI to use the existing “after-exit” proviso to reimburse colleges at 130% to bring the two-count summer rate closer to the 150% needed to fund the summer term at the same rate as all other terms. The \$3 million was just enough to fully fund the small number of “after-exit” students (seniors seeking to finish their associate degrees and non-graduating students who exceeded the 1.40 annual average FTE limit) and account for an additional 30% of all 6,160 “standard” students. It will not be enough to cover additional summer growth or reach 150%.

To clarify, the 130% rate adjustment applied only to colleges and did not provide additional funding to schools and districts that have also incurred additional costs for administering summer Running Start at a time of year when schools are traditionally closed. At the district level, program effectiveness was hampered due to the limited availability of high school staff required to advise students at the end of the school year, process Running Start Enrollment Verification Forms (RSEVF), and manage monthly enrollment reporting during the summer months. There also needs to be sufficient staffing available during the summer term to manage communication between high schools and colleges with respect to student eligibility, enrollment, support services, grade and credit transcription, etc. To date, additional funding has not yet been provided to account for the additional workload incurred by opening summer quarter in 2023 and the inclusion in 2024 of additional students accessing the program as rising juniors.

Integrated Electronic Tracking and Reporting: Funding must be allocated to establish the technological infrastructure to effectively administer Running Start and reduce student and family

barriers to guidance and enrollment. Due to OSPI's antiquated apportionment and enrollment reporting systems, Running Start enrollment and reimbursement processes rely on the submission of hardcopy paperwork and transmission of Excel spreadsheets between high schools and colleges, at times requiring students, school counselors, administrators, and college staff to personally track down people and paperwork to complete the enrollment verification process. These practices are administratively burdensome, inefficient, unsecure, and subject to human error. Given the implementation of summer quarter Running Start, which occurs when high schools are closed and districts are minimally staffed, OSPI and its partners are exploring options for developing or licensing an electronic platform accessible by students, families, K-12 staff, and higher education administrators to digitize, automate, and report on Running Start enrollment and reimbursement. This would increase efficiency and reduce errors across the enrollment and reimbursement systems.

Reallocation of "After-Exit" Funding: Considering that less than 9% of all summer students were eligible for "after-exit" funding in 2024, OSPI recommends the Legislature consider reinvesting the \$3 million in "after-exit" funding to support the program more holistically. The "after-exit" proviso was intended to help graduating seniors complete an associate degree under the 1.20 FTE limit, which without very careful academic planning, put degree completion just out of reach for some students. With an increase to a 1.40 FTE limit and the availability of summer Running Start beginning after a student's tenth grade year, students now have the opportunity to earn up to 136 credits through Running Start. While many graduating seniors have benefitted from the "after-exit" opportunity, there is less need under the 1.40 FTE limit and management of multiple funding sources with distinct eligibility criteria created a tremendous amount of confusion for students, school counselors, and administrators, and led to errors in summer term registration and reimbursement.

Increase Emphasis and Supports for "Vocational" (Career & Technical Education) Running Start: SBCTC and OSPI have collaborated on a barrier reduction proposal included in OSPI's 2024 decision package to eliminate out-of-pocket costs to students in Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs. Annually, only 7–10% of Running Start FTE is in "vocational" (professional technical or workforce) coursework, and in the past two years, less than 1% (32 of 5,000+) of distinct Running Start courses were in vocational fields. Despite their proximity to large student populations and prospective business and industry partners, the state's five technical colleges enroll the fewest Running Start students in the community and technical college system. The cost to students is a significant barrier to access, as vocational Running Start courses often require additional fees and specialized equipment and supplies. OSPI and SBCTC have made an effort to promote Running Start in professional technical fields by leveraging Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, delivering professional development to CTE and Career Connected Learning associations, updating guidance on CTE graduation pathways, and prioritizing Consolidated Equity and Sustainability Grant funding for CTE; however, additional funding to cover the costs of industry-recognized credentials and CTE-specific needs is warranted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is reflective of the collaborative efforts of OSPI's Dual Credit Program Supervisor, Tim McClain; Data Consultant, Andrew Nelson; and Enrollment Reporting and Categorical Funding Manager, Becky McLean; as well as SBCTC's Summer Kenesson, Jamie Traugott, and Stephanie Rock; Council of Presidents (COP's) Julie Garver; and ERDC's Phil Hurvitz. OSPI values its longstanding partnership with SBCTC, COP, and ERDC, and is especially appreciative of their support and commitment to improving our dual credit programs through data reporting and analysis.

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