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Summary of OPPAGA Reports Examining Workforce Education Programs and Legislative Options

at a glance

Both colleges and school districts provide workforce education, which includes adult education and postsecondary career education. Recent proposals to give colleges responsibility for all postsecondary career education and school districts responsibility for all adult education have both positive and negative aspects.

Florida's current structure allows school districts and colleges to locally decide how to divide workforce responsibilities, resulting in varying service delivery systems across the state. Despite the variation, districts and colleges typically avoid duplicating programs.

Consolidation could create more uniformity and make it easier to align and articulate postsecondary career education programs, but could weaken operational connections between districts' secondary and postsecondary career education programs and reduce the availability of flexible training options that benefit students. Our analysis of student outcomes for workforce education programs found slight but not overwhelming performance differences between district and college programs.

We provide options the Legislature could consider if it chooses to maintain the current workforce education structure but improve uniformity; implement a consolidation; or charge fees to offset some state costs and potentially motivate adult education students to achieve learning gains before leaving programs.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, OPPAGA examined the positive and negative aspects of consolidating workforce education programs provided by school districts and the Florida College System and released a series of reports on these issues.¹ This report summarizes our findings and provides legislative options.

Background

Florida's workforce education programs help students attain skills needed to become or remain economically self-sufficient. These programs provide training designed to meet local and state workforce needs and help Florida compete in the global economy by building a broadly based, highly skilled, and productive workforce.

Workforce education programs include both postsecondary career education and adult education programs. Postsecondary career education programs prepare individuals for specific occupations and award various credentials upon completion. Adult education programs provide literacy, basic skills, and

¹ *School Districts and Colleges Share Responsibility for Workforce Education; Duplication Is Minimal*, [Report No. 10-61](#); *Consolidating Workforce Education Would Bring More Uniformity; Mixed Results on Whether Evidence Supports Other Stakeholder Arguments*, [Report No. 10-62](#); *Colleges Perform Slightly Better Than School Districts in Career Education; Neither Clearly Outperforms in Adult Education*, [Report No. 10-63](#); *Profile of Florida's Public Workforce Education Program Providers by Service Area*, [Report No. 10-65](#); and *Completing Adult Education Programs Improves Students' Employability, But Program Completion Rates are Low*, [Report No. 11-04](#).

English language training to help individuals improve their job performance and/or move to higher paying jobs. Approximately 435,000 students enrolled in workforce education programs in 2008-09. The majority of these students (333,000) enrolled in adult education programs.²

Workforce education programs are provided by school districts and Florida College System institutions. In general, Florida law authorizes districts and colleges to offer similar types of workforce education programs; however, school districts cannot offer college credit programs such as associate in science degrees.^{3,4}

School districts and colleges are expected to receive approximately \$1 billion to support workforce education programs in Fiscal Year 2010-11. These funds are derived from state, local (student tuition and fees), and federal sources. Most program funds are expected to come from state resources, including general revenue and lottery funds.⁵ The state uses different funding policies and allocation models for school district and college workforce education programs.

The Department of Education's Division of Career and Adult Education is primarily responsible for state-level governance of both school district and college workforce education programs, including developing curriculum frameworks, managing federal funding, and providing technical assistance.⁶

² Of the 333,000 students enrolled in adult education programs, 12,000 were enrolled in Applied Academics for Adult Education (formerly Vocational Preparatory Instruction), which is remediation for students who are also enrolled in postsecondary career certificate programs.

³ Section 1011.80(2), *F.S.*

⁴ In addition to adult workforce education, school districts offer career education programs for high school students. These programs may be provided in a career academy format in which students take several courses related to a specific career, such as culinary arts, nursing, or information technology.

⁵ State funding is approximately \$374 million, or 85%, of total workforce funds provided to districts, and \$419 million, or 71%, of total workforce funds provided to colleges.

⁶ The department's Division of Florida Colleges works collaboratively with the Division of Career and Adult Education to help colleges and districts implement workforce education programs; the two divisions develop and submit separate budget

Report Summaries

To analyze the positive and negative aspects of consolidating school district and state college workforce education programs, we examined a number of issues in a series of four reports. Following are the highlights of these reports, which examined the overlap in college and school district responsibilities, the option of consolidating responsibility for workforce education programs, performance outcomes for postsecondary career and adult education programs, and whether it would be possible for the state to charge fees for adult education programs.⁷

School Districts and Colleges Share Responsibility for Workforce Education; Duplication Is Minimal ([Report No. 10-61](#)). School districts and colleges locally determine what workforce education programs to provide in their service areas and how to divide responsibility for these programs, resulting in varying delivery systems across the state. However, the two entities tend to offer different types of workforce education programs and typically avoid duplicating programs within individual counties.

Consolidating Workforce Education Would Bring More Uniformity; Mixed Results on Whether Evidence Supports Other Stakeholder Arguments ([Report No. 10-62](#)). In recent years, there have been proposals to give colleges responsibility for all postsecondary career education programs and school districts responsibility for all adult education programs.

Such a reorganization could produce benefits. It could help provide more consistent policies and practices for workforce education programs, provide better alignment and articulation of postsecondary career education programs, and make it easier for some students to access financial aid. Consolidating adult education

requests for college and district programs, respectively.

⁷ The series also included a supplemental report that profiled the workforce education programs in each college service area. See *Profile of Florida's Public Workforce Education Program Providers by Service Area*, OPPAGA [Report No. 10-65](#), December 2010.

under districts could help their efforts to address dropout prevention and recovery.

However, this reorganization could have drawbacks as well, including limiting the availability of some open entry and open exit training programs and reducing resource sharing between school districts' secondary and postsecondary career education programs. Stakeholders raised several additional potential benefits and concerns about reorganizing workforce education programs, but we found limited evidence to support these assertions.

Colleges Perform Slightly Better Than School Districts in Career Education; Neither Clearly Outperforms in Adult Education ([Report No. 10-63](#)). Students who left college postsecondary career education programs were more likely than school district students to have fully completed a program. Colleges also outperformed districts in having students find full-time employment, and students who completed college programs tended to earn slightly more than school district students. Although districts served more minority and lower income students than colleges, these differences did not account for performance differences between the two systems.

School districts and colleges had similar performance results for adult education students' employment-related outcomes. However, for teenage students in adult education, school districts outperformed colleges in keeping these students in school and helping them earn a high school credential.

Completing Adult Education Programs Improves Students' Employability, But Program Completion Rates are Low ([Report No. 11-04](#)). Because adult education is the state's largest workforce education program, we further examined the program's overall performance in helping students achieve desired outcomes. Two-thirds of adult students left programs before achieving learning gains, which lessened their ability to find employment and increase their earnings. Of those adult students who made learning gains, approximately half were working full-time or continuing their education.

High school students who co-enrolled in adult education were significantly more likely than recent dropouts to stay in school or earn a high school credential.

Currently, most students are exempt from paying fees for adult education. However, guidelines for receiving federal adult education funding do not preclude the state from charging reasonable fees for adult education courses. Charging fees could help motivate adult students to achieve learning gains before leaving and offset some state costs, but has the potential to reduce access for students who cannot afford to pay the fees. As discussed below, the Legislature could consider several options for charging tuition and fees for adult education programs that should not jeopardize federal grant funding.

Workforce Education Organization Options

Option 1: Maintain the current workforce education system structure but improve program uniformity between districts and colleges. If the Legislature chooses to implement this option, we recommend that it consider the actions below.

1. Require the Department of Education to provide recommendations to the State Board of Education and Higher Education Coordinating Council by December 31, 2011, for improving the consistency of workforce education data collected and reported by colleges and school districts. These recommendations should address policies and procedures, data elements, data definitions, and data values for any data that is used for state and federal funding and program accountability, including program enrollment, program completions, and student demographics.
2. Require the department to annually publish a report that provides comparable information for college and district workforce education programs. At a minimum, this document should provide

information on student and program enrollment, student demographics, program completion, and budget and expenditures for the various programs offered by each system. This report should also identify responsibilities for providing the programs offered in each college service area, as well as specific programs that are duplicated by the college and district. Such a report should provide the Legislature and stakeholders with a clear, easily accessible summary of workforce education programs. Currently, the department annually publishes separate fact books for Florida College System and school district workforce education programs, making it difficult to assess workforce programs statewide and compare college and district programs.

3. Require the department to develop and submit recommendations to the State Board of Education for addressing access to federal financial aid for students at non-accredited district technical centers. Currently, students at some district postsecondary career education instructional sites cannot access federal financial aid such as Pell Grants because the sites are not accredited.^{8,9}

Option 2: Transfer responsibility for all postsecondary career education programs to the colleges and responsibility for all adult education programs to the school districts. If the Legislature chooses to implement this option, we recommend that it consider the actions below.

1. Require each affected college and school district to develop and submit to the Higher Education Coordinating Council, State Board of Education, and Legislature by June 30, 2012, a formal joint agreement and implementation plan for transferring responsibility for all postsecondary career education programs to the college and

responsibility for all adult education programs to the school districts within the college service area. Each of these local implementation plans could go into effect July 1, 2013, and should include:

- a) An assessment of local workforce training demands and a description of how subsequent program offerings will be modified (if appropriate) to meet those demands. The description should identify specific programs that each college and school district will continue, transfer, and discontinue. The description should demonstrate how the college and school district based these decisions on local training demands. Programs should not be eliminated if the assessment demonstrates that there is sufficient demand to warrant continuing the program.
- b) A strategy for minimizing service disruptions and ensuring smooth transitions for students currently attending programs that would be affected by the changes.
- c) Strategies for maximizing the sharing of existing program resources, such as facilities and equipment, among the affected colleges and school districts in the provision of transferred programs. In areas where resource sharing arrangements cannot be reached, the college and affected districts must develop a plan for equitably distributing program resources involved in the transfer.
- d) A description of strategies and programs that the affected colleges and school districts will implement to maximize the number of district adult education students who transition to college postsecondary education programs after leaving adult education.
- e) A description of how the affected colleges and school districts will ensure that the transfer process does not disrupt current business partnerships for programs involved in the transfer, such

⁸ Institutions must be accredited by a federally approved agency for their students to be eligible to receive federal financial aid.

⁹ According to the department, seven school districts that offer postsecondary adult vocational certificates are not currently accredited (DeSoto, Dixie, Gadsden, Gulf, Monroe, Sumter, and Wakulla), affecting approximately 240 students.

as training contracts, program advisory boards, and apprenticeship sponsors.

- f) A description of how full-time budgeted faculty positions that currently support transferred programs will be managed by the college or school district that receives the programs.
2. Require the State Board of Education and Department of Education to develop and submit a legislative budget request for Fiscal Year 2013-14 to transfer workforce education programs as detailed in each affected college's and school district's implementation plan. This should include adjustments to college and school district base funding levels to reflect changes in their responsibilities.

Adult Education Fee Option—

Regardless of which entity provides adult education, the Legislature could consider several options for charging students fees for adult education programs. Fees could help motivate adult education students to achieve learning gains and offset some state costs, but could reduce the number of students enrolling in programs. We identified several options for Legislative consideration that would avoid jeopardizing federal grant funding. If the Legislature chooses to implement fees, these options could be implemented independently or in varying combinations with each other, and could be structured as discretionary fees that colleges and school districts could charge at the discretion of their local boards. The Legislature could apply these options to all adult education students or continue to exempt those 18 years and younger.

- Pay for the cost of assessments, supplies, and/or administrative services. Students could pay a fee to cover the cost of assessments, supplies, and other administrative services such as registration and identification cards. This fee could be a one-time fee charged to students upon their initial enrollment or a recurring fee charged to students at the beginning of each term. The fee would be the same regardless of the

number of contact hours in which the student is enrolled for a given term.

The amount of revenue generated by this option would vary depending on how it is implemented. For example, if new adult education students in 2008-09 had been charged a one-time fee of \$10 for assessments, this would have resulted in an estimated \$1.62 million in annual revenues.¹⁰ Total annual revenues may be less than estimated if fewer students enroll as a result of charging fees.

- Pay tuition per contact hour. Students could pay 10% of the tuition rate per contact hour established in law, which is currently only used for students who do not meet fee exemption requirements (\$1.01 for residents).¹¹ Using 10 cents per contact hour, the fee would result in a full-time adult education student (900 clock hours) paying approximately \$90 over the course of a school year.¹² Students could pay this amount in full when they enroll or in blocks of clock hours over the course of a year. If the tuition is 10 cents per contact hour, this option would generate an estimated \$4.85 million.¹³
- Pay block tuition. Students could be charged tuition and fees for adult basic, general educational development (GED), adult high school, and English language (ESOL) courses not to exceed a specified amount annually, such as \$50 or \$100 per school year. The fee could be pro-rated for each term so that students would not have to pay the full amount at one time. The fee would be the same regardless of the number of contact

¹⁰ We did not include adult high school students in this analysis because they typically are not required to take assessments such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

¹¹ While fee-exempt students are not required to provide proof of residency, s. 1009.22, *F.S.*, provides that non-fee-exempt students who are not residents may be charged a higher tuition rate.

¹² In the 2008-09 school year, adult education students completed an average of 192 contact hours, which would have cost each student an average of \$19 if a 10% tuition rate had been charged.

¹³ This estimate is based only on students enrolled in adult basic, general educational development (GED) and English language (ESOL) programs. These students generated approximately 48 million contact hours in the 2008-09 school year.

hours in which the student enrolls each term or school year.

The amount of revenue generated by this option would vary depending on the fee limit. For example, if tuition of \$50 per year were implemented for all current adult education students (333,000), this would generate a maximum of \$16.7 million.

- Pay tuition based on ability to pay. Tuition could vary by each student’s ability to pay, which could be determined by using the federal free and reduced lunch guidelines. Utah currently has a similar fee policy.¹⁴

The amount of revenue generated by this option would vary depending on how it is implemented. For example, if Florida implemented block tuition of \$100 per year for all currently employed adult education students, this would generate approximately \$14 million.

- Nonresidents pay tuition. Students who could document that they are permanent Florida residents would not pay tuition (or pay a nominal amount using the contact

¹⁴ Utah regulations provide that tuition and fees shall be charged for adult basic, GED preparation, adult high school, or ESOL courses in an amount not to exceed \$100 annually per student based on the student's ability to pay as determined by federal free and reduced lunch guidelines. Student fees and tuition are determined by local school boards or community-based organizations’ boards of trustees.

hour or block tuition approaches). Students who could not document permanent residency would pay for the full cost of instruction. Some states such as Utah have similar residency requirements for adult education students. We were not able to estimate how many students this would affect.

- Pay second chance tuition. Students could be provided free academic instruction the first time they enroll in adult education. However, students who left programs or were disenrolled because they met the state’s absentee policy threshold (six consecutive absences) could be charged tuition (contact hour or block) if they re-enrolled at a later date. We were not able to estimate how many students this would affect.

If the Legislature chooses to maintain the current fee exemption policy, we recommend that it clarify s. 1009.25, *Florida Statutes*, to specify what types of fees are exempt. Currently, some colleges and districts charge all adult education students a nominal (\$10 or \$15) registration fee or a fee to take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), while others stated that statutes prevent them from charging these types of fees. Department staff consider the statutory language unclear as to whether the fee exemption policy applies to registration and TABE testing.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



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