

Testimony of the Educational Policy Improvement Center
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 2789, RELATING TO CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION
Before the House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce Development
March 9, 2017

Thank you for extending the opportunity to provide public testimony to Oregon's House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development as it considers House Bill 2789 to establish career and technical education pathways. Your consideration of this bill is commendable, as it will support our educational systems in creating the talent supply chains necessary to effectively power Oregon's future workforce.

The following comments are offered on behalf of the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), located in both Eugene and Portland, and founded in 2002 as a nonprofit consulting group by a nationally recognized leader in the field of college and career readiness, Dr. David Conley. I am Kirsten Aspengren, EPIC's Senior Director, and I have been a leader in the organization for the past 12 years. I am here today in support of HB 2789.

At EPIC, we firmly believe that our schools and our society have the responsibility to prepare students for life, not just tests. In today's global, connected world, information itself is available 24/7. It's no longer what you know, but what you can do with this knowledge. We have made it our mission to first understand what knowledge, skills, and abilities students must possess to be successful in postsecondary education or training that leads to a sustaining career, and secondly, to develop systems to support educators in achieving this student- and work-centered goal. We aim to make systems that will make college and career readiness actionable in schools, preparing students not just for college readiness, but also for life's many transitions.

The concept of college and career readiness is not new, but somehow most educational systems remain focused on teachers developing course materials in isolation of other teachers and of the community at large, including local industry. This requires students to do the work in figuring out how to connect what they are learning in one course with what they're learning in the next course and what they'll need to know and be able to do in the workforce. Ensuring that students have clear, coherent, and relevant pathways through and out of high school provides every student with the opportunity for success, but especially those in underserved populations and struggling schools.

We all know of students who are self-motivated and can make the connections from one course to the next to their next step after high school. But we should not expect this of every student. Putting the onus on the student to make cross-course connections deflects the system's responsibility to prepare students for life and prevents teachers from supporting the higher-order learning process of connecting, analyzing, and synthesizing content across disciplines and with future work goals.

Developing integrated pathways maps out the progression of knowledge, skills, and abilities that will make courses relevant to students and will ensure that what they are learning is relevant to the industries they'll be entering when they complete their educational careers.

In 2014 the California Department of Education contracted EPIC to evaluate five different categories of potential measures of college and career readiness in response to California Senate Bill 1458, which called for California's school accountability system to shift from a near-exclusive reliance on state test scores to a broader range of measures demonstrating student achievement.

We determined that the single best indicator of the potential measures under consideration were integrated pathways. The evidence suggests that course-taking behavior is a critical component of college and career preparedness by: 1) having one of the strongest research bases of all potential college and career preparedness measures under consideration, 2) providing tangible educational and career value to students, and 3) being a pure measure in terms of the content, skills, and competencies taught in school and student performance. Most importantly, creating an integrated course pathway measure would increase the rigor of both college and career pathways by exposing students and educators to the strengths of both pathways. We found that this type of measure could also create incentives for cross-disciplinary partnerships between core academic and CTE educators, resulting in unexplored positive social consequences from breaking down barriers between core academics and CTE.

The California Department of Education heard the results of our study and made integrated CTE pathways one of the priorities in their statewide accountability system. As a direct result, EPIC was contracted with Merced Union High School District in central California to support the districtwide development of a robust and aligned CTE curriculum. Articulating appropriate standards with CTE pathways and then sequencing a vertically aligned curriculum to a capstone course that is horizontally aligned with an appropriate college-level course will provide students with seamless pathways from high school to community college or preparation for transfer. In this work, we have facilitated panels of high school teachers, community college instructors, and local industry professionals to ensure that what's being taught are the skills aligned with the needs of local industry. Ultimately, our work with Merced is designed to strengthen the local area's talent supply chain.

EPIC has extensive experience working with K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions on curriculum alignment. We have been under contract for the past 10 years with the College Board to perform the curriculum audit for all Advanced Placement (AP) courses worldwide. The AP program is built on a foundation of rigorous, aligned course content, resulting in what has become a highly successful educational improvement reform. Therefore, we are deeply committed to what we know works: curriculum alignment within integrated pathways.

Integrated pathways are not new, nor do California and AP have a cornerstone on this work. There are a number of Oregon initiatives showing student success from this type of approach. Examples of vertical partnerships include the following:

1. Southern Oregon University focuses on having the conversations across disciplines, engaging high school teachers in how to look at one learning area across many disciplines to provide the dual-directional benefits of curriculum alignment.
2. Eastern Oregon University uses interrater reliability measures in scoring student writing in dual enrollment courses to show that instructors across the high school/ community college aisle know what they're looking for in terms of what students need to learn and their proficiency in those areas.
3. Central Oregon Community College focuses on why instructor engagement is so important, noting that the old adage of college instructors telling students to "forget everything you learned in high school" forces students to make connections necessary for learning versus truly supporting student learning by building on what they have already learned.

All Oregon students rely on the legislative support that educators need to focus on strengthening our local talent supply chains. You have before you, in HB 2789, a bill that could support doing just that in Oregon. Our students and our employers need this, and they need it now. I applaud you for taking the time to consider this bill and urge the committee to support HB 2789.