Career and Technical Education Skill Centers: *Describing Programs, Students, and Student Outcomes*

WSIPP receives funding from the legislature to conduct research on K-12 education topics. We identified skill centers as a priority topic based on conversations with nonpartisan legislative staff. In this report, we describe what skill centers provide students in Washington, who can and does access skill centers, and what skill center students' high school transition outcomes look like.

Background

Career and technical education skill centers are regional secondary schools providing hands-on learning across a range of education content areas (e.g., *Architecture & Construction, Health Science*). Washington has 17 centers located across the state.

Findings

Access: Students in districts without access are evenly split across rural and urban locales. At the district level, districts with skill center access have larger enrollments, higher median incomes, and lower poverty rates relative to districts with no access.

In AY 2023-24 most students (86%) were in a school district with access to a skill center (SC).

SC Access
No SC Access
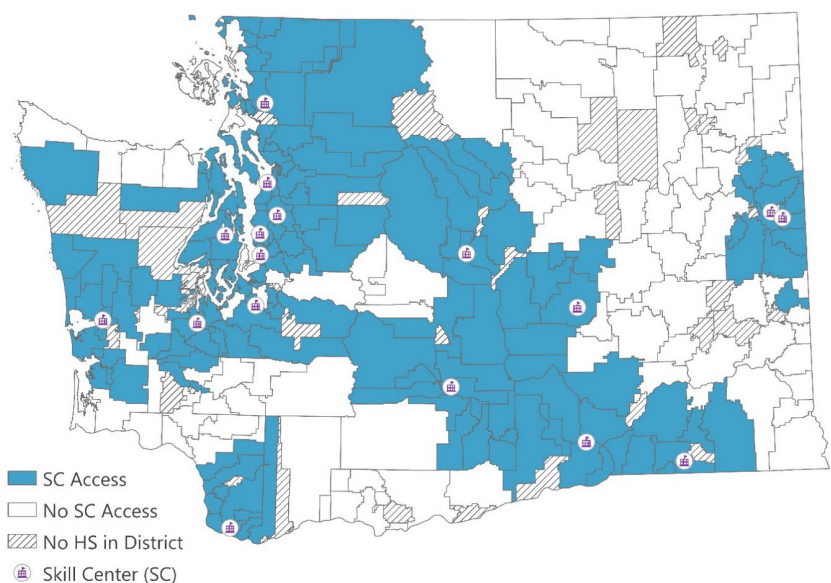No HS in District
Skill Center (SC)

Across geographic locale and content areas, skill center directors reported that enrollment demand exceeds availability for a majority of skill center programs. About 3% of high school students enrolled in a skill center in AY 2023.

Student outcomes: Across the 2013 through 2023 graduation cohorts, most skill center students (80%) earned a high school diploma. Less than 40% have earned a post-secondary credential five years after graduation, but nearly 70% are employed over that time frame. Only 10% of skill center students are not in education or employment five years after graduation.

Limitations

Due to data limitations, we could not examine why students do or do not access skill centers, all CTE programming available to students or in community and technical colleges, or pandemic impacts on long-term outcomes. Finally, outcome results should be interpreted as descriptive only.