



## Legislative Report for HB 2353 (2011 Regular Session) National Career Readiness Certificate Program

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December 1, 2012

Section 5 of HB 2353 requires the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development to provide data and recommendations on the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) program. This report provides 1) the number of students enrolled in an Oregon community college who utilized the services provided by the program during the 2011-2012 academic year, and, 2) recommendations for improving the program.

### **Background**

The National Career Readiness Certificate is a valuable, portable certificate that verifies three foundational workplace skills: Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information. It helps job applicants stand out from the crowd and assures employers that applicants have the foundational skills needed to be successful on the job.

The NCRC program in Oregon was officially launched in January 2011 by Governor Kitzhaber and over 100 public and private sector leaders. The Governor has identified the NCRC as one of his administration's key workforce development strategies.

Three key policy decisions shaped the strategies for implementing the NCRC throughout Oregon. First, the Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) were directed to convene partners around this initiative. Second, in order to create a balanced approach, state and local staff focused their outreach efforts on Oregon employers and job seekers. Finally, WorkSource Oregon Centers were designated as the primary point where individuals could access services to earn an NCRC, which ensures accessibility statewide.

### **Progress to Date**

Since the program began in 2009, over 20,000 individuals across Oregon have earned a National Career Readiness Certificate. Through the work of local staff in the WorkSource Oregon Centers, 901 Oregon employers have signed letters of commitment saying they will prefer the NCRC in their hiring and recruitment practices. In addition to the employer support, several associations have endorsed the program including Associated Oregon Industries, Oregon Business Association, Oregon Business Council, Energy Consortium of Oregon and Southwest Washington, Northwest Food Processors Association, as well as twelve local economic development organizations and chambers of commerce.

### **Student Engagement**

Of the 9,945 individuals who earned an NCRC during the 2011-2012 academic year, 3,234 were enrolled in an Oregon community college. The table on the next page shows the number of NCRC earners at each college:

<b>Oregon Community Colleges</b>		
<b>NCRC Earners who Attended a Community College in 2011-12</b>		
<b>College</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Blue Mountain	51	1.6%
Central Oregon	397	12.3%
Chemeketa	486	15.0%
Clackamas	155	4.8%
Clatsop	42	1.3%
Columbia Gorge	38	1.2%
Klamath	29	0.9%
Lane	402	12.4%
Linn-Benton	21	0.6%
Mount Hood	377	11.7%
Oregon Coast	3	0.1%
Portland	940	29.1%
Rogue	135	4.2%
Southwestern Oregon	36	1.1%
Tillamook Bay	26	0.8%
Treasure Valley	8	0.2%
Umpqua	88	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,234</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Sources: OCCURS, WorkSource Oregon Management Information System, ACT RegiSTAR

## **Recommendations**

HB 2353 states that the NCRC program may be offered through public high schools, community colleges, local and regional career centers, education service districts, and any other institution deemed appropriate. Currently, the majority of WorkSource Oregon Centers and three Oregon community colleges provide individuals the opportunity to earn a National Career Readiness Certificate. During the first year of statewide implementation the NCRC was supported by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Statewide Activities funds. Unfortunately, expansion, if not successful continuation, is limited by the current type and amount of funding used to support the program:

- ARRA funds are no longer available and WIA budget cuts at the federal level will severely impact the viability of the Oregon NCRC program.
- According to federal regulations, a majority of WIA funds provided to the LWIBs for this purpose cannot be used to serve individuals under 18 years of age. Thus, a large portion of the funding supporting this program may not be used to offer the NCRC in public high schools.
- Lack of adequate funding also resulted in the elimination of a state NCRC coordinator position, significantly hampering efforts to expand and more deeply engage business partners, community colleges, school districts, and other community partners.

Ongoing support of the Oregon Certified Work Ready Communities (CWRC) initiative is critical as it provides an independent endorsement of the quality of the workforce and the community's ability to meet business growth demands. One of the key criteria for CWRC at the county level is the participation of local businesses and organizations using the NCRC. Certified Work Ready Communities empower counties and states with actionable data and specific workforce goals that drive economic growth.