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# **BUILDING AN EQUITABLE CAREER CONNECTED LEARNING SYSTEM:**

PROGRAM BUILDERS SURVEY REPORT

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# INTRODUCTION + RESEARCH CONTEXT

Career Connect Washington (CCW) is a coalition of industry, labor, education, and community leaders who are creating work-based and academic programs for young people to explore, learn, and earn money and college-level credit. Career Connect Washington's vision is that every young adult in Washington will have multiple pathways toward economic self-sufficiency and fulfillment, strengthened by a comprehensive state-wide system for Career Connected Learning (CCL). For every young adult to succeed, we must intentionally focus on populations furthest from opportunity especially students of color, Indigenous students, low-income students, rural students, and students with disabilities. Systemic racism has held students back, especially Black and Indigenous students, and Career Connect Washington aspires to build an antiracist system for CCL.

This report will discuss findings from the first stage of a three-part research effort focused on "program builders." Future research will focus on influencers (e.g. parents, teachers, counselors) and students. The purpose of the research is to fill a gap in quantitative data on barriers to participation in and completion of CCL programs for students furthest from opportunity. This research will inform policy recommendations to lower or eliminate these barriers to encourage more equitable participation and completion of programs.

Research is one element of Career Connect Washington's equity strategy, along with disaggregation of enrollment and completion data (e.g. by race, ethnicity, income, rurality, disability, etc.), developing a directory of career connected learning programs that includes available supports to boost participation and completion, developing and sharing of best practices, and ensuring system accountability through performance contracting.

The survey was developed from March-June 2020. Multiple education and community partners provided input on the survey design and assisted with deploying the survey to program builders. Those partners included:

**CCW Cross-Agency Working Group:** *Especially OSPI (including Office of Native Education, CorePlus), SBTC, LNI, WSLC, WSAC, DSHS, DCYF*

**CCW Networks:** *Washington Alliance for Better Schools, West Sound STEM, Mid-Columbia STEM, North Central ESD, ESD 105, Career Connect Southwest, Greater Spokane Inc., ESD 113, Workforce Snohomish.*

**Nonprofit and CCW Intermediary partners:** *Washington STEM; Workforce Southwest, Building Changes; Computing for All; OESD 114, Ironworkers Local 86*

**Washington State Commissions and Councils:** *Commission Hispanic Affairs, Commission on Pacific American Affairs, African American Commission, Washington State Rehabilitation Council*

**CCW Partner Meetings** *including the January 2020 CCW Convening Equity Workshop*

Existing research – especially research directly engaging students and families – also informed the survey design. We drew from research by partners including:

**Washington STEM**

**CCER / The Roadmap Project**

**CorePlus**

**The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Equitable Futures Initiative**

# KEY FINDINGS

These findings are based on a survey of 94 CCL "program builders" from across Washington state and different organizations including K-12 schools and districts, community and technical colleges, registered apprenticeships, and regional networks. The survey was conducted between July 13th and August 10th, 2020.

- Program Builders cited access and enrollment as the most important stage of a student's experience to prioritize (followed by awareness & perception and completion).
- While the challenges and interventions varied across the stages, two broad themes emerged from the responses:
  - Dedicated program staff to guide students through the program and connect them with wraparound support services is essential to student success, particularly for students furthest from opportunity.
  - Logistics and equipment access pose a significant challenge to students, particularly transportation, access to technology, and scheduling of programs.
- These themes resonate with the anecdotal evidence that Career Connect Washington collected previously, but further research is needed to confirm these findings.

# SURVEY DETAILS

The findings in this report come from a survey of career connected learning (CCL) program builders – career and technical education directors, skills center directors, technical college workforce leads and student services staff, community-based organizations, intermediaries, and apprenticeship consultants. This survey is the first stage of the research effort. The second stage will focus on student influencers such as parents, teachers, counselors, apprenticeship coordinators, and technical college professors. The third stage will focus on the direct input of students. The perspectives of all these groups are critical to fully understanding the issues at hand.

The purpose of the survey was to quantify the challenges students face in three areas: awareness of, enrollment in, and completion of CCL programs. Respondents were asked about challenges and potential solutions in each of these three areas. The survey was drafted with input from CCL leaders statewide and reflects the existing knowledge in the field on student needs with regards to participating in CCL programs.

The survey is intended to provide context to datasets like the enrollment demographics of Career Launch and helps us better understand the barriers that prevent certain communities from enrolling in CCL programs at equitable rates.

## AWARENESS + PERCEPTION

How can we reach more students and communities with information about CCL programs?

## ACCESS + ENROLLMENT

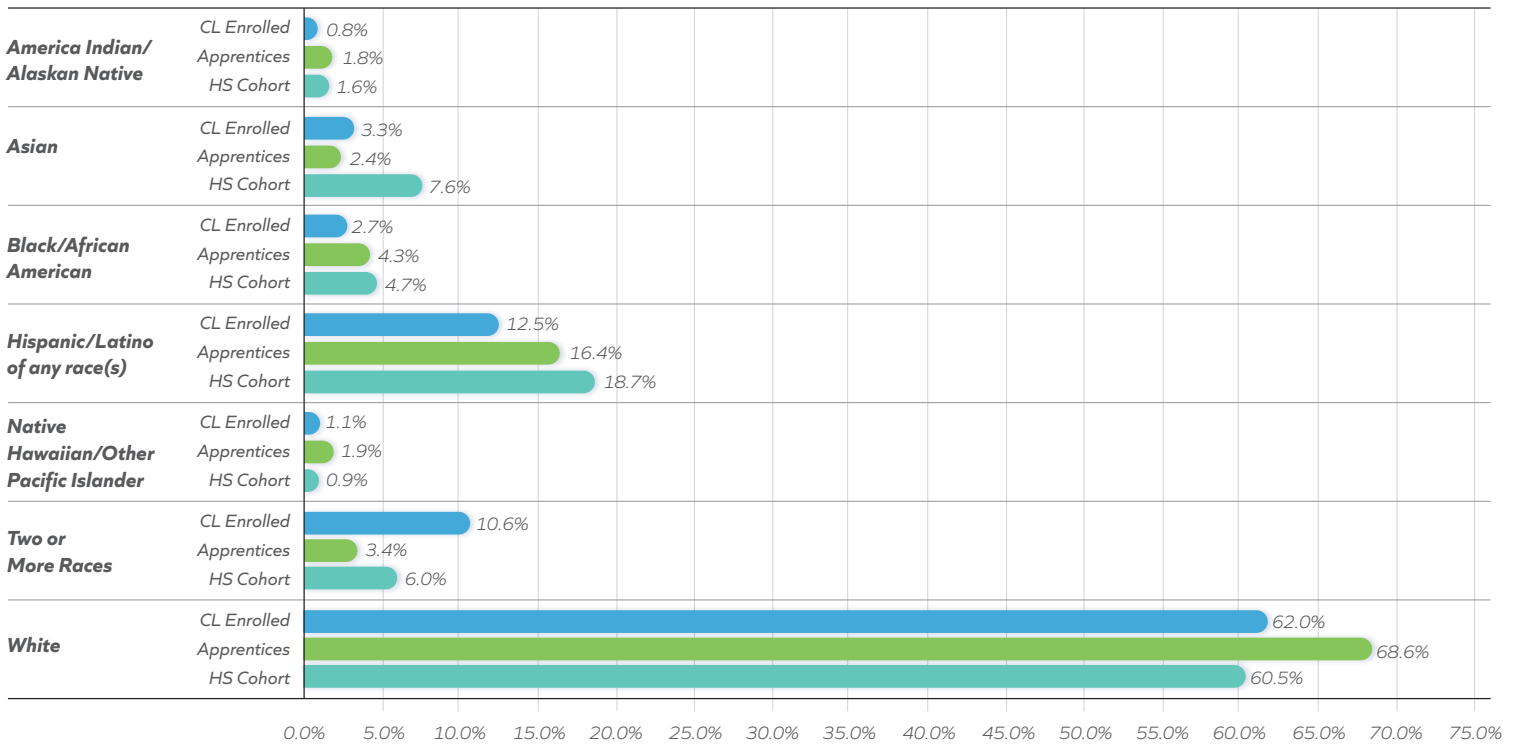
How can we increase the number of interested students that enroll in CCL programs? What prevents their access?

## COMPLETION

How can we increase the number of students that complete CCL programs?

What supports do we provide students when they're in programs?

## Total Career Launch Enrollment (Registered Apprenticeship (RA)\* and Career Launch Non-RA) Compared to OSPI High School Cohort Data by Race\*\*



Data and measurement reporting provided by Washington STEM. \*Apprenticeship numbers reflect total growth, influenced by a variety of factors, including economic expansion prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

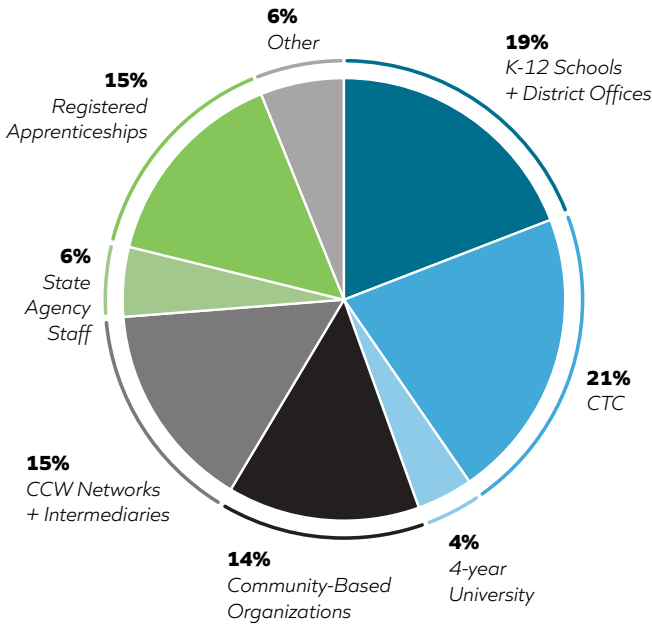
\*\*OSPI Class of 2015 through 2019 with average 5-year adjusted cohort of 81,479 students; Average monthly active apprentices from Q1 2020 is 9,547; Career Launch enrollment Q3 2019-2020 academic year was 386 students.

# SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

This survey was aimed at career connected learning (CCL) program builders. 94 respondents completed the survey representing programs in every county in the state.

## Survey respondents were asked what type of organization they worked for:

(94 Complete survey respondents)



Percent of survey respondents who reported that their organization's mission specifically focuses on serving the following student populations:

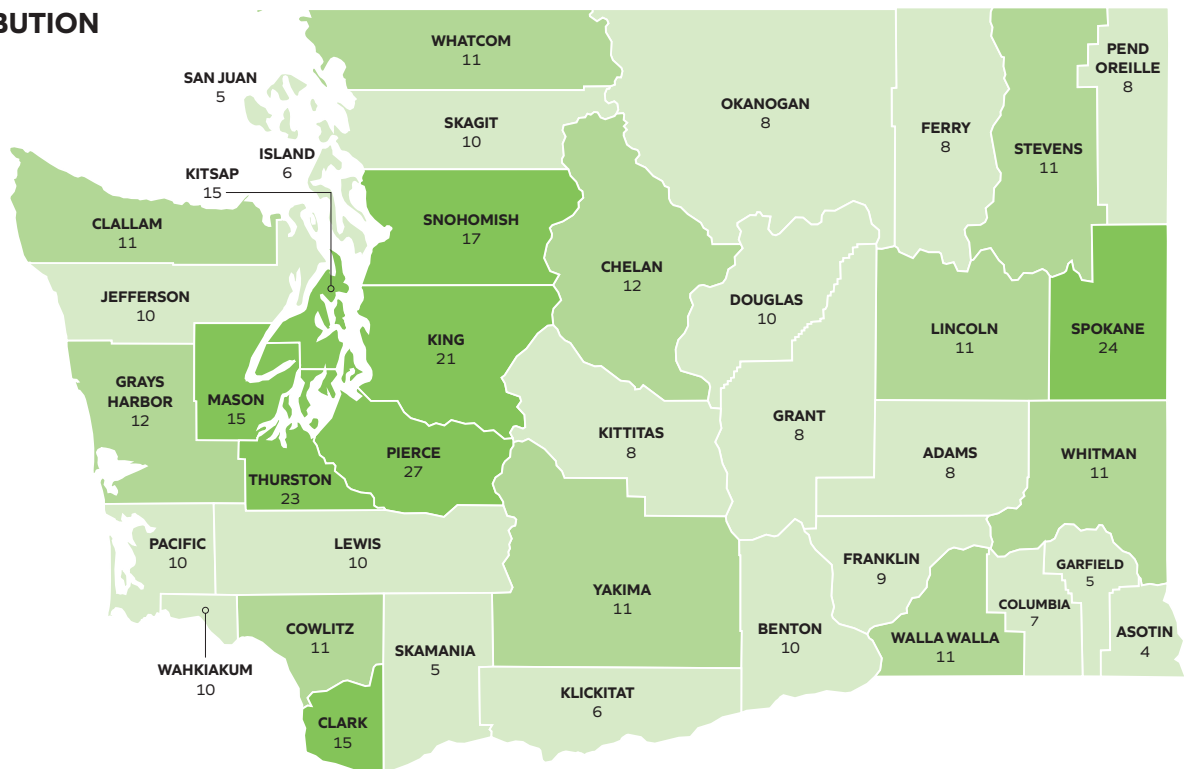
- **56%** Students of color
- **46%** Students who are English Language Learners
- **45%** Female students
- **45%** Students in rural areas
- **43%** Students experiencing homelessness
- **40%** Students with disabilities
- **39%** Students in foster care

Additionally, several respondents reported their programs have a specific focus on serving undocumented students, LGBTQ+ students, Opportunity Youth, and formerly incarcerated youth.

\*Percentages add up to more than 100% because organizations can serve more than 1 student group

## GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

- 15-25 RESPONDENTS
- 11-14 RESPONDENTS
- 6-10 RESPONDENTS



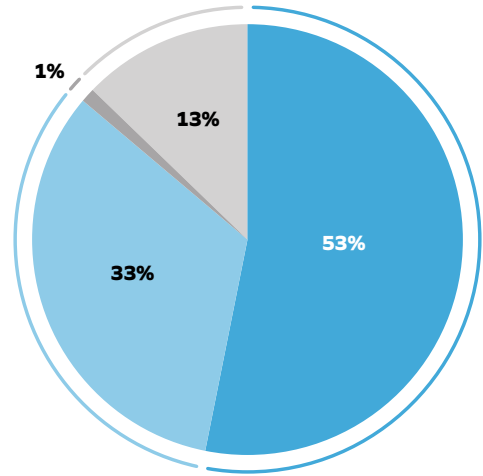
# AWARENESS + PERCEPTION

## OVERVIEW

One third of respondents said that awareness was the most important part of a student’s experience to prioritize to lower barriers for the communities they serve. 86% of program builders say students and families sometimes or frequently report not knowing about career connected learning (CCL) programs.

When you discuss career connected learning programs with students and families, how often do you hear that they **do not know** about these programs?

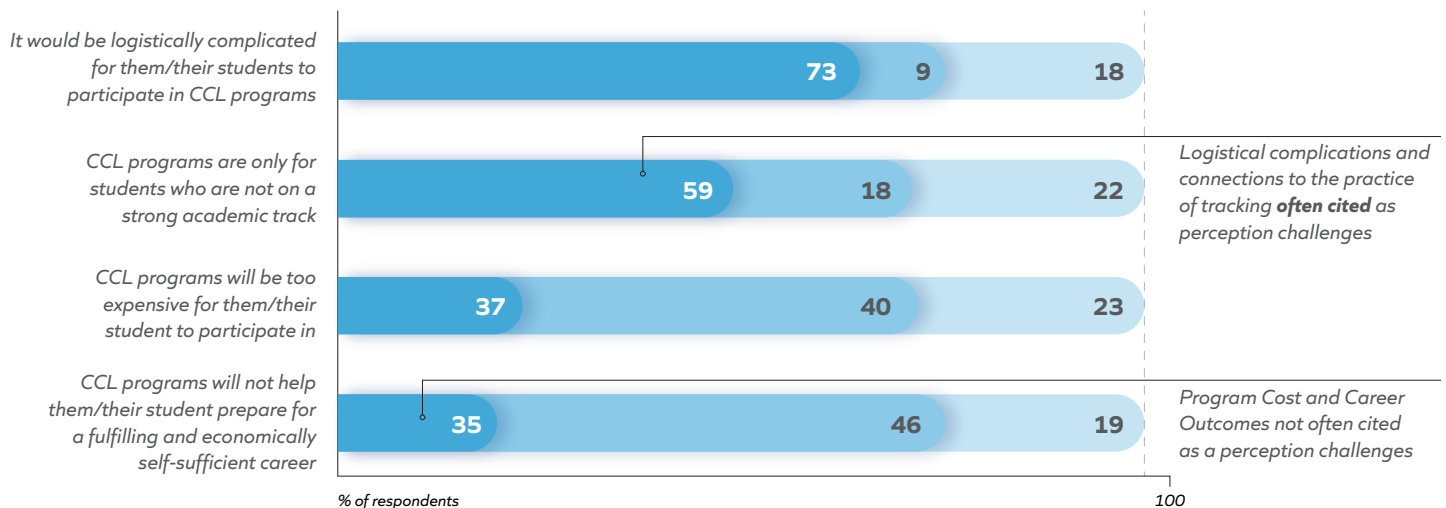
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Never
- Not sure/ Not applicable



## CHALLENGES

Program builders report a perception that CCL programs are logistically complicated and are only for students not on a strong academic track. 73% of program builders said that students and families sometimes or frequently report it would be too logistically complicated for them to participate in a CCL program. 59% report that they hear from students and families that they believe programs are only for students who are not on a strong academic track. However, respondents rarely report that students and families cite making connections from a CCL program to an economically sufficient career as a barrier to participation in CCL. This could suggest that students and families do perceive CCL programs as a useful pathway to economic self-sufficiency. Similarly, the cost of CCL programs was not a frequently cited barrier, suggesting CCL programs are not perceived as prohibitively expensive.

When you discuss career connected learning programs with students and families, do you hear any of the following?



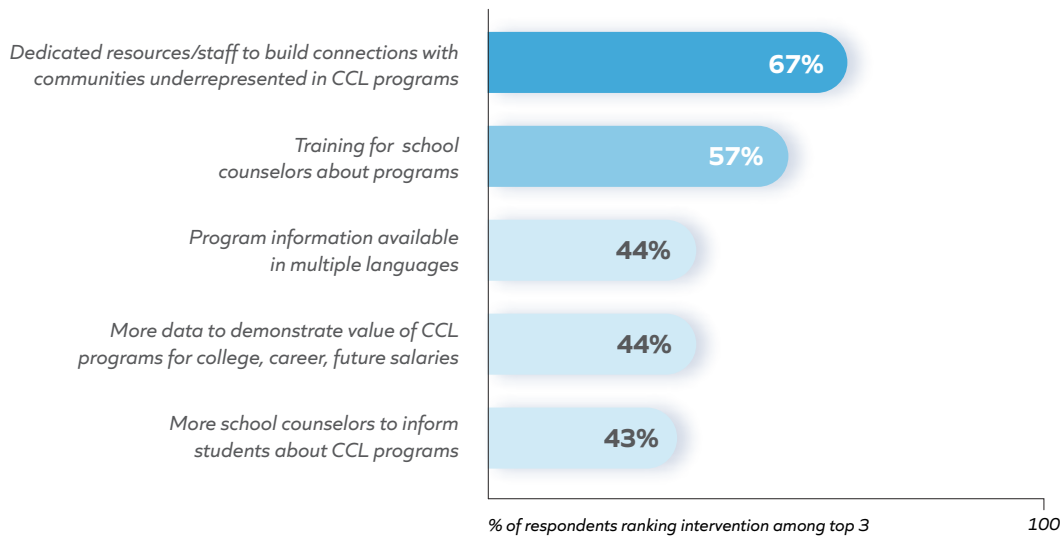
- Yes
- No
- Not sure/Not applicable

# AWARENESS + PERCEPTION

## PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

Program builders were asked to rank the top three interventions to increase awareness of career connected learning (CCL) programs. Dedicated staff to build relationships with underrepresented students was the most frequently cited intervention to increase awareness. Training for school counselors about CCL programs was the second most frequently cited intervention. These two interventions were consistently the top priorities among programs focused on students with disabilities, students of color, and students in rural areas. K-12 program builders and registered apprenticeship providers cited counselor training as a top priority and technical college program builders cited community connections.

### Priority interventions for increasing awareness in career connected learning programs



# ACCESS + ENROLLMENT

## OVERVIEW

Nearly half of respondents said access and enrollment is the most important stage of the student journey to prioritize to lower barriers for the communities they serve. Dedicated program staff to connect students to available services (basic needs, financial aid, etc.) and transportation access were the most often cited interventions as a priority for increasing access and enrollment in CCL programs.

## CHALLENGES

Transportation to program sites is the most frequently cited barrier to access and enrollment in programs. Transportation has continued to be a barrier for some programs even during COVID-19, as not all training can be accomplished remotely and programs are attempting to operate where it is safe to do so. Programs currently operating remotely will continue to face post-pandemic transportation challenges. The second and third most frequently cited barriers to access and enrollment are broadband internet availability and computer access. More than 70% of program builders who specifically focused on serving students of color, students with disabilities, and students in rural areas, said they sometimes or frequently hear about this barrier from students and families.

“People are talking about online learning, but the tribe has no broadband... **WHEN WE TALK ABOUT EQUITY, THE STUDENTS ON THE COAST DON'T HAVE INTERNET.**”

– Intermediary focused on rural and tribal communities

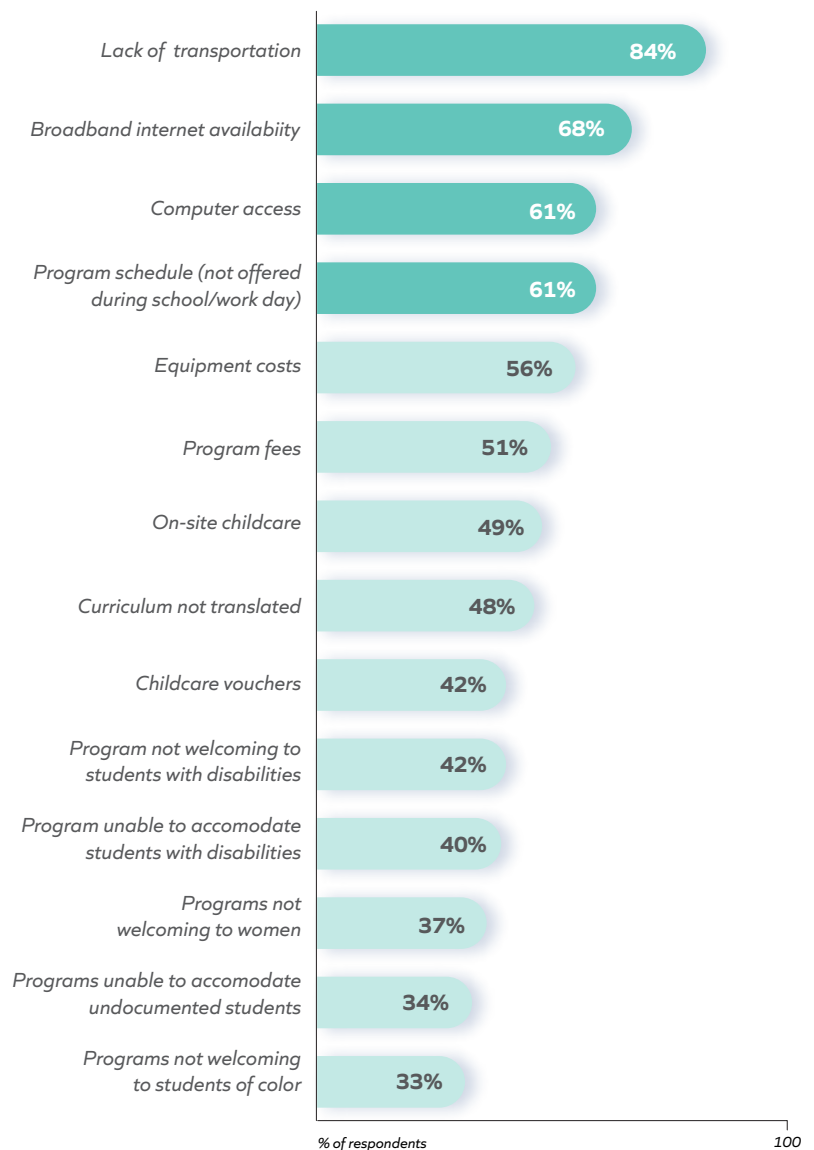
Methodology: Respondents selected from “Never tell me;” “Sometimes tell me;” “Frequently tell me;” and “Not Sure.” Combined “Sometimes” and “Frequently” responses into a single percentage; n = 94

**GETTING PEOPLE TO AND FROM THEIR TRAINING SITE IS A CHALLENGE.**

*They need gas money, help replacing expired licenses, funds for car repairs.*

– Apprenticeship training director

When you discuss career connected learning programs with students and families you serve, do they tell you that any of the following pose a significant challenge to ENROLLMENT?

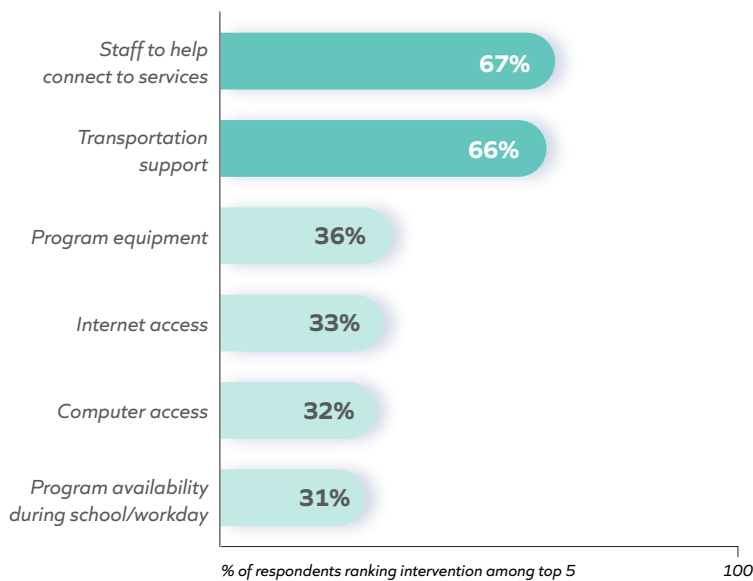


# ACCESS + ENROLLMENT

## PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

Respondents were asked to rank the top five priority interventions to help increase student access to and enrollment in career connected learning (CCL) programs from a list of 16 potential interventions. The two most often cited interventions were staff to connect students to resources and transportation support. This trend was consistent across program builders from all regions in the state representing all types of organizations (K-12, registered apprenticeships, technical colleges, community-based organizations etc.).

### Priority interventions for increasing access and enrollment in career connected learning programs



**Staff to help connect students to services** includes ensuring students and families can find support for basic needs (e.g. food, housing, childcare, healthcare, etc.) and program support (e.g. financial aid, supplies, equipment, etc.). With COVID-19 disrupting students' regular school days and check-ins with support staff, this dedicated outreach is only more important. Further research is needed to understand where students currently learn about available supports and how staff can better make connections for students.

The top three interventions recommended for **transportation** were: purchasing gas cards for students, purchasing transit passes for students, and regularly chartering vehicles to take students to work sites. Purchasing gas cards for students was the top transportation intervention cited by program builders from both urban and rural counties. Program builders recommended prioritizing flexible, student-focused interventions – 57% of respondents said that more flexibility with their existing transportation funding would allow them to better serve student needs.

**Equipment, technology access, and program availability during the school/workday** were the next most cited interventions. 77% of program builders in registered apprenticeships said that students must purchase equipment to participate in the program, but only 8% said they could meet the full need of students who must purchase equipment. Overall, 57% of program builders reported having no funds available to meet student needs for broadband internet access and only 15% of respondents said they have sufficient funds to cover the need for digital devices.

Less frequently cited interventions: diversity and inclusion training (29%), paying program fees (27%), implicit bias training (15%), childcare vouchers (15%), on-site childcare (14%), disability accommodation training (14%), providing accommodations to students with disabilities (14%), stipends to provide salaries for undocumented students (13%).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also created barriers for students to access and enroll in CCL programs. COVID-19 has disrupted student schedules, making it harder for students and program staff to stay in close contact. The shift to digital instruction has also exacerbated existing inequities in computer/internet access and digital literacy.

**STUDENTS DO NOT HAVE REGULAR SCHEDULES.** *They are sporadic in their connections with schools and career services...There are large parts of the rural region without broadband access and some students must commute an hour or more to a free wi-fi site to connect, when transportation is available.*

– CCW Regional Network



# COMPLETION

## OVERVIEW

When discussing barriers students face in completing Career Connected Learning (CCL) programs, the survey focused specifically on programs with work-based learning components, where a student is spending a significant amount of time learning and training outside of the classroom.

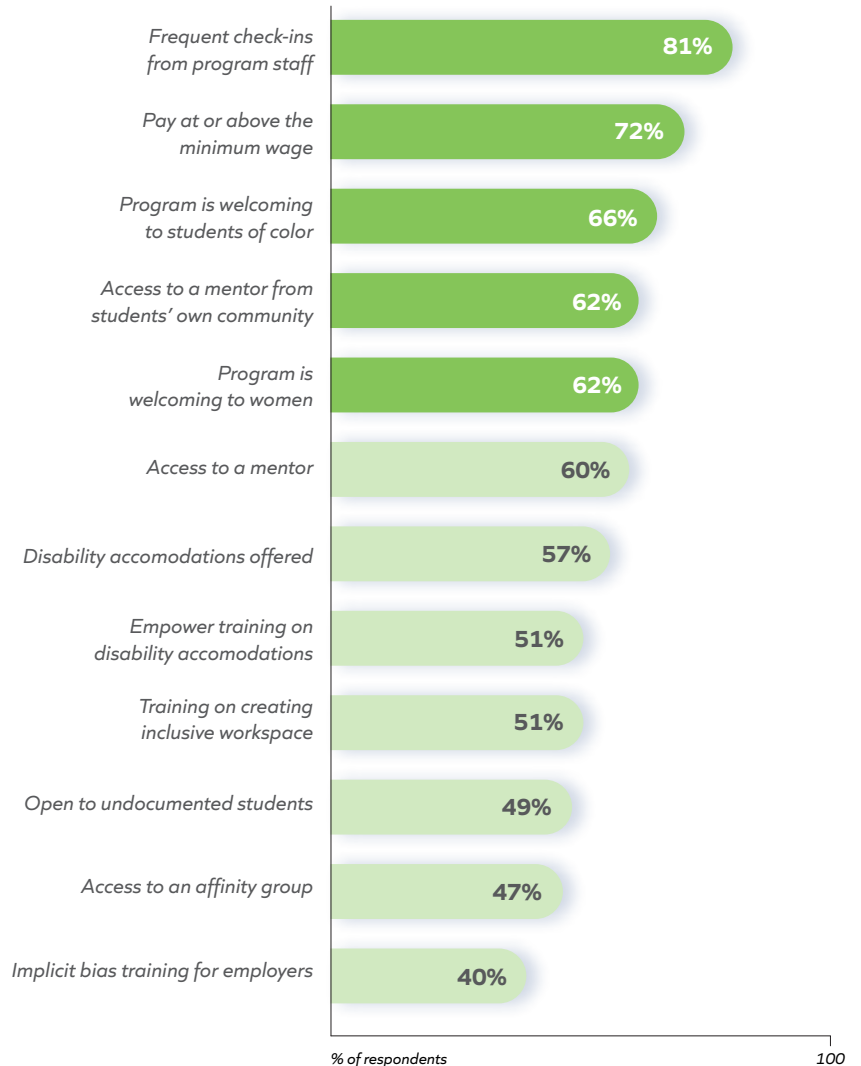
81% of program builders said they hear that frequent check-ins by staff would support a student in completing a work-based learning program. Program builders also said that pay at or above the minimum wage, mentorship, and inclusive work environments came up frequently.

## CHALLENGES

Programs with a worksite-based learning component were asked what they heard from students and families about how to best support a student's ability to complete programs with worksite-based training. 81% said that they sometimes or frequently hear from students and families that regular check-ins by program staff to ensure a student is receiving needed supports would contribute to a student's likelihood of completing a worksite-based learning program. 66% of respondents hear from students and families that students are more likely to complete their program if the worksite is inclusive of students of color and 62% hear the same if the worksite is inclusive of women.

Ensuring that students have access to a mentor, especially one from their own community, is also a need that students and families raise to program builders. 57% of program builders said they frequently hear from students and families that pay at or above the state minimum wage would support the likelihood of a student finishing a worksite-based learning program.

When you discuss career connected learning programs with students and families you serve, do they tell you that any of the following would contribute to a student's likelihood of **COMPLETING** a worksite-based learning program?



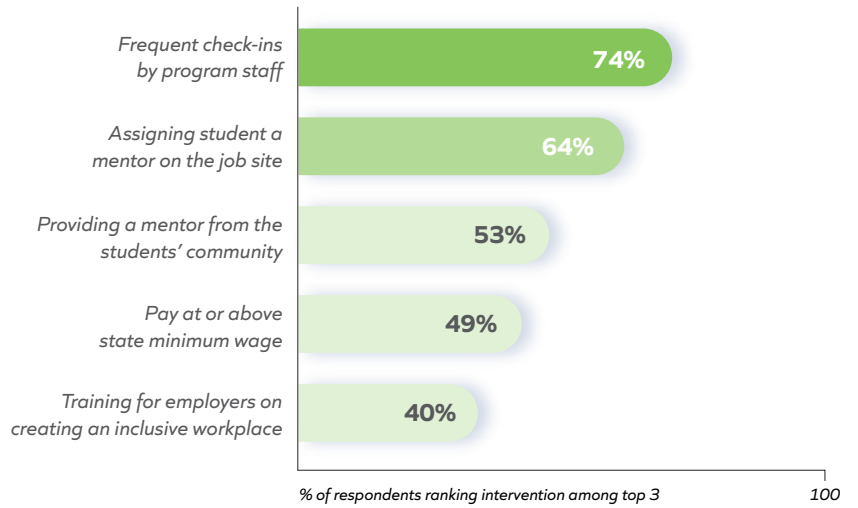
# COMPLETION

## PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

Respondents were asked to rank the top interventions needed to support a student's likelihood of completing a worksite-based learning program. The top ranked interventions among program builders were related to student one-on-one support – either program staff to provide frequent check-ins with students on their support needs or assigning the student a mentor on the job site, including a mentor from the students' own specific communities (e.g. Latinx community, disability community, etc.). The fourth ranked intervention was increasing student pay to meet state minimum wage.

The fifth most commonly ranked intervention was providing training for employers on creating an inclusive workplace. 66% of respondents said that they provide some form of inclusive workplace training for employers who are hosting students.

## Priority interventions for supporting student completion of career connected learning programs



# SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS PRIORITIZED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

## AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION

- Dedicated resources / staff to build connections with communities underrepresented in CCL programs
- Training for faculty and staff on CCL and multiple pathways (including Career Launch and Registered Apprenticeship)
- Provide program information in multiple languages
- Provide data to demonstrate the value of CCL programs or college and career

## PROGRAM ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT

- Provide direct, personal help to connect students in CCL programs to existing financial and program supports
- Increase availability and flexibility of existing funding for transportation – allow programs to purchase gas cards, rideshare credits, or charter vehicles/buses
- Provide support to purchase program equipment
- Ensure every student in Washington has access to a dedicated digital device and broadband internet at home

## PROGRAM COMPLETION

- Provide frequent check-ins with students on the job and help them navigate challenges as they come up
- Provide mentorship – especially culturally relevant mentors – to students on the job
- Ensure all employers are well-trained in creating safe, welcoming, and inclusive work environments for students
- Maintain pay at or above the state minimum wage for student trainees

# CONCLUSION

The survey of program builders is the first stage in a research effort to understand barriers to success in career connected learning programs. The next stages of the research will focus on student influencers, such as parents and teachers, and students themselves. Data from further research will help to confirm, modify, and/or add to the findings shared in this report. Through this work we hope to develop a more complete and specific understanding for policymakers about how to support students who face significant barriers to accessing career connected learning.



In May 2017, Governor Inslee created the Career Connect Washington Task Force, composed of leaders from business, labor, government, non-profits, and education. The Task Force concluded that while Washington had many excellent CCL programs, it lacked systemic supports to achieve the scale needed to have a transformative impact. It also recommended an inclusive planning process to develop a strategic plan including policy recommendations to overcome the barriers to scale and expansion with quality. This planning process began in early 2018 and concluded in fall 2018. The plan was transformed into legislation which passed in April, 2019 along with significant funding to begin implementation.

The legislation codified the CCL continuum to describe different types of CCL programs: Career Explore, Career Prep, and Career Launch. Explore level programs are designed to expose students to many career options and pathways, beginning as early as elementary or middle school. Career Prep programs begin in high school and provide students with hands-on training and knowledge to help students prepare for future work and decide whether a given career path is a good fit. Career Launch programs combine meaningful, supervised, paid, on-the-job experience with aligned academic instruction that result in a competitive candidate for a real job and an industry-recognized and/or postsecondary credential (or at least 45 credits towards a postsecondary credential). Programs must apply to be endorsed as Career Launch by the Career Launch Endorsement Review Committee (administered by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

