

**House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development**  
**Meeting Summary – Committee Tour of Willamette Career Academy**  
**Tuesday, April 15, 2025**

**Members Present:** Rep. Hudson, Chair; Rep. Fragala, Vice Chair; Rep. Harbick, Vice Chair; Rep. Finger McDonald; Rep. Muñoz; Rep. Wright

**Tour of Willamette Career Academy**

The Committee assembled at Willamette Career Academy on Lancaster Drive Northeast in Salem. The primary purpose of the tour was for Committee members to get an understanding of the WCA's regional career center model for career and technical education (CTE) and its role in workforce development. Dr. Joe Morelock, superintendent of the Willamette Education Service District (ESD), opened the meeting.

Alan Kirby, the principal of WCA, led the Committee on a tour of each program offered by WCA: dental sciences, construction technology, Freres manufacturing, PAPE diesel technology, health services, IT/computer science, and cosmetology. Committee members had the opportunity to speak with student ambassadors in each program about their experience at WCA, including how they learned about the program, their schedule and typical day, the certifications and college credits available in their program of study, and their plans for future education and workforce participation.

Mr. Kirby described how each of the 19 high schools associated with WCA are guaranteed a number of spots for their students and develop their own application processes for selecting which students participate. Students spend half days at WCA and half days at their own school, with 12<sup>th</sup> grade students attending WCA classes in the morning and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students attending WCA during the afternoon. Participating districts provide transportation.

Committee members discussed how students could remain on track for graduation while spending half-days at WCA during their junior and senior year of high school. Students are able to earn applied math and science credits, depending on their program of study. In response to new requirements for personal finance and career and college readiness credits passed in Senate Bill 3 (2023), WCA plans to offer personal finance classes to participating students in the upcoming academic year.

WCA is now in its third year of operation and currently serves around 300 students. The program plans to serve 360 to 380 students in the 2025-26 school year. In response to questions about student outcomes, Mr. Kirby noted that while they are difficult to track, the program has attempted to survey former students and received 60 to 80 responses for the preceding school year.

Mr. Kirby noted that the program serves breakfast and lunch but is unable to participate in federal free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs due to its status as a program instead of a school. The Committee discussed the implications of WCA's status as a

program, its relationship to the Willamette ESD, and sources of funding for both the ESD generally and WCA specifically. Mr. Kirby described the origins of WCA, which was formed out of a public-private partnership and continues to fund programs primarily based on industry demand and partnership.

Committee members asked about the incidence of students leaving the program. While some students leave the program or, if space is available in another area of study, switch programs, Mr. Kirby emphasized that as a result of schools' application processes, students are typically dedicated to their areas of study and that attrition is low.

After the tour, the Committee reconvened in the WCA conference room and discussed the demographics of the program, as well as the opportunity for students from different high schools and backgrounds to study together. Dr. Morelock and J.L. Wilson, principal lobbyist at Public Affairs Counsel, discussed the \$7 million in matching funds that WCA received from the state in 2021 (Senate Bill 5534), the regional career center model and the possibility of adapting it to other ESDs, and House Bill 3552.

Attendees included: Alan Kirby, Willamette Career Academy; Dr. Joe Morelock, Willamette ESD; Adam Whalen, Willamette ESD; Kari Laizure, Willamette ESD; J.L. Wilson, Public Affairs Counsel; Ellen O'Brien, Legislative Policy and Research Office; Caleb Hayes, Office of Rep. Zach Hudson; Juliette Kudrick, Office of Rep. Zach Hudson.