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## K–12 Strong Workforce Program

### *State and Regional Administrative Shortcomings Limit the Program’s Effectiveness in Supporting Grant Applicants*

#### **Background**

Career technical education (CTE) is one component of the State’s vision for workforce development. The Strong Workforce program provides funds to eligible entities, such as school districts, that partner with community college districts to provide CTE to K–12 students. Our audit focused on the processes the Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, eight regional consortia of community college districts, and regional selection committees use to award workforce grants to eligible entities.

#### **Key Findings**

- The Chancellor’s Office has not directed applicants to provide key details that would help selection committees ensure that they fund applications that best meet the program’s goals.
- The Chancellor’s Office has not disclosed in its request for grant applications (RFAs) all of the factors that some regional selection committees consider when making grant selections, leaving applicants without information that could help them make decisions.
- Most regional consortia have not ensured that selection committees adopt strong safeguards to prevent unfair decisions due to conflicts of interest.
- The school districts in each community college district are served by one support staff member who helps them pursue grants, even though the number of school districts and other eligible K–12 entities in each community college district varies.
  - » \$2.6 million of the amount intended to pay for those staff in fiscal year 2018–19 remains unspent, and the Chancellor’s Office has not yet added these unspent funds to the appropriation for CTE programs as state law requires.
- The California Department of Education reported that demand for a related CTE incentive grant program was three times higher than the actual amount requested, which may have misled policymakers and stakeholders.

#### **Key Recommendations**

The Chancellor’s Office should do the following to address the findings in our report:

- Specify in RFAs that applicants should include detailed information addressing all eligibility criteria.
- Request that selection committees disclose in advance how they will address requests for funding that exceed the total amount they are allocated.
- Establish and implement a process for modifying the areas support staff members are assigned to serve.

The State’s eight regional consortia should document their reviews of potential conflicts of interest and subsequent recusals where potential conflicts exist.

**Applicants in three regions were *denied* funding for eligible applications in 2020–21 based on criteria that were not disclosed to them.**

