

Lifelong education key for workers to advance

Strategies for moving Washington's workforce forward

Education key to economic self-sufficiency

One year of education beyond high school and a credential can be the difference between earning a living wage and living on the edge.

Research shows that those who complete at least one year of education beyond high school and earn a certificate or credential have a much better chance of supporting themselves and their families. Those who don't, find themselves trapped in entry-level, low-skill jobs.

Taking the first step to a life of learning

The more Washington residents who obtain a 13th year credential, the more people rise out of poverty, and improve business productivity at the same time.

Those with a vocational certificate or two-year vocational degree are especially in demand. But for low-wage working adults, reaching educational goals poses a challenge. We can help adult workers by focusing on these key issues:

- **Link basic education with skill training** —Workers are more successful when basic education is taught with job skills, through integrated programs such as I-BEST. They are better able to land a job, keep it and advance.
- **Making the 13th year more reachable** —The state should consider ways to eliminate financial and technical barriers to accessing post-high school programs, including expanding financial aid programs for workforce education students.
- **Help workers complete education more quickly**—By granting credits for prior learning and developing credentials that can be acquired quickly and combined to count toward advanced certificates and/or degrees, we make it possible for residents to learn and work their way up a career ladder.
- **Make learning available in the workplace**—When employers offer training opportunities at work, workers can continue to learn while they earn, while becoming more valuable, productive employees. Distance learning options, such as online or Open Courses, help make it possible to blur the boundaries between the workplace and classroom.

---Read more on these topics on the back side---



A boat builder uses his welding skills at Munson Aluminum Boats in Burlington.

High Skills, High Wages report outlines key strategies

High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: *Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development* outlines key strategies to put adults on the path to success.

The plan has a 10-year horizon, taking a broad view of the many programs and initiatives aimed at boosting the job skills, paychecks and opportunities for Washington's workforce.

High Skills, High Wages lays out 11 objectives designed to help:

- Young people graduate from high school and pursue further education.
- Adult workers move up the career and wage ladder.
- Employers obtain the skilled workforce they need to prosper.

High Skills, High Wages –Moving Workers Forward

From preparing workers for family-wage jobs to supplying industry with a skilled workforce, *High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development* offers a comprehensive look at our state's workforce challenges and opportunities. Here we offer a glimpse at our adult worker strategy.

Integrating job-ready skills with basic education

Many disadvantaged workers lack basic skills—reading, writing and math. But when workers are taught specific job skills along with basic skills they are able to land a decent job, keep it, and advance.

I-BEST offers this successful blend of basic skills and job preparation and is offered at Washington's community and technical colleges around the state with limited course offerings. These program offerings should be expanded.

Getting to that first rung

People who complete at least one year of college and obtain a certificate or credential have a much better chance of supporting themselves and their families.

Yet, the greatest barrier to postsecondary education, according to Workforce Board research, is the cost of tuition, books, and other expenses such as childcare and transportation.

Washington should consider eventually providing free tuition for workforce education students pursuing their 13th year of education. In the short term, the state should increase financial aid to low-income students, helping them onto that first rung of the education/career ladder.

Workers returning to school should also be encouraged to fill out financial aid forms that make them eligible for a variety of grants and scholarships.

Help workers complete their education more quickly

Workers seeking to return to school to obtain a credential or degree often find the educational path long and daunting. Too often, they forgo additional education because of time and expense.

Granting credits for prior learning helps workers advance more quickly, by recognizing and providing credit for job skills and workplace knowledge.

Workers also need to gain credentials in a shorter time frame than a traditional academic year. Modularized programs that allow a student to earn industry-recognized credentials in small bundles help do that.

Research also shows students who reach a certain "momentum points" are more likely to obtain a certificate or degree. The Student Achievement Initiative has sharpened the focus of the state's community and technical colleges on helping students complete coursework and credentials.

Help workers advance through workplace-based learning

By continually upgrading and expanding skills, Washington's workers can advance along a chosen career path, stay on top of technology and other changes, and boost their value in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

But to do that, our adult workers must be able to keep working and progress on the job. One way to help workers achieve their educational goals is to pursue strategies that bring education into the workplace, through online and distance learning tools.

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