

Education, jobs critical for Washington youth

Key strategies for keeping young people on track

Putting Washington youth on a solid path

Whether it's a high school student learning the chemistry of the internal combustion engine or a 20-year-old being encouraged by a community college advisor to head back to school, when we help youth explore and connect with careers and educational opportunities we invest in their success—and ours.

Too many youth struggle to transition to the world of work and further education. Many begin their working lives on the economic edge: unskilled, undereducated and with little or no work experience. At the same time, young people face a steeper climb to self sufficiency with higher living costs and a tighter job market.

Fighting the 10-year drift

Even when the economy is strong, young people often struggle to get started in the workforce. They wander through a series of low-paying jobs and repeated bouts of unemployment, without building toward a future career. This directionless period can continue far into their 20's.

The Workforce Board believes this decade-long detour can be prevented by focusing on four key issues, including:

- **Guidance & mentoring** – Disconnected youth often leave high school without a plan for the future. Starting in middle school, students need to connect with a caring adult who can help them sort through the many decisions they face.
- **Relevant, applied learning**—Students learn in different ways but research shows that almost everyone learns well when the learning is presented in context and can be applied to real situations.
- **Improving on-time high school completion** —More than one out of four Washington youth do not graduate with their peers, putting them at risk of a lifetime of lower earnings, ongoing public assistance and in worst cases, incarceration. Community-based programs that focus on drop out prevention and retrieval can help at-risk students graduate on time.
- **High unemployment**—Many older youth are jobless and need to connect to a meaningful career path. More opportunities need to be created for youth to get valuable paid and unpaid work experience.

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



Seattle's SODO Inc provides manufacturing internship programs for young adults.

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 youth 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—A pathway for youth

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 part of our youth strategy.

Support systems keep students in school, on track

Studies show students who drop out of high school earn far less than those who graduate, are more likely to be incarcerated, have a higher incidence of substance abuse and are much more likely to rely on public assistance. This inability to be self sufficient requires ongoing taxpayer support. The Washington Institute for Public Policy found preventing a high school student from dropping out saves taxpayers \$10,500 each year of a dropout's life.

The Legislature asked the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and other agencies serving vulnerable youth to coordinate in building an integrated support system that includes schools, families and communities. One key component is an early warning data system to help prevent dropouts. When students do leave school, they need support to return to the classroom and rejoin classmates. Communities must also assist students in need of housing, health care, and community services.

Career guidance starts early

Comprehensive career counseling programs, such as Navigation 101, help students see a direct connection between school and the work world, so they leave school knowing what it takes to be economically self-sufficient.

Other tools, such as the Washington Career Bridge website and the Where Are You Going? career guide, help students determine their interests, and then connect them with a career.

Also, the presence of at least one adult mentor is needed for the modeling and support to chart a path to success.

Career & Technical Education connects students to work

Career and technical education classes capture a student's attention, tap their interests and talents, and lead to careers that pay living wages.

By providing academic rigor in a work-relevant context, career and technical education in Washington's middle and high schools provide another way for students to learn, enabling them to see the value of continuing with their education beyond high school.

These programs offer classes from accounting to applied science to business and marketing. Yet many students in Washington, particularly rural areas, do not have access to career and technical education programs that can help them gain the technical skills they need to pursue the career field of their choice.

Wanted: Work Experience for Young Adults

Young adults in Washington, 18-25, have significantly higher unemployment rates than the general population. Not only do they lack jobs, but they miss out on work experiences that boost future performance and earnings.

Public education and policies should seek to increase volunteer opportunities, internships, apprenticeships and summer work programs so youth can gain job skills, work habits and confidence.

The tight economy requires creative thinking in generating paid and unpaid employment for youth, including reaching out to nonprofits, local governments and Chambers of Commerce, among others, to provide these crucial experiences to more of Washington's youth.

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Eleni Papadakis

Workforce Board



Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

128 - 10th Avenue SW,
PO Box 43105,
Olympia, WA 98504-3105
360-753-5662, Fax 360-586-5862
www.wtb.wa.gov
E-mail: workforce@wtb.wa.gov