

High Skills, High Wages 2006: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development

*High Skills, High Wages includes goals, objectives, and strategies to position Washington State for prosperity in the global economy. To further this important agenda, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board has identified the following **Ten Key Strategic Opportunities**.*

- *Increasing high school graduation rates:* About 74 percent of ninth graders graduate on time with their class. The numbers are even lower for some racial and ethnic populations. Those who do not graduate are subject to a lifetime of lower wages. The state must build on the success of community partnerships that implement effective dropout prevention and retrieval programs and hold schools accountable for engaging and retaining students through graduation. While schools are raising their expectations of students, they need to demonstrate the relevance of education, including strong career and technical education (CTE) programs.
- *Expanding the availability of career pathways that span secondary and postsecondary education and training:* Career pathways offer students CTE in a career cluster; incorporate rigorous academic, as well as technical content; span secondary and postsecondary education and training; and lead to an industry-recognized credential. The reauthorized Carl Perkins Act requires schools receiving federal career and technical dollars to have at least one career pathway (also referred to as a program of study). Pathways increase opportunities for students to enter postsecondary education and training and high-skill, high-wage careers.
- *Increasing postsecondary training capacity:* The state must increase postsecondary education and training capacity if we are to close the gap between the need of employers for skilled workers and the supply of Washington residents prepared to meet that need. Fifty-one percent of employers who attempted to hire workers in 2005 said they had difficulty finding qualified applicants. The largest gap is at the subbaccalaureate level. Capacity must be expanded at community and technical colleges, apprenticeship programs, and private career schools.
- *Increasing financial aid and retention support for workforce education students:* If all segments of our state population are to have access to postsecondary training, we must increase financial aid and retention support. Financial barriers are the number one reason why Washington residents do not access postsecondary training. In addition to financial aid, many individuals need support services, such as child care, in order to access training and stay in training until completion.
- *Increasing Adult Basic Education Skills and English as a Second Language instruction that is integrated with occupational skills training:* Integrated, or “blended,” instruction is more likely to lead to wage gains for participants than basic skill programs that do not include an occupational component. Without education and training opportunities, the state’s illiterate populations, immigrants, low-income workers, and the unemployed can be stuck in dead ends.
- *Improving coordination between workforce and economic development in key economic clusters:* An economic cluster is a sector of the economy in which a region has demonstrated it has a competitive advantage by a high geographic concentration of firms and employment. Public investments in clusters are more likely to pay off than investments in other economic sectors since clusters have already demonstrated success in the market. Clusters provide an organizing principle around which the state and local areas can successfully coordinate workforce and economic development efforts to the advantage of Washington employers and workers.
- *Expanding and sustaining skill panels:* An industry skill panel is a partnership of business, labor, and education and training providers in an economic cluster. Skill panels harness the expertise of their members to identify skill gaps and devise solutions to close the gaps. The partnerships foster innovation and enable industries and public partners to respond to and anticipate changing needs quickly and competently.
- *Expanding customized training for current workers:* With the accelerating pace of technological advances and globalization, there is increasing need to train and retrain current workers to keep pace. Customized training prepares workers with the latest skills required to meet the needs of a particular employer or set of employers, enabling businesses to be competitive. Even with recent investments, Washington lags far behind other states in publicly supported customized training.
- *Expanding the availability of the Work Readiness Credential:* Washington is working with the U.S Chamber of Commerce, major national industry representatives, and other states to establish a certification of work readiness as defined by employers for entry-level jobs. The Work Readiness Credential will enable job seekers to demonstrate to prospective employers that they have the knowledge and skills needed for successful performance as entry-level workers. These skills include the ability to: complete work accurately, work in teams to achieve mutual goals and objectives, follow work-related rules and regulations, demonstrate willingness to work, show initiative, and display responsible behaviors at work.
- *Developing state and local agreements on service integration:* WorkSource, Washington’s one-stop system for employment and training programs, provides access to 19 programs. Integrating services from such a large array of programs is a continuing challenge. In order to advance integration, the Workforce Board will coordinate the development of statewide agreements on integration among partner agencies and programs. The agreements will indicate what partner agencies and programs will do to support the integration of workforce development services. The goal of this effort is to improve services to customers.

Strategies Serving Youth

Youth Goal: Ensure all Washington youth receive the education, training, and support they need for success in postsecondary education and/or work.

Objective 1

All students graduate on time.

- Create a state-level public/private partnership that provides demonstration grants to school-community partners for development of comprehensive dropout prevention and intervention programs for middle and high school students at risk of dropping out and dropouts.
- Expand the Dropout Prevention Initiative to more high schools.

Objective 2

All students leave high school prepared for success in further education and/or work.

- Increase the number of students who complete CTE sequence and/or course requirements for admission to a four-year college or university or enrollment in college-level classes at a community or technical college.

Objective 3

There is a Comprehensive Guidance System throughout the K-12 system that provides students and their parents with a curriculum to individually plan their pathways and prepare for future education and/or work after high school.

- Expand implementation of the “Best Practice” guidance system, Navigation 101, across the K-12 system.
- Integrate Individual Education Plans with the 13th year plan required for graduation.

Objective 4

There are secondary CTE programs throughout the K-12 system that enable students to explore career pathways and complete preparatory coursework that matches their aspirations. The career pathways are articulated with postsecondary education and training and result in industry certification.

- Expand opportunities for secondary students to take CTE preparation programs and career assessments.
- Boost the academic content of CTE programs and recognition of academic course equivalencies.
- Develop model statewide CTE articulation agreements that provide a program of sequenced courses and ensure all students have access to dual enrollment options.
- Expand preapprenticeship training to prepare students for direct entry to apprenticeship programs.
- Pilot the Work Readiness Credential for CTE completers.

Strategies Serving Adults

Adults Goal: Provide Washington adults (including those with barriers to education and employment) with access to lifelong education, training, and employment services.

Objective 5

Increase the number of adults who have at least one year of postsecondary education and training and a credential.

- Cover tuition costs for the 13th year for workforce education students who earn less than the Washington median family income.
- Expand the Opportunity Grant program in order to provide wrap-around support services and financial aid for more low-

income adults so they can complete at least one year of training and obtain a credential.

- Provide Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I resources to help student access and retention, including up-front “bridge” funds.
- Expand use of the Food Stamps Education and Training program.
- Expand Integrated Basic Skills Education and Occupational Training (I-BEST) programs.
- Establish industry-based credentials in occupational and general workplace skills for students that complete one year of training and develop more one-year certificated programs.

Objective 6

Front-line services are accessible for all adults in need of staff assistance.

- Create and take advantage of opportunities to redirect resources to front-line services.

Objective 7

Postsecondary education and training provides opportunities for going in and out of training over the course of life-long learning.

- Expand vertical and horizontal articulation among community and technical colleges and four-year colleges and universities.
- Expand the availability of applied baccalaureate degrees.
- Make more part-time students eligible for the State Needs Grant.

Objective 8

Comprehensive education and career information is readily accessible to adults.

- Explore a “Navigation 102” model of comprehensive guidance to pilot in community and technical college workforce education programs and WorkSource centers.

- Develop a website that provides information about traditional and non-traditional student financial assistance, including support services.

Strategies Meeting the Needs of Industry

Industry Goal: Meet the workforce needs of industry by preparing students, current workers, and dislocated workers with the skills employers need.

Objective 9

The Workforce Development System prepares workers with the strong general workplace skills that employers need.

- Pilot the Work Readiness Credential in a wide variety of local organizations.

Objective 10

The Workforce Development System supplies the number of newly prepared workers required to meet employer needs.

- Increase capacity in mid-level education and training programs (greater than one year, but less than four years).
- Increase apprenticeship retention and completion.
- Provide adequate funding for education and training programs that are in high demand by employers.

Objective 11

The Workforce Development System strengthens key economic clusters by meeting employer and worker needs.

- Further develop skill panels by sustaining and creating more panels in key economic clusters, establishing statewide panels in select industries and by enhancing the ability of skill panels to leverage resources to address skills shortages.
- Establish additional Centers of Excellenc

- in key economic clusters.
- Increase the number of workers receiving customized training.
- Develop expertise in the WorkSource System in serving the needs of local employers in key clusters.
- Identify and support the development of economic clusters that provide a large number of family-wage jobs.

Objective 12

Unemployed workers return to suitable work in as short a time as possible.

- Rapidly link dislocated workers with appropriate employment services and retraining programs.

Strategies for Integrating Workforce Development Services

Integration Goal: Integrate services provided by separately funded workforce development programs so that we provide the best possible service to our customers.

Objective 13

The Workforce Development System is coordinated with other education and training systems.

- The Workforce Board should participate on a new P-20 Education Council that coordinates education policy for the state from pre-school through graduate school.
- The Workforce Board should participate on a newly constituted Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Objective 14

The Workforce Development System is coordinated with economic development.

- The director of the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) should be appointed

as an ex officio participating official on the Workforce Board.

- The executive director of the Workforce Board should be appointed as an ex officio member of the Economic Development Commission.
- The Workforce Board and CTED, in collaboration with the Workforce Development Councils (WDC), Economic Development Councils, community and technical colleges, and local governments should be directed to develop a plan to support coordination at the regional level of workforce and economic development efforts.
- CTED and the Workforce Board should be directed to develop a cluster-based strategy as a central organizing principle for their activities and as an important method to close skill gaps.
- CTED, the Workforce Board, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Employment Security Department (ESD) will coordinate grant processes wherever appropriate.
- Coordinate the research activities of workforce and economic development agencies.

Objective 15

Local and state goals for WorkSource are aligned.

- The ESD senior leadership team and the WDCs' directors commit to an even stronger integrated partnership in overseeing the management of the WorkSource System.
- ESD will continue to be the lead organization for developing statewide WorkSource operational policies.
- All staff within a WorkSource Center will function as part of a multiagency team coordinated by the one-stop operator.
- ESD and the WDC directors should work

with WorkSource partner programs toward integrated, not commingled, budgets for WorkSource centers.

- One-stop center results will be reported in concert with ESD using a Government Management, Accountability, and Performance approach.

Objective 16

Workforce development program services are integrated.

- Develop state directives and agreements on integration.
- Collocate WorkSource Centers and establish affiliate sites on more community and technical college campuses.
- Mandate increased use of common assessments.
- Enhance management information system integration.
- Seek alignment of eligibility criteria for dislocated worker programs.
- Pilot the collocation of Labor and Industries Vocational Rehabilitation Services at WorkSource centers.
- Establish an interagency workgroup on serving people with disabilities.
- Improve coordination of job development and referrals.
- Establish integration as a WorkSource certification criteria.
- Establish integration as a criteria for plan approval.

Objective 17

Performance accountability is expanded for integrated services.

- Following the reauthorization of WIA, the Workforce Board will join its partners in a full scale review of the state core measures to determine if any changes are warranted.
- ESD and the Workforce Board should reexamine the relationship between the measurements that each requires from

WorkSource to determine how this measurement scheme can be simplified.

- The Workforce Board will collaborate with ESD's Labor Market and Economic Analysis unit and other partners to examine measures of skills gaps for possible enhancement, such as measuring the gaps in key economic clusters.
- The Workforce Board will regularly develop and publish a "Workforce Tracking Matrix" that shows workforce development programs' funding, services, and results.

Objective 18

Enhancements are made to the Workforce Board's capacity to coordinate the Workforce Development System.

- The Governor should direct that the following programs be included in the system performance measurement considerations of the Workforce Board and be considered in developing the State Strategic Plan for Workforce Development: WorkFirst and the Customized Training program.
- The Governor should appoint a WDC director to fill the vacant local representative position on the Workforce Board.
- There will be a clear mutual understanding of the strategic role of the Workforce Board and the operational role of the agencies, and the difference between the two roles.
- The staff of the Workforce Board and the staff of the operating agencies represented on the Board will endeavor to strengthen the ways in which they collaborate to benefit the customers of the workforce development system.
- The Workforce Board will enhance the use of its Interagency Committee for program coordination.

2006

WASHINGTON STATE

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