



## Ensuring Washington State's Global Success

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Reducing our “skills gap” through innovative education models and rigorous standards

A report by:  **AMERICA'S EDGE**  
Strengthening Businesses Through Proven Investments in Kids

## Acknowledgements

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## Who We Are

The business leaders of AMERICA'S EDGE take a critical look at the knowledge, skills and abilities businesses need their employees to have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the ability to be communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. Using that analysis, we educate policy-makers and the public about high-quality, proven investments that strengthen businesses, establish a foundation for sustained economic growth, and protect America's competitive edge in a global market place, while helping our nation's children get on the right track.

## Our Support

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## Executive Summary

Washington State faces a significant shortage of qualified workers in key industries, including healthcare, finance, sales and construction management, architecture, engineering, and information technology.

Why these shortages? Jobs in these and other industries require greater numbers of individuals with an associate’s degree or higher. But today, only 43 percent of working-age adults in our state have that level of education. By 2023, more than twice as many new jobs requiring post-secondary education will exist as compared to jobs for those with a high school education or less. The number of jobs in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)—industries upon which our state’s modern economy was built—is expected to grow by 22 percent between 2010 and 2020, and 93 percent will require post-secondary education. Yet only 11 percent of Washington State students’ college degrees and certificates are in STEM fields. In fact, a 2013 joint report from the Washington Roundtable and The Boston Consulting Group noted that Washington State would gain 160,000 jobs, spread across many sectors of the economy, if it fills its job skills gap.

The deficiencies go beyond those related to specific occupations. Washington State businesses are also concerned about the lack of the increasingly important “soft skills” —communication, collaboration, and critical thinking—required for virtually any occupation in today’s global economy. Nationally, more than 90 percent of surveyed members in The Business Council—an association of chief executive officers from the world’s leading private sector businesses from commerce and industry—ranked “deeper learning skills,” such as teamwork and critical thinking, as “very” or “most” important to their businesses. Yet only 30 percent believed the U.S. workforce is “very /mostly capable” of critical thinking skills, and only 15.5 percent said the U.S. workforce is “very /mostly capable” of communications.

This lack of a skilled workforce comes at a high cost. Remedial education costs in our state are estimated to be at least \$248 million every year. In addition, higher levels of education protect

against unemployment and increase earnings, which increase spending power and contributions to the tax base.

To reverse these anticipated “skills gaps,” the Washington State business leaders of *America’s Edge* urge that we strengthen high school education models that will develop crucial skills needed for a world-class, competitive workforce, while ensuring that we have rigorous standards, high-quality assessments, and effective accountability systems to accurately measure how well students are performing and academically growing from year to year.

To address the lack of “hard and soft skills,” particularly in younger workers, our high school students must have greater access to innovative education models that can equip them for success in both college and career. Today, education is too often separated from real life, so it can be hard for students to see how education will be relevant to them as adults. This is one reason why more than one in five (23 percent) of Washington State high school students do not graduate high school on time, and only 21 percent of residents have a bachelor’s degree. **These promising and proven education models provide relevant and core academic curricula**, while also incorporating project-based learning, numerous communication activities, critical thinking exercises, and work-based learning opportunities. In conjunction with these models, the **rigorous Washington Common Core Standards and aligned assessments** now being implemented in our schools will allow educators to determine how students are doing and use this information to improve instruction, so more students will be college- and career-ready.

**The bottom line:** The future of Washington State’s economy depends upon the caliber of our workforce. We must invest in what works in our education system if we are going to develop the skilled workforce our businesses need today and into the future. As we continue the debate on strengthening our education system, the conversation must include expanding access to innovative education approaches that help our students acquire the core knowledge and skills our businesses expect—and need—from their workforce, while ensuring students are applying those skills.



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**Unprepared Students, Unprepared Workers:** Although businesses have always needed workers proficient in the “3 Rs” – reading, writing and arithmetic – today’s fast-paced, international marketplace requires even higher proficiency levels in these hard skills. But they are too often lacking, especially among those entering the workforce.

- According to the Nation’s Report Card, 58 percent of Washington eighth graders are below grade level in math, 58 percent read below grade level and 65 percent are not proficient in science;<sup>1</sup>
- 23 percent of Washington high school students do not graduate on time;<sup>2</sup>
- Only 39 percent of Washington Class of 2013 graduates taking the ACT college admissions test met college readiness benchmarks in all four core areas tested – English, math, reading and science. Students were least prepared in science.<sup>3</sup>
- Only 43 percent of Washington workers ages 25 to 64 have at least an associate’s degree. An additional 25 percent have some college education, but no degree.<sup>4</sup>



registered nurses), sales and construction management, finance (e.g., accountants and auditors), architecture, engineering, and information technology.<sup>5</sup> The Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue and Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton MSAs are experiencing shortfalls in many of the same industries. These findings suggest that Washington State, particularly in the large metro areas of Seattle and Portland, is importing

large numbers of educated workers that were educated outside their regions, or even outside of the state.<sup>6</sup> A 2013 joint report from the Washington Roundtable and The Boston Consulting Group noted that Washington State would gain 160,000 jobs, spread across many sectors of the economy, if it fills its job skills gap.<sup>7</sup>

What is driving these estimates? The anticipated growth rates for occupations for Washington State are skewed towards jobs that are either highly skilled (requiring a bachelor’s degree or above) or medium-skilled (requiring an associate’s degree, vocational degree, or professional accreditation). In fact, about 67 percent of the high-growth and high-wage jobs in our state will require an associate’s degree or higher.<sup>8</sup>

These statistics do not bode well for the ability to fill jobs that have increasingly higher education and/or training requirements.

## A Skills Gap in Washington State

In fact, Washington state faces a significant shortage of qualified workers in several key industries, including healthcare (e.g.,

Between 2013 and 2023, Washington jobs requiring a bachelor’s degree are expected to grow 18 percent faster than jobs for high

school dropouts. In occupations that are expected to have the highest deficits of skilled workers through 2023, 47 percent of positions will require post-secondary education.<sup>9</sup> More than twice as many new jobs in Washington will require post-secondary education as jobs for those with a high school education or less.<sup>10</sup>

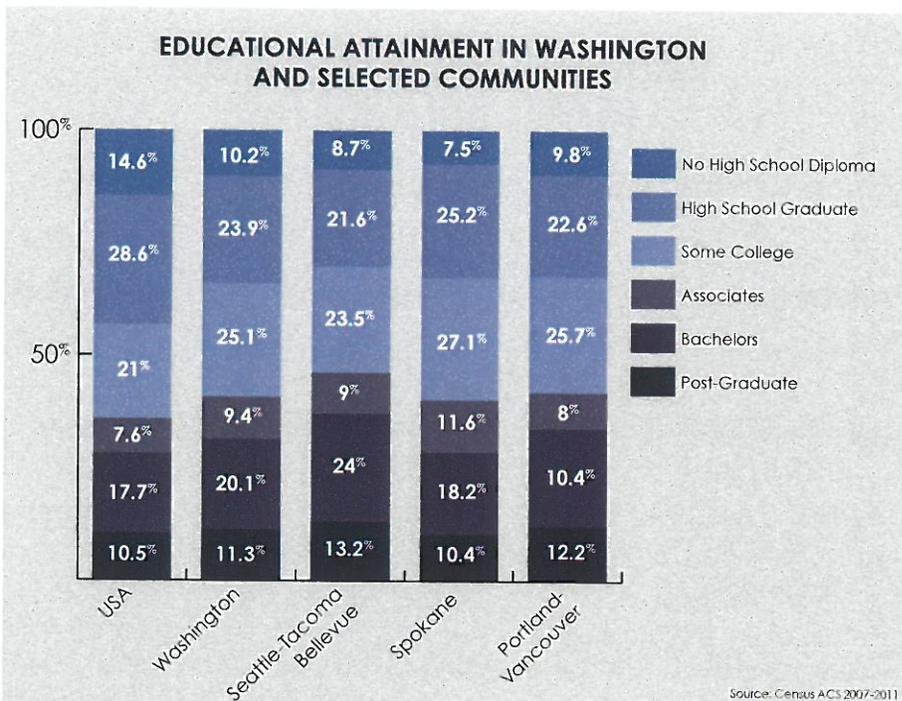
## Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Occupations Growing in Washington

As several reports have noted, jobs that are heavily reliant on technology are also growing fast, and employers in Washington are concerned that they will not be able to find employees with the necessary skills for these jobs.<sup>11</sup> The number of STEM jobs in Washington State is expected to grow by 22 percent between 2010 and 2020. Of those STEM jobs, 93 percent will require post-secondary education by 2018 – 72 percent will require a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>12</sup> One-third of the jobs with large projected gaps will require a STEM-related degree or specific training in a medical or healthcare field.<sup>13</sup> Yet only 11 percent of Washington students’ college degrees and certificates are in STEM fields.<sup>14</sup>

Health care jobs are also growing rapidly in Washington State, with 29 percent growth expected between 2010 and 2020. But only 14 percent of Washington health care jobs in 2020 will be for those with only a high school diploma – 86 percent will require some post-secondary education.<sup>15</sup>

Technology is also increasingly central to many jobs in manufacturing, which has shifted to more advanced, computer-assisted production, replacing the manual labor force with automation on the shop floor. To remain viable, workers in manufacturing facilities must now have a technical skill or trade-based skill that machines cannot adequately perform, such as knowledge of mechanical and electrical engineering processes, the ability to operate automated manufacturing systems, and the ability to work with computerized systems and read and write machine programming code.<sup>16</sup> More than 600,000 manufacturing jobs go unfilled each year in the U.S., because workers do not have the necessary skills.<sup>17</sup>

The inability to find skilled workers will hurt our state’s competitive readiness. Workforce shortages or skills deficiencies will have a significant impact on the ability to expand operations



or improve productivity – perhaps even forcing companies to move operations out of the state.

## Deficiencies in “Soft Skills” / Developing Deeper Learning Skills

Business leaders know that young people entering college and the workforce need a mastery of core academic subjects. But they need more:

- The critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to find answers to challenges that – unlike multiple choice tests – are not on the page in front of them.
- Part of those skills come from learning how to learn – knowing how to find out what they do not already know.
- They will need effective written and verbal communication skills to work as part of a team, or to interact with the public.
- And, to work as a team, they will have to master collaboration skills, such as interpreting others’ messages and responding appropriately.

This preparation includes going beyond rote learning to transfer what they have learned in one subject and apply it in novel ways or different settings in the workplace. It also requires the ability to regulate one’s own behavior and emotions to reach goals. Research cited by the National Research Council, for example, shows that being conscientious – “being organized, responsible,



## Required Skills and Traits for Manufacturing

### WHAT WAS NEEDED THEN

- Learning one or two specific technical roles
- Physical strength & flexibility
- Ability to follow fixed, unchanging procedures
- General attention to production & safety procedures
- Following orders
- Operating, maintaining & designing mechanical machinery

### WHAT IS NEEDED NOW

- Mechanical reasoning, logic, troubleshooting & spatial visualization
- Personal flexibility, communications & cooperation
- Initiative, persistence & independence
- Attention to detail, self-control & dependability
- Making independent decisions
- Operating computers or computerized machinery & using computers for a wide range of critical functions

Handler et al., 2009

translate into less spending power, fewer contributions to the tax base and lower productivity.

Higher levels of education can also help protect against unemployment. In 2012, 12 percent of high school dropouts nationwide were unemployed, compared to 8 percent for those with a high school degree, 6 percent for an associate's degree, and 4.5 percent for a bachelor's degree. The median weekly earnings for those without a diploma who were employed were \$471 per week. In contrast, only 4.5 percent of those with a bachelor's degree were unemployed, and employed college graduates had median weekly earnings of over \$1,000 per week.<sup>24</sup>

and hardworking – [has] the strongest correlation with desirable work and educational outcomes [whereas] anti-social behavior ... is negatively correlated with these [desirable] outcomes.<sup>18</sup> These are skills that can be taught and reinforced, especially in the workforce. All of this goes beyond “textbook” learning to provide students and workers with the skills now needed in a competitive global market.<sup>19</sup>

Nationally, over 90 percent of Business Council members surveyed ranked deeper learning skills, such as teamwork and critical thinking, as “very” or “most” important to their businesses. Yet only 30 percent believed the U.S. workforce is “very /most capable” with critical thinking skills and only 15.5 percent said the U.S. workforce is “very /most capable” with communications.<sup>20</sup>

### High Cost of the Skills Gap

The lack of a skilled workforce comes at a high cost for individuals, businesses and the economy. In Washington State, workers with an associate's degree earn annually more than \$15,000 more than a high school graduate and more than \$25,000 more than a high school dropout.<sup>21</sup> High school dropouts are so much less productive than high school graduates that each new class of Washington dropouts will earn \$4.8 billion less over their lifetimes than their high school graduate peers.<sup>22</sup> The returns from a college degree are even greater. The average lifetime earnings of an individual college graduate are \$2.1 million dollars higher than those of a high school dropout.<sup>23</sup> These staggering earnings losses

Graduating just an extra 1,000 of Washington's high school dropouts – just 3 percent of the class of 2010's dropouts – could result in impressive economic benefits. These 1,000 extra graduates would likely:

- collectively earn \$14 million more in an average year than they would have without a diploma;
- spend \$1.2 million more each year purchasing vehicles;
- buy homes worth \$43 million more by the time they reach the midpoint of their careers;
- support 80 new jobs in the state;
- increase the gross state product by \$16 million; and
- increase state revenues by \$1.2 million annually through their increased spending and investments.<sup>25</sup>

Remedial courses and training to help students catch up and get on track for higher education and training are helpful, but they are expensive and inefficient. Almost half (46 percent) of recent Washington public high school graduates transitioning to community colleges enrolled in at least one remedial class, along with five percent of four-year college students.<sup>26</sup> In fact, research from Change the Equation shows that 51 percent of Washington's community college students need remediation in math, which costs the state more than \$93 million each year.<sup>27</sup> Washington students who place into remedial coursework are far less likely to complete their degrees, with only 23 percent of community

college students graduating within three years.<sup>28</sup> In Washington, remedial education costs students and the state an estimated \$248 million annually, and up to \$348 million annually after factoring in the reduced lifetime wages of students taking remedial courses.<sup>29</sup>

## Changing Course

As Washington and the nation wrestle with the vitally important debate on education reform, businesses know that career relevance must be incorporated into the classroom. Too many students do not understand *why* they need to know what they are being taught, lose interest in school and then do not develop the deeper learning skills employers expect them to have. Innovative high school education models help students stay engaged in school so they graduate with a concrete understanding of what they will need to succeed in the workforce and education post-high school, thus better ensuring Washington businesses have a workforce armed with the skills required in a global marketplace.

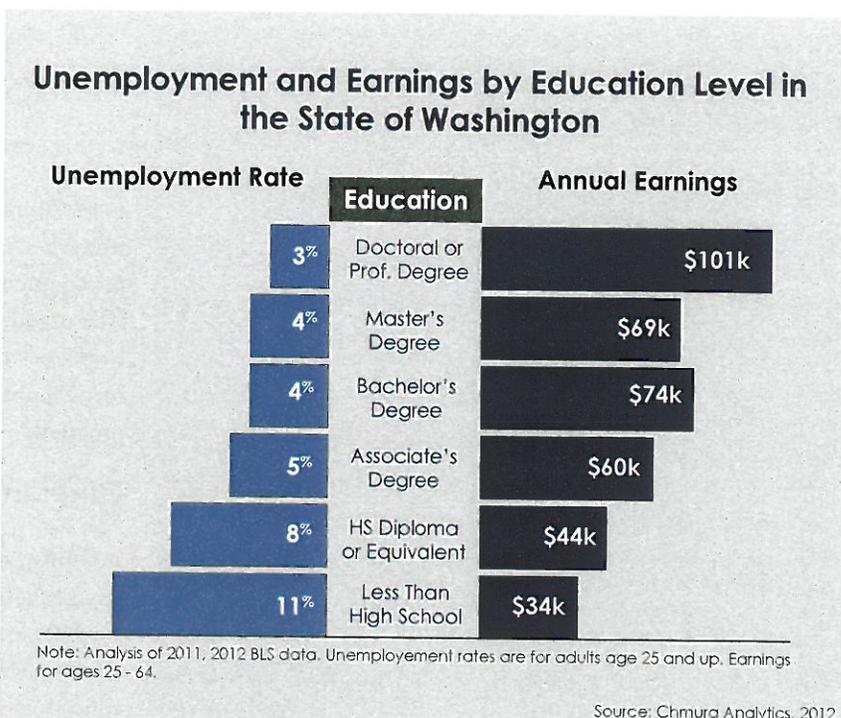
## Developing Skills Businesses Need through High School Education Models

One of the best – and proven – ways to impact the skills gap is to equip high school students for success in both post-secondary training and/or education and their future careers. Students need to understand how education is relevant to a career, understand their options and what is expected in the work place, and develop communication, collaboration and critical-thinking capabilities. Innovative models and approaches are achieving these goals.

A common element to these proven and promising high school education models is the integration of rigorous academics, career-relevant instruction, support services for students and real-world, work-based learning experiences supported by industry and community partners over a three- or four-year period. A number of schools have also adopted educational approaches that focus on problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills. A new federal program, the Youth CareerConnect grants will offer up to \$100 million to fund public-private partnerships to scale up these innovative high school models.<sup>37</sup>

## Career Academies and Pathways

Career Academies is a proven approach found throughout the United States and in Washington that incorporates real-world, work-based learning. Although some programs are stand-alone



schools, including charter or magnet schools, most are pathways within larger comprehensive high schools. Often called a “school-within-a-school,” pathways typically comprise no more than 200 students who stay together with the same teachers for the duration of the program. That continuity helps create close relationships among the students, their peers and their teachers. It creates the kind of “team player” mentality employers too often find lacking in their younger employees.<sup>38</sup>

Key elements in proven and promising high school education models, such as Career Academies, are:

- *Work-based learning* such as mentorships, job shadowing opportunities and internships with local employers brings actual career relevance to the students, deepening their understanding of how traditional academics are used in careers. This helps direct them toward training and education opportunities that will get them the skills Washington employers are seeking.<sup>39</sup>
- *Project-based learning* helps students make connections across subjects and brings greater relevance to classroom learning. Students work together on projects, developing academic and technical skills, as well as more experience with collaboration, communication and critical thinking.<sup>40</sup>
- *School-based enterprise*, like student-led businesses or community service initiatives, is another form of work-based learning. It allows students to design, produce and deliver real products and services.



## Highline Big Picture High School<sup>30</sup> and Raisbeck Aviation High School<sup>31</sup>

Burien, WA; Tukwila, WA.

The Highline Big Picture High School is focused on three goals: relationships, relevance, and rigor. The school uses real-world learning, internships, individualized learning plans, a small school setting, low student-teacher ratios and a breakthrough college transition program to help students develop the skills, habits, and knowledge they need to succeed in higher education, overcome obstacles in well-being, and contribute positively to their communities. Starting in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, every student spends two days a week at an internship, where they are immersed in the professional work at the site. The school opened in 2005, and currently serves a total of 125 students in grades 9 through 12, with a middle school that opened in 2011.

The Highline Big Picture High School in Washington has an impressively high rate of college enrollment, with 80 percent of 2010 graduates currently enrolled in college, compared to 47 percent for low-income students across the nation. Results from student and parent surveys are also positive: a 2010 survey of Highline Big Picture graduates indicated that 83 percent felt the school prepared them to write clearly and effectively. A 2008 parent survey indicated that 100 percent of parents felt that the school encouraged their children to prepare for his/her future and pursue further education after high school.<sup>32</sup> Big Picture schools across the country have a graduation rate of 92 percent.

The Raisbeck Aviation High School, a project-based, STEM-focused school with an in-depth airplane and aerospace theme, was started in 2004. Students are selected to attend through an application and interview process, and once selected, students sign a four-year commitment to continue to attend the school until graduation. The student body is limited to 400 students, which allows for more interactions between students and teachers. Each class incorporates learning in the context of engineering, aviation or space. To simulate a work environment, students work together on group projects – and can even “fire” unproductive teammates. Upperclassmen form corporations and compete with each other for the most productivity, best research and development, and best management skills. Senior students are placed in a mentoring program with local experts from companies including Boeing, Microsoft, and Blue Origin.<sup>33</sup>

- *Support services*, including counseling as well as additional instruction in reading, writing and mathematics, help students keep their grades up and stay on track for graduation.<sup>41</sup>

In a well-designed study of Career Academies across America, students were twice as likely as nonparticipants to be working in the computer, engineering or media technology sector eight years after graduation, thus helping to increase the supply of STEM workers.<sup>42</sup> Young people who went through Career Academies earned more and were more productive than those not in the program.<sup>43</sup>

### Other Innovative Education Models

A number of schools around the nation have adopted educational approaches to promote deeper learning and help ensure that students focus on these critical problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills. Included among the educational models that focus on developing these skills in Washington are New Tech Network. These education models focus on cultivating the skills Washington businesses need:

- New Tech Network works nationwide with schools to support innovations in education, helping students gain the knowledge and deeper learning skills they need for college and career success. Key features of this instructional approach are project-based learning, use of technology, and maintaining a school culture of trust, respect, and responsibility. New Tech Network supports 120 schools in 18 states and Australia, including Cleveland High School in Washington.<sup>45</sup>

The Lake Washington School District is phasing in “Signature Programs”, and by 2014-2015, all District high schools will offer them. Signature Programs are thematic, interdisciplinary three-period blocks organized around career clusters and pathways. The courses have both rigorous academic content and application of learning to the real world. Students learn about subjects by solving problems (problem-based learning) and complete industry-based projects. Industry experts, business and community leaders and college professors work with students on projects. Some of these programs focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics.)<sup>46</sup>

Although evaluation research has not yet assessed the effectiveness of these models, their focus on these key learning skills that businesses need shows promise for helping students be better equipped for problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Through these promising models, Washington high school students understand the skills they will need in a particular occupation and can make more informed decisions about post-secondary education and training. Whether they go directly into the workforce or pursue advanced education, these students will ultimately enter the workforce much more prepared to hit the ground running, potentially reducing the time and cost of on-the-job training.

## Washington Common Core Standards

The Washington Common Core Standards (CCS), when fully implemented with their aligned assessments, will ensure that students develop the deeper learning skills required by today's businesses.

Until recently, each state has had its own particular educational standards and tests to assess student achievement. Standards varied greatly across states and even among school districts within a state. State tests also vary, in content and on the level of performance deemed "proficient." As a result, there is a lot of confusion about how students are really doing and businesses have no objective way to compare job applicants from different states—a high school diploma from a state with high standards likely comes with a different skill set than one from a state with low standards.

Washington's CCS offer a way out of this dilemma. The CCS are based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS),<sup>47</sup> which were developed and led by the nation's governors and chief state school officers, and have been voluntarily adopted by 45 states, as well as the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity. Washington State adopted the standards in July 2011 with approval from its Office of Public Instruction. The adoption occurred after a thorough process. In July 2010, the state legislature authorized the state superintendent to provisionally adopt the CCSS. The following January (2011), the superintendent delivered a report to the legislature that compared Washington's standards to the CCSS, and had both a proposed timeline for implementing the CCSS and a projected budget of implementation costs. The state is fully implementing the new standards during the 2013-2014 school year and will conclude in 2014-2015 with implementation of a new assessment system to measure student achievement to the standards.<sup>48</sup>

The CCS establish a shared, rigorous set of educational standards for English language arts and mathematics for K-12 education. The standards reflect businesses' needs for a highly-skilled workforce that has mastered core academic content and is able

## Cleveland High, School of Engineering & Design<sup>34</sup> and School of Life Sciences<sup>35</sup>

Seattle Public Schools - Seattle, WA.

Cleveland High School transitioned from a traditional public high school to a STEM public high school in 2010. Cleveland High is now home to two STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – academies: The School of Engineering & Design and the School of Life Sciences. These academies personalize the learning experience for students by creating teams of teachers who can offer their students choices in STEM content.

The School of Engineering & Design (SoED) focuses on the physical sciences and technology. This academy features a computer game design program and a pre-engineering program that exposes students to leading edge technologies in robotics, aeronautics, rocket design, and alternative energy. The School of Life Sciences (SoLS) focuses on the life sciences, including biology and biochemistry, as well as global health issues. Students in the two academies take core-content classes within their own academies, but come together for elective classes and extracurricular activities.

In the 2011-2012 school year, Cleveland High School students in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade exceeded the typical growth on the Washington state tests for math. Eighty-eight percent of students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade also demonstrated that they were earning sufficient credits to graduate, the same as the state average. The percent of students taking college admissions test was 76 percent, greater than the state average of 69 percent. Graduates enrolled in higher education within one year at about the same rate as the state average: 66 percent compared to 67 percent across the state.<sup>36</sup>

to think critically, solve complex problems and communicate effectively (i.e. deeper learning skills). The CCS establish the content and skills that children must learn at each grade level, but they do *not* tell teachers how to teach, nor do they specify a curriculum; these important decisions remain under teacher, local or state control.



## Enhancing Deeper Learning Skills

### Skills Necessary for Success

To be equipped with the knowledge and abilities businesses now require, students must:

#### Master Core Academic Content

Students must be able to demonstrate a baseline understanding of core content knowledge and apply facts, processes and theories to real-world situations.

#### Think Critically and Solve Complex Problems

Students must be able to apply tools and techniques learned from core subjects to formulate and solve problems, using them to evaluate, integrate and critically analyze multiple sources of information. Students must be able to learn to reason and construct justifiable arguments creatively, encompassing non-linear thinking and persistence.

#### Work Collaboratively

Students should demonstrate the ability to cooperate together to identify and create solutions to social, vocational and personal challenges. This includes the ability to identify common goals; to organize resources necessary for meeting group goals; and to learn to

communicate and incorporate multiple points of view to better achieve goals.

#### Communicate Effectively

Students must be able to organize their thoughts and findings in clear, meaningful and useful ways and express themselves in both written and oral forms. They must be able to listen well and present others' concepts, as well as their own.

#### Learn How to Learn

Students must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and be able to monitor and direct their own learning. They should understand and be prepared to meet changing expectations in a variety of academic, professional and social environments.

#### Develop Academic Mindsets

Students must develop academic mindsets that are positive, motivated, and resilient. Students should commit to completing their work, meeting goals, doing quality work, and searching for solutions to overcome obstacles.

Washington is a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)<sup>49</sup>, one of the two main groups of states developing assessments based on the CCSS. The assessments will be implemented in 2014-2015. The assessments will allow educators to determine how students are doing and to use this information to improve education, so more students will be college- and career-ready. Short-term assessments will allow teachers to determine students' understanding of concepts and then adjust teaching in real time, to increase understanding. The data from these assessments will also help educators identify and share educational practices that work with other schools and districts. Employers could also use new assessment scores to compare applicants and find those who have the reading and language or math skills needed.

In addition to assessments, in order to affect student outcomes, we also need stronger curricula, compatible with the CCS. Better pre- and in-service training will also be necessary, including

support for teachers and leaders learning how to use the CCS assessment data effectively.<sup>50</sup> As assessments will be computer-based, schools must also have sufficient hardware and bandwidth to accommodate the assessments. However, current spending will cover a significant proportion of the costs of implementing the CCS.<sup>51</sup>

The CCS can help ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education consistently, from state to state. The new educational standards and assessments will not magically turn things around overnight. Because the CCS are more rigorous than Washington's prior standards in English Language Arts<sup>52</sup>, the new assessments are going to be tougher than previous state tests. At first there is likely to be a decrease in test scores, not because students are doing worse, but because we will be accurately measuring how well students are meeting higher standards. With rigorous standards and assessments our students will be better prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

## Conclusion

To meet the future demands of a more skilled and educated workforce, Washington State policy-makers should make sure we invest in what really works and include promising and evidence-based approaches that will ensure young people enter the workforce with the skills Washington businesses need. If we are serious about securing Washington's economic future, we must act now to get our businesses the skilled workforce we need to innovate and grow in the global marketplace.

## Riverpoint Academy<sup>44</sup>

### Mead School District - Spokane, WA

Riverpoint Academy is a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) focused, project-based learning public school for eleventh and twelfth grade students. The Academy offers opportunities for students to engage in internships and to take advantage of college courses available through Eastern Washington University, while they also complete graduation requirements in English, social studies, math and science. Students learn through "challenge-based" learning – a collaborative process in which teachers and students work together to learn about compelling issues, propose solutions to real problems, and take action. The focus at the Academy is on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and leadership, STEM literacy and nurturing the creative passion within each student. Learning at Riverpoint Academy happens through a "learn-by-doing" approach that encourages students to see first hand what it takes to be a leader, and what life in a work setting is like.

At Riverpoint Academy, professionals from the community work with students as they dive deeply into science, engineering, mathematics, the arts and humanities and entrepreneurship. For example, through the Work 101 program, high schoolers are placed into internships through the school's partnership with Spokane Valley Tech and the Spokane Area Workforce Development Council. These programs help students become better prepared for college and career, while also training skilled workers that businesses in the region need. Even though the school opened during the 2012-2013 school year, and student outcome data are not yet available, the community's support is an indicator of their belief in the program. The school has been privately funded by local industry due to their faith in the program.

## Endnotes

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