



Workforce Training and
Education Coordinating Board

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gap between skilled workers and employer demands will increase *Education and training more vital than ever for workers in down economy*

OLYMPIA, Wash. –The current supply of workers trained by Washington’s community and technical colleges, and other training programs, already falls short of what employers will need to fill many family-wage jobs, according to a forecast by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. Enrollment cuts as a result of the down economy will widen the gap further.

Charged with anticipating the needs of employers and the state’s education and training capacity to fill [critical middle-skill jobs in areas such as health care and construction](#), the Workforce Board projects a growing shortfall that could further damage Washington’s economy in the years to come. Based on current enrollment levels, the shortage of sufficiently skilled workers will continue to grow. By 2012, the gap between skilled workers and demand will be 9 percent.

“As bad as our financial situation is, we cannot lose sight of the fact that investments in our state’s workforce competitiveness will be a key driver of our economic recovery,” said David Harrison, chair of the Workforce Board and a senior lecturer at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington.

Recent estimates show a \$5.8 billion shortfall in the 2009-2011 state budget. With a faltering economy in mind, the Workforce Board recently endorsed continued funding and additional support for education programs that:

1. Keep young people from dropping out of school and on track for the world of work.
2. Train workers in high demand fields such as construction and health care.
3. Help low-level workers upgrade their skills through an innovative blend of basic education and job skills training, among other vital programs.

“Since the Workforce Board’s creation in the early 1990s, we have made significant strides towards ensuring Washington residents have the skills they need to support their families and

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that our industries and businesses have the talent pool necessary to flourish and prosper,” said Harrison.

Harrison heads up the Workforce Board, a 15-member Governor-appointed board that includes representatives from the state’s business community, labor groups and government. The board oversees and weighs in on a wide range of education and training programs aimed at helping Washington residents move ahead and into higher-skilled, higher-paid jobs, especially in areas in demand by Washington’s business and industry.

At its November 20 meeting, the Workforce Board listened to agency budget requests and made recommendations on additional investments in programs that will help Washington workers and businesses rebound during the next two-year budget.

- \$25 million for additional community college enrollments in high-demand fields such as health care, construction, and aircraft and diesel mechanics.
- \$4 million to provide customized training to employers who increasingly require employees with new or updated skills.
- \$9.2 million for Navigation 101, a comprehensive career guidance and planning program.
- \$7 million on the Student Achievement Initiative, aimed at helping community college students earn enough credits to reach their education and career goals.
- \$2 million to handle the increased demand for services from students with disabilities who require equal access to higher education.
- \$15 million to expand participation in the Opportunity Grant program which helps low-income students afford tuition, books and other expenses to prepare for in-demand fields.
- \$29.8 million to begin to modernize the technological capabilities of our community and technical colleges, and by doing so, increase student capacity over time.
- \$1 million to expand apprenticeship as a workforce and economic development training model and to strengthen oversight to protect apprentices.
- \$2 million to modernize and increase the efficiency of the system that helps job seekers find work and employers find workers.

As a state agency, the Workforce Board oversees 18 education and training programs, operated by seven agencies including the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Employment Security Department, the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Labor and Industries. All together, these agencies’ workforce programs receive nearly \$900 million in state and federal funds annually.

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