

***Executive Summary***  
***High Skill, High Wages: 2008 - 2018***  
***The State Strategic Plan for Workforce Development***

**Planning to Create a Highly Skilled Workforce**

As tomorrow's workforce will be older and more racially and ethnically diverse and tomorrow's workplace will be even more technology and information driven, we need to upgrade skills of those with low or obsolete skills, and increase the educational attainment level of our residents. Now, more than ever, we must concentrate efforts on developing a highly skilled workforce. "High Skills, High Wages" our state's 10-year strategic plan for workforce development, contained in this report, provides our blueprint.

Leaders from across the state created this plan. Contributors included employers, labor, education, nonprofit and community-based organizations, state, local and tribal government, rural and urban areas, communities of color, and individuals with disabilities. We will achieve our three goals related to Youth, Adults and Industry by implementing 20 strategies, sticking to our vision for 2018, and tracking our progress.

**Responding to Economic and Demographic Changes**

Our economic and demographic outlook forms the context of our planning. Our economy shows signs of slowing down after a period of growth with unemployment rates beginning to climb in January 2008. Even in periods of economic downturn our employers report difficulty recruiting skilled workers, particularly those with mid-level education and training. Our 2007 gap analysis estimated that we are only filling 77 percent of the demand for skilled workers. This has serious consequences. Employers report that a lack of skilled workers has a direct impact on their ability to expand, on their profitability, and influences whether they decide to stay in the state. Support of our state and regional strategic industry clusters is one key method for improving our economy.

As Washington's workforce ages and begins to retire, our workforce is growing more slowly than in the past. In-migration from other states and abroad will contribute more than half of our future growth. In this context we need to implement strategies that enhance the skills of low-skilled adults, ensure that more youth graduate from high school and are on track to complete at least one year of postsecondary education, and reduce under-employment. We need to remove barriers in our workforce development system to ensure expanded access and success.<sup>1</sup>

**Opportunities for Enhancing Education and Training**

Past planning efforts have helped us to make great strides in meeting the workforce needs of our economy. Areas of progress include: improved access to career and technical education in high schools, developing the Building Bridges Initiative to reduce K-12 dropouts, providing High Demand funds to expand programs that prepare students for high employer demand occupations, increasing access to postsecondary education through breakthrough programs such as the Opportunity Grants, and expanding apprenticeship options, among many other strategies. In addition, industry skills panels that comprise education providers, employers and related public and non-profit entities from a strategic regional industry cluster, are a source of initiatives that have become prominent best practice examples, for both our state and nation.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information on our state's demographics and economy please see earlier chapter.

While we are making progress, we still have a gap between the supply and the demand for a skilled workforce. Moreover, some are concerned about the development of an “hourglass economy” and increasing polarization between high and low paying jobs.<sup>2</sup> Education and training is essential for the growth of middle-wage employment, and for helping individuals to move up career ladders.

### **Key Issues**

In developing our plan we asked our stakeholders to first identify the key issues, and then to help us create a plan for the immediate future through 2018. Key issues for youth relate to the high rate of students dropping out between grades 9 and 12, the high unemployment rate among older youth (approximately 18 to 24 years of age), and youth leaving high school unprepared for further education and/or work.

For adults we are concerned about low skill attainment, with more than 1.6 million Washington adults who have a high school diploma or less as their highest level of educational attainment.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the average age for participants in programs serving adults is 29, reflecting a gap in serving young adults. Adults need pathways to self-sufficiency, they need financial support to access education and training options, and education policymakers and providers need to develop more options to bring education to the workplace through distance learning and other methods.

We also need to find ways to better serve adults from specific subpopulations. State and national research demonstrates that individuals from communities of color fare worse in our education system as a whole, but see better results in workforce programs. Many people with disabilities, who account for 16 percent of the state’s working-age population, would like to work, but labor force participation for this population has declined over time. Veterans returning home often need to transition to the civilian workforce and can experience barriers in transferring their skills. Ex-offenders, particularly women, face reduced employment options. All these groups rely on further training and skill upgrades, as well as various support services, to improve opportunities for employment.

As we develop our economy, employers are calling for skilled workers. To achieve the greatest success, we need to align our workforce and economic development strategies. Limited public investments can achieve great gains if they are strategic. One proven method is supporting state and regional strategic industry clusters, by developing skill panels and establishing Centers of Excellence, among other key initiatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Sommers, Ph.D, Mark Gardner, Juliet Scarpa, “Skills Required: Preparing Puget Sound for Tomorrow’s Middle-Wage Jobs,” March 3, 2008, page 1.

<sup>3</sup> Conversation with David Prince, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges on calculations derived from 2000 Census Data, June 19, 2008.

### **What's In This Plan?**

More detailed discussion to further outline the key issues, research, and rationale for the objectives and strategies follows. The plan is organized according to our three goals.

### **OUR GOALS**

1. **YOUTH:** Ensure all youth receive the education, training, and support they need for success in postsecondary education and/or work.
2. **ADULTS:** Provide Washington adults (including those with barriers to education and employment) with access to lifelong education, training, and employment services.
3. **INDUSTRY:** Meet the workforce needs of industry by preparing students, current workers, and dislocated workers with the skills employers need.

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## Youth Goal and Summary of Objectives

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

**Objective 1** (For discussion see pages 7-8)

A K-12 Guidance and Counseling System provides students and their parents with a curriculum to individually plan their pathways and prepare for future education and/or work after high school.

- No later than 2018, all middle and high schools in the state have in place all five elements of the K-12 Guidance and Counseling System that includes community, business and labor collaboration.

**Objective 2** (For discussion see pages 10-11)

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

- No later than 2018 all high school students across Washington have the option to complete a career and technical education sequence that matches their career interests, articulates with postsecondary education and results in industry certification where applicable.

**Objective 3** (For discussion see pages 13-14)

All students graduate from high school.

- No later than 2018 every local community in the state will have an effective school/community partnership that provides a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention and re-engagement system for ALL youth, including those who have dropped out or who are at risk of dropping out.

**Objective 4** (For discussion see pages 16-19)

Reduce unemployment rates among older youth, and improve their career prospects.

- No later than 2018, there is a comprehensive state strategy to help unemployed older youth reconnect with work and/or further education opportunities.

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

**Objective 1**

A K-12 Guidance and Counseling System provides students and their parents with a curriculum to individually plan their pathways and prepare for future education and/or work after high school.

- No later than 2018, all middle and high schools in the state have implemented all five elements of the K-12 Guidance and Counseling System that includes community, business and labor collaboration.

**Steps To Get Us There**

- Expand implementation of the best practice guidance system, “Navigation 101” across the K-12 system including establishing goals for expansion each year.
- Integrate the Individual Education Plan with the 13<sup>th</sup> year plan required for graduation.
- Work with the State Board of Education to create policy links to comprehensive career guidance.
- Support the College Bound Scholarship Program that provides an incentive for low-income students to complete high school.

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

**Objective 2**

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

- No later than 2018 all high school students across Washington have the option to complete a career and technical education sequence that matches their career interests, articulates with postsecondary education and results in industry certification where applicable.

**Steps To Get Us There**

- Increase the number of students who complete a 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 by:
  - Identifying targets for increases.
  - Conducting an ongoing campaign to increase awareness of teachers, counselors, students, parents, and the general public of the opportunities of rigorous CTE programs, using multiple strategies.
  - Establishing criteria for setting academic course equivalencies.
  - Increasing the number of CTE courses that provide credit for math or science.
  - Providing new opportunities for students in rural areas to complete a CTE sequence.
  - Expanding CTE offerings offered via distance learning options.
  - Identifying high employer demand programs and expand these offerings in secondary CTE sequences.
  - Expanding Grades 7-12 CTE sequences for students.
  - Developing model statewide CTE articulation agreements that provide a program of sequenced courses and ensure all students have access to dual enrollment options.
  - Working with the State Board of Education to ensure high school graduation requirements contain a viable option for students to pursue a CTE sequence.
- Expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities for youth.
- Provide opportunities for all youth to connect to the workplace, including mentorships, job shadows, internships and a variety of other strategies including:
  - Building upon the mentorship component of the In-Demand Scholars program.
- Develop and implement best practice models to help basic skills deficient immigrant youth succeed in high school including.
  - Developing I-BEST programs for use in middle schools and high schools (basic skills and English language programs that are integrated with occupational skills training.)
- Assist all students to achieve the rigorous, high standards required for further education and/or work.

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

**Objective 3**

All students graduate from high school.

- No later than 2018 every community in the state will have an effective school/community partnership that provides a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention and re-engagement system for ALL youth, including those who have dropped out or who are at risk of dropping out.

**Steps To Get Us There**

- Expand the Building Bridges Grant Program to serve more youth at-risk of dropping out and to re-engage youth who have dropped out of school.
- Collaborate with education partners to develop state-level performance measures and targets for reducing the dropout rate, increasing the on-time graduation rate and increasing successful re-entry and achievement for students who have dropped out.
- Establish a process for identification, development and replication of best practices statewide.
- Explore changes in school funding that will give schools an incentive to serve at-risk youth.
- Identify and make recommendations to reduce the fiscal, legal and regulatory barriers that prevent coordination of program resources across agencies and community-based organizations to support the development of sustainable dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval partnerships.
- Create stronger program links between Job Corps, and Skills Centers to ensure more Job Corps students receive a high school diploma.
- Identify support services for at-risk youth and their parents, and implement action steps.

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

**Objective 4**

Reduce unemployment rates among older youth, and improve their career prospects.

- No later than 2018, there is a comprehensive state system to help unemployed older youth reconnect with work and/or further education opportunities.

**Steps To Get Us There**

- Create summer youth employment programs.
- Connect unemployed youth to expert “navigators” who can guide them to postsecondary resources and work experience opportunities.
- Seek a WIA I-B Youth waiver or WIA Adult 18-24 waiver for the maximum age eligibility and supplement these resources with state funds.
- Develop I-BEST opportunities specifically for older youth.
- Ensure the Building Bridges Grant programs includes a strong component for re-engaging youth 21 years of age and under to reconnect with education to obtain a high school diploma.
- Connect disadvantaged youth to AmeriCorps and Service Corps opportunities.

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## Adult Goal and Summary of Objectives

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

**Objective 1** (See discussion on pages 21 – 24)

Increase the number of adults who have at least one year of postsecondary training.

No later than 2018:

- (Target to be determined) More adults attain at least one year of postsecondary training and a credential.
- Washington state covers the tuition costs for the 13<sup>th</sup> year for workforce education students.
- (Target to be determined) More individuals receive the support services they need to enter and complete postsecondary training.
- (Insert Student Achievement target if appropriate.) More students achieve critical milestones at community and technical college programs as evidenced by the Student Achievement Initiative.

**Objective 2** (See discussion on pages 26-28)

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

No later than 2018:

- The majority of working adults are engaged in training each year, including workplace-based learning.

**Objective 3** (See discussion on pages 30 – 33, incomplete)

Adults with barriers to employment and training enter education and career pathways that lead to self-sufficiency.

No later than 2018:

- (Target to be determined) More adults with barriers to employment and training become employed in middle and higher wage jobs.
- The majority of Adult Basic Education programs at community and technical colleges are integrated with occupational skills training.

**Objective 4** (See discussion on page 35, incomplete)

The WorkSource system provides integrated and effective customer service without barriers associated with separate, individual programs.

No later than 2018:

- WorkSource is a functionally integrated service delivery system that measurably improves the employability of customers.

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

### **Objective 1**

Increase the number of adults who have at least one year of postsecondary training.

No later than 2018:

- (Target to be determined) More adults attain at least one year of postsecondary training and a credential.
- Washington state covers the tuition costs for the 13<sup>th</sup> year for workforce education students.
- (Target to be determined) More individuals receive the support services they need to enter and complete postsecondary training.
- (Insert Student Achievement target if appropriate.) More students achieve critical milestones at community and technical college programs as evidenced by the Student Achievement Initiative.

### **Steps To Get Us There**

- Provide more financial aid and support services to enable students to enroll in and complete at least one year of postsecondary training and receive a credential, including:
  - Expand the Opportunity Grant program and include support services.
  - Provide the first five credits of postsecondary training free for workforce students who earn less than the median family income.
- Establish more industry-based credentials in occupational and general workplace skills demanded by employers for students that complete one-year of training and develop more one year certificated programs.
- Provide more workforce education students with access to work-based learning and career and labor market information.
- Create easy to navigate postsecondary education and training and career websites, including financial aid and support services.
- Conduct an ongoing marketing campaign to inform the general public about the employment and earnings benefits of postsecondary training, especially in high employer demand programs of study.

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

**Objective 2**

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

No later than 2018:

- The majority of working adults ~~are engaged~~ in training each year, including in workplace-based learning.

**Steps To Get Us There**

- Identify and implement best practice models for working adults to gain further education and training at the workplace, including through digital learning.
- Develop public/private financial aid support to assist working adults to gain further education and training credentials including:
  - Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLas).
  - Increasing the number of part-time, working students who can receive the state-need grant.
- Develop more Applied Baccalaureate degrees to create four-year degree options for students that complete technical associate degrees.
- Develop more statewide direct transfer agreements and articulation agreements between two-year and four-year schools, and between private schools and public schools.

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

### **Objective 3**

Adults with barriers to employment and training enter education and career pathways that lead to self-sufficiency.

No later than 2018:

- (Target to be determined) More adults with barriers to employment and training become employed in middle and higher wage jobs.
- The majority of Adult Basic Education programs at community and technical colleges are integrated with occupational skills training.

### **Steps To Get Us There**

- Expand the use of the self-sufficiency calculator to all workforce development councils, and provide training for frontline staff.
- Expand the number of Adult Basic Education programs that integrate occupational skills training through the I-BEST model.
- Expand use of the Food Stamps Education and Training program for customers with the greatest barriers to employment.
- Enhance professional development and provide credentials for career coaching, mentoring, and instruction in life skills and employability skills for WorkSource staff, training institutions, community-based organizations, employers, and others.
- Enhance employment and training options for targeted populations (people of color, people with disabilities and women), ex-offenders, and veterans.
- Ensure that workforce development services are fully accessible for all adults with disabilities.
- Develop a system to provide post-employment services to adults to improve work retention and career advancement.

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

#### **Objective 4**

The WorkSource system provides integrated and effective customer service without barriers associated with separate, individual programs.

No later than 2018:

WorkSource is a functionally integrated service delivery system that measurably improves the employability of customers.

#### **Steps To Get Us There**

- Identify barriers to integrated customer service and implement solutions.
- Increase integration of WorkSource partner programs through methods such as co-enrollments and co-locations among WorkSource partner programs.
- Increase the use of consistent performance measures among WorkSource partner programs.
- Improve the integration of assessments, counseling, employment services, and training in the WorkSource system.
- Improve linkages with community-based organizations, especially those that serve target populations, ex-offenders, and veterans.
- Identify opportunities for partnership that will provide resources to serve more customers in the workforce development system.

## Industry Goal and Summary of Objectives

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

**Objective 1** (See discussion on page 38)

The workforce development system supplies the number of newly prepared workers needed to meet current and emerging employer needs.

No later than 2018:

- Raise mid-level degrees and certificates to 36,200 annually, an increase of 9,400 degrees and certificates annually.

**Objective 2** (See discussion on page 40 - 41)

The workforce development system strengthens Washington's economy, focusing on strategic industry clusters as a central organizing principle.

No later than 2018:

- Washington's workforce and economic development programs have established track records of effective service to the strategic industry clusters in Washington.
- Washington's workforce development system prepares the number of workers needed to fill job openings in strategic industry clusters.

**Objective 3** (See discussion on page 43, incomplete)

Current and dislocated workers, and job seekers receive education and training that builds competitive skills and businesses.

No later than 2018:

- A majority of mid- and lower-wage employees receive training from either their employers or the workforce development system.
- Dislocated worker programs are easy to navigate and enable good wage replacement results.

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

**Objective 1**

The workforce development system supplies the number of newly prepared workers to meet current and emerging employer needs.

- No later than 2018, raise mid-level degrees and certificates to 36,200 annually, an increase of 9,400 degrees and certificates annually.

**Steps To Get Us There**

- Increase annual capacity in mid-level education and training programs (greater than one year but less than four years) by 9,400 degrees and certificates.
- Expand apprenticeship training opportunities and recruitment of employers who hire apprentices for traditional and non-traditional programs.

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

### **Objective 2**

The workforce development system strengthens Washington's economy, focusing on strategic industry clusters as a central organizing principle.

No later than 2018:

- Washington's workforce and economic development programs have established track records of effective service to the state's strategic industry clusters.
- Washington's workforce development system prepares the number of workers needed to fill job openings in strategic industry clusters.

### **Steps To Get Us There**

- Establish Industry Skill Panels that provide information on skill needs in strategic industry clusters in all workforce development areas.
- Establish Centers of Excellence that provide best practice support to education providers for all strategic industry clusters in the state.
- Expand High Employer Demand programs of study at all levels of postsecondary education and target under-represented labor pools to facilitate their entry to high demand occupations.
- Prepare more individuals to work in industry clusters that provide middle-wage and high-wage job opportunities.
- Coordinate workforce development and economic development planning efforts at the state level, including an emphasis on industry clusters.
- Provide the best possible services to support strategic industry clusters by:
  - Identifying and removing barriers to serving industry clusters.
  - Identifying and implementing best practices in industry cluster development
  - Identifying and implementing best practices in unified business services at WorkSource Centers.
  - Providing incentives to regions and local areas to convene and support industry clusters through programs and resources.
- Establish a state initiative modeled after the WIRED grant program.
- Convene an annual conference for workforce and economic development.

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

### **Objective 3**

Current and dislocated workers, and job seekers receive education and training that builds competitive skills and businesses.

No later than 2018:

- A majority of mid- and lower-wage employees receive training from either their employers or the workforce development system.
- Dislocated worker programs are easy to navigate and provide good wage replacement.

### **Steps To Get Us There**

- Increase the level of public and private support for customized training for current workers, recruit more workers and employers to participate, and improve program design to best suit their needs. (Also see strategies in the Adult section of this plan.)
- Increase the number of working adults gaining further education and training at the workplace through distance learning and other methods including the integration of Adult Basic English / English language and occupational skills. (Also see strategies in the Adult section of this plan.)
- Expand the availability of Lifelong Learning Accounts to fund worker training.
- Align eligibility criteria for dislocated worker programs. (Also see strategies in the Adult section of this plan.)
- Establish a toolbox of work-ready assessments and promote their use in a variety of settings.
- Meet the skill and training needs of businesses by developing workplace training options.