

Developing High Skills, High Wages  
Industry Work Group  
**Meeting Notes for March 24, 2008**

Attendees: Mike Brennan, Madeleine Thompson, Barbara Mix, Yvonne Chase, Carl Wolfhagen, Bryan Wilson (Workforce Board staff); Mike Hudson and Janet Lewis, Workforce Board members; Reed Hackett, DeVry University; David Gonzales, South Central WDC; Rich Berkowitz, Seattle-King County WDC; Carolyn Cummins, SBCTC; Lynnae Ruttledge, DSHS/DVR; Peter Cavanaugh, Seattle-King County WDC; Lorine Hill, Northwest Federation; John Lederer, HECB; Rosemary Brester, Hobart Machine; Linda Nguyen, Tacoma-Pierce County WDC; Sheri Nelson, Sierra Pacific; Lou McMurrin; WSA; Jennifer Thornton, ESD; Evelina Trainer, ESD; Chris Strow, PSRC

Mike Hudson of the Association of Washington Business and business representative on the Workforce Board and Janet Lewis (IBEW 46) and labor representative on the Workforce Board welcomed the group. They described the purpose: To develop the new state plan for Workforce Development, "High Skills, High Wages." Mike noted there will be a presentation on "Skills for the Next Washington" at the next meeting and a Legislative panel at the 2<sup>nd</sup> or third meeting.

Madeleine Thompson gave an overview of the goals for the work group and described the process for developing "High Skills, High Wages." (See PowerPoint presentation.) She invited work group members to contact her via e-mail or phone if they have any further ideas and suggestions. Everyone is encouraged to come to all the meetings if possible.

Carl Wolfhagen, Research Manager at the Workforce Board presented the state's demographic context which is a key consideration for developing the plan. (See PowerPoint presentation.)

A question was asked about the education level of immigrants. Carl clarified that the group is a mixture of highly educated and lower educated people. As a state we are better at retaining highly educated people.

Bryan Wilson, Deputy Director at the Workforce Board gave a presentation of the most recent statewide Employer Survey Results. (See Powerpoint presentation.)

A question was raised about whether the "classroom training" is on-line or on-campus. The survey did not make a distinction.

The remainder of the meeting consisted of a full group brainstorm session on key issues, and small groups working on these issues. (See notes below.)

For the next meeting, review Skills for the Next Washington. Group of Legislators at the next meeting. Suggestions for other people who should be invited, or do a short presentation, let Madeleine know. Brainstorm, comment, send to any of the group. Ongoing conversation, keep the energy going forward.

## Group Brainstorm Notes:

- We need to do a better job of responding to global competition.
- We need to send the message that a strong workforce:
  - Is a leading contributor to economic vitality
  - Increases our ability to innovate
  - Makes a strong community
  - Attracts businesses to Washington.
  - Maintains a high wage economy.
- What is a strong workforce?
  - Is Capable of change / adaptable
  - Adaptable skills for different industries
  - Adaptable to gain more skills and move up the career ladder
  - Highly skilled
  - Skills match employer needs

What can we do? What can we do better to meet the needs of employers for skilled workers?

- Employers needs change over years
- Schools need to communicate with employers, but not overburden them
- Better identification of the core competencies, working together instead of each part of the system doing the same work. Better collaboration between public and private schools
- We need to educate the public about the big picture, what is the connection between a strong workforce and economic development?
- We are getting smarter about how to engage business but we need to get even smarter. CTCs have advisory committees; Federation is on committees; need to best utilize employer's. Listen to them! Keep employers informed. If employer committees are only seen as rubber stamps, there is a problem.
- Skill Panels have helped. Another idea like skill panels that can be tangible?
- Consider a super advisory group as opposed to separate advisory groups for each educational program - could meet a few times a year.
- WDC boards could carry out this role?
- Workforce of 16 to 19-year-olds – how do we best utilize them to give them hands-on experience and for them to meet employer needs considering labor laws?
- Youth can't get into the schools, either. Gets back to funding issues.
- Security clearance issues – reduces employers' available pool of workers. Can't find employees who can get security clearance. If immigrants, the process takes even longer. The process is burdensome.
- Ongoing difficult time engaging with the K-12 folks.
- Employers and schools both need to step up and have mentor programs. No funding for these programs.
- Huge gap in education. Need to be able to get to students in middle school. Can't wait until someone graduates from high school and never been in the trades.

- Navigation 101 is building steam. Good practice but if not mandatory will not be in every school. It needs to be strengthened and ensure all elements are implemented properly.
- Not the mentors in the school district. Need mentors of people with disabilities, of color.
- Vocational rehabilitation – some students did not have hands-on. Prepare them to be workers of the future, need them to have hands-on training.
- Need for incumbent worker training

### **Small Group Notes**

- *Work Readiness Credential*: What is the status? *WRC* stay or not? Not sure if want to stick with this.
- Certificate not as important as what is behind it—exposure to expectation of work; different cultures (employment and workers); skills that workers need that are non-occupational; way to connect mentors with this process.
- Mid-level training is a good concept
- Continue emphasis on apprenticeship and opportunity grants
- How do people know about these programs?
- Make clear that we are talking about high demand at all levels
- Drive education in the appropriate direction.
- Make sure industry needs are an organization driver.
- More strategies that clearly delineate what the overall goal is.
- Anyone who graduates with a certificate or degree should have the soft skills that employers are looking for.
- Work at each level, K-12, postsecondary to ensure that the employer skills are in there.
- How can streamline various ways to engage employers at regional level – program advisory committee, skill panels. Get people together by cluster.
- Dislocated workers – we need to find a way to align eligibility criteria and report program results for all programs clearly, because they don't all measure the same thing
- We need to track veterans.
- Clarification – define (need more money, in hands of other people). Define how the WTB can actually promote adequate funding.
- A need for new apprenticeship programs
- A need for in-house training.

- More pressing needs than the green jobs. Putting cart before horse if creating green jobs before making sure there are people who can do the jobs that are currently in need of workers. Skill set for green jobs is still the same as need for what already exists with a little tweaking.
- We need to pull the employer community together to support industry cluster approaches - Centers of Excellence and skill panels need a critical mass of employers. Look at a cluster approach to the issues.
- We have done a good job of getting discussion out about family-wage jobs but need to work on the people who are in minimal pay jobs into middle wage jobs.