ADULT

High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018

State Strategic Plan for Workforce Development

Education key to economic self-sufficiency

One year of education beyond high school can be the difference between earning a living wage and living on the edge.

Research shows that those who complete at least one year of education beyond high school and earn a certificate or credential have a much better chance of supporting themselves and their families. Those who don't find themselves trapped in entry-level, low-skill jobs.

Currently, 1.6 million Washington adults have an education that goes barely beyond high school, if that.

Many low-educated workers are "working poor," struggling to pay basic living costs—from food to housing to health care. Most low-wage jobs lack benefits and more than one in 10 Washingtonians lack health insurance—and are just a health care crisis away from the financial brink. Meanwhile, homelessness, hunger and childhood poverty threaten these workers and their families.

Taking the first step to a life of learning

By helping more Washington residents obtain a 13th year credential we can lift more people out of poverty, and improve business productivity at the same time.

Those with a vocational certificate or two-year vocational degree are especially in demand. But for low-wage working adults, reaching educational goals poses a challenge. We can help adult workers by focusing on key issues, including:

- **Too little job preparation**—Disadvantaged workers often do not have the basic skills, not to mention the job skills, to boost employability and earnings.
- **Being trapped in dead end jobs**—Working adults don't have the time or money to go back to school, but must continue to stick with jobs that pay poorly and offer few opportunities to get ahead.
- **Financial hurdles**—Many workers can't afford tuition, textbooks and other expenses, even if they're able to carve time away from work and family.
- **Education that takes too long to complete**—Let's face it, getting an education while working to support a household is tough. Everything from the length of the program to the culture of the campus can be barriers to an adult attempting to balance school and work.

Helping more adults reach next educational step

High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development outlines key strategies to put adults on the path to success.

Our plan details how more Washington adults can get education and training beyond high school that leads to high skill, high-wage jobs. Key opportunities at the state level include:

- **Ensure job-ready workers** by expanding programs like I-BEST that blend basic education, including language lessons, with job skills training.
- **Engage employers in making workplace learning** and on-the-job training available so workers can earn while they learn.
- **Expand financial aid** and grants so more workers can afford further education.
- **Grant more credits for prior learning,** including direct transfer agreements from two-year colleges and other measures that make it easier for adults to pursue education over a lifetime .

High Skills, High Wages Adult Strategies

From preparing workers with education and training for family-wage jobs to supplying industry with a skilled workforce, *High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development* offers a comprehensive look at our state's workforce challenges and opportunities.

We plan along a 10-year horizon to give us time to realize our vision of a stronger economy. Because we take a broad view of the many programs and initiatives aimed at boosting the job skills, paychecks and opportunities for Washington's workforce, we're able to recommend best practices that lead to real gains for both workers and the businesses that employ them. We focus on three main groups: youth, adults and industry. Here we offer a glimpse at our adult strategy.

Universal access to I-BEST

Many disadvantaged workers lack basic skills—from listening and leadership to reading, writing and math. But it's only when workers are taught specific job skills along with basic skills that they are able to land a decent job, keep it, and advance.

I-BEST offers this successful blend of basic skills and job preparation and is offered at Washington's community and technical colleges around the state with limited course offerings. These program offerings should be expanded.

Getting to that first rung

People who complete at least one year of college and obtain a certificate or credential have a much better chance of supporting themselves and their families.

Yet, the greatest barrier to postsecondary education, according to Workforce Board research, is the cost of tuition, books, and other expenses such as childcare and transportation. By 2018, Washington should be providing free tuition for workforce education students pursuing their 13th year of education. In the short term, the state should increase financial aid to low-income students, doing whatever reasonable to get them onto that first rung of the education/career ladder.

Creating a culture that supports life long learning

We need to make it easier to participate in college-level education and training, creating multiple ways to go in and out of training over the course of a lifetime of learning.

One concept that embodies that principle is Lifelong Learning Accounts, where employers and employees jointly fund continued education and training. Employees literally are able to learn while they earn.

In addition, our college and universities must pursue a system of seamless transfer, reducing barriers to adults who re-enter the education process wherever they may be in the lives.

Engaging employers through workplace learning

By continually upgrading and expanding skills, Washington's workers can advance along a chosen career path, stay on top of technology and other changes, and boost their value in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

But to do that, our adult workers must be able to stay employed and progress on the job. One way to help workers achieve their educational goals is to pursue strategies that bring education into the workplace, through online and distance learning tools.

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