



Workforce Training and  
Education Coordinating Board

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **“Learning laboratories” to help child care workers gain college credits** *Workers in Whatcom, Skagit, Island and San Juan counties to advance their careers*

BELLINGHAM—Child care workers will gain new skills, advance up the career ladder and earn college credits right where they work as part of an innovative Workplace-based Learning initiative.

The Northwest Corner Professional Development Project in Early Learning is one of three new programs to help workers gain college credit at their workplace to advance their career prospects while meeting specific employer needs.

The grant was awarded in January to Whatcom Community College, and in partnership with Skagit Valley College, the funds will be used to establish “learning laboratories” throughout Whatcom, Skagit, Island and San Juan counties at public, private and tribal child care centers. As many as 40 teacher assistants and aides will train to become lead teachers, boosting their skill set and pay. Along the way, they’ll also be able to earn up to nine college credits, putting them on the path to further education and advancement.

Program participants will be able to access computers to complete college coursework, communicate online with college instructors and get one-on-one instruction from supervising child care teachers trained as educational facilitators. They’ll be able to do all of this from their workplace with the encouragement and support of their employer.

The nearly \$200,000 Workplace-based Learning grant was awarded in January by the state’s Workforce Board, which selected three programs to pilot a variety of learning laboratories statewide. Funds come from the U.S. Department of Labor and were championed by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray.

“This pilot will bring educational opportunities directly to workers where they work--during work time--with the help of their employers,” said Workforce Board Executive Director Eleni Papadakis. “Workplace-based learning gives workers a chance to advance their education and careers as they work, and enables employers to help their bottom line.”

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Two other Workplace-based Learning grants from the state's Workforce Board are funding programs that help Vancouver, Wash., hospital workers advance into nursing assistant positions and machinist apprentices across the state to earn a college degree. The lessons learned through the initiative should lead to the expansion of workplace-based learning opportunities to other low-wage, lower-skilled workers statewide as additional colleges adopt the model.

"Ultimately, we would like to see many more workplace-based learning opportunities in Washington," Papadakis said.

Learn more about the Workforce Board's Workplace-based Learning Initiative at <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/LearningLaboratoryPartnerships.asp>

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*The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board is a partnership of labor, business and government, dedicated to helping Washington residents obtain and succeed in family-wage jobs, while meeting employers' needs for skilled workers.*