



Workforce Training and
Education Coordinating Board

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Workplace-based learning to help Washington workers move ahead *Initiative to deliver education where people work is more critical than ever*

OLYMPIA, Wash. - As Washington's workers face a down economy and dwindling job prospects, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) is moving forward with an innovative initiative that would bring education to the workplace, helping workers gain needed new skills and the state's business community a much needed edge.

On Tuesday, legislators, educators and business and labor representatives kicked off a new initiative dedicated to expanding access to education and training to busy, working adults. Dubbed "Workplace-based Digital Learning," the initiative has its roots in legislation passed this spring. The bill, SB 6295, sponsored by Sen. Derek Kilmer, D-Gig Harbor, would have authorized up to eight pilot projects between private sector employers and private career schools, community colleges and universities. Because of a tight budget, the bill was unfunded. Rep. Phyllis Kenney, D-Seattle, attended the organizational meeting.

The Workforce Board conducted initial research into how to best implement education in the workplace and will issue a report to the legislature later this month. The group on Tuesday agreed to form an executive advisory committee to oversee further research and to look for ways to move forward. Meanwhile, the state's budget, with a projected two-year shortfall of \$5 billion, has grown only grimmer.

"We can't afford to let a tight budget prevent us from continuing to innovate," said Workforce Board Executive Director Eleni Papadakis. "The Workforce Board has identified this issue as a priority, public and private sector partners are signing on. We are moving forward and doing what we can to find the resources to make it happen."

Workplace-based learning has become an increasingly popular concept in recent years as new technology allows employees to receive education and training via streaming video, closed circuit TV and online courses. Some employers blend this new technology with on-site instruction. Others provide flexible schedules that allow their workers to gain their education in a

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campus classroom. This initiative will focus on the use of electronic media tools or “E-Learning” as a way to deliver education to working adults.

For too many low-skilled, low-income workers, workplace education and training opportunities do not exist. That prevents many workers from moving up the career ladder to earn a living wage. Instead, these workers juggle family obligations, long work hours and a limited budget, and simply don't have the time or money to gain the education they need to advance to better job opportunities.

This not only hurts workers but harms the state's economy as employers scramble to find skilled workers to fill open positions.

"Employers are asking for ways to solve chronic worker shortages, even when the economy dips," said Mike Hudson of the Association of Washington Business. "But also important is to see how Washington businesses can increase their competitiveness with a workforce and work environment that is capable of adapting to a changing economy."

Rapidly changing technology and market conditions means employers can't wait for employees to head back to school over the span of months, or even years, Hudson added. Instead, employers need to respond in real-time.

At the Ferndale-based aluminum smelter, Alcoa Intalco Works, employees are enrolled in a new apprentice training program for industrial millwrights and electricians in partnership with Bellingham Technical College. The employees are able to earn college credits for these courses to earn an Associate in Applied Science degree in electro-mechanical technology from the college. Workforce Board staff cited this project as an example of digital workplace-based learning.

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. As a state agency, the Workforce Board oversees a workforce development system that includes 18 education and training programs that receive state and federal funds.

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