

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the College & Work Ready Agenda?

The College & Work Ready Agenda is an effort by Washington's private sector to encourage state and local officials to accomplish an agenda focused on four educational priorities. This agenda will help ensure Washington's children are able to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college and the workplace.

What specific educational priorities are included in the College & Work Ready Agenda?

The Agenda focuses on the following four educational priorities.

1. Strengthen the quality of early learning programs
2. Improve math and science education and alignment
3. Increase production of bachelor's degrees in high-demand fields
4. Enhance state support for public university research

Who supports the College & Work Ready Agenda?

The College & Work Ready Agenda is supported by a wide range of business, community and labor organizations from across the state, including American Electronics Association, Association of Washington Business, Columbia River Economic Development Council, Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Greater Wenatchee Area Technology Alliance, Partnership for Learning, Prosperity Partnership, Puget Sound Regional Council, Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce, Technology Institute, The Technology Alliance, Tri-City Development Council, Tri-City Regional Chamber of Commerce, Washington Biotechnology & Biomedical Association, Washington Software Alliance, Washington Roundtable and the Washington State Labor Council.

Not every high school graduate is going to go to college. Are you being unrealistic by pushing every student toward college?

Research conducted by Achieve Inc. and ACT has found that the skills required to succeed in college closely parallel those required to be successful in today's workplace. The global economy is changing the nature of work and the types of jobs young people will hold as adults. In 1950, 60 percent of jobs were classified as "unskilled" because young people with a high school diploma or less could do them. Today less than 15 percent of all jobs are considered "unskilled." Whatever their plans after high school, all students need strong foundational skills in reading, writing, mathematics, science and critical thinking.

How much will the College & Work Ready Agenda priorities cost? Where is the money going to come from?

While some of the priorities included in the agenda will require additional resources, others can be accomplished by focusing existing resources. Some, such as the proposal to establish a limited number of math and science curricula, may actually improve the cost-effectiveness of educational services. We believe that the elements of the College & Work Ready Agenda should be given a high priority as the Legislature evaluates options for using the projected state budget surplus.

How does the Washington Learns report relate to the College & Work Ready Agenda?

We are encouraged that Washington Learns represents a comprehensive, systemic approach to improving the entire educational system in our state, including focusing on the critical transitions between early learning, K-12, community and technical colleges and our baccalaureate institutions. Many of the elements of the Washington Learns proposal correspond with elements of the College & Work Ready Agenda, and we will continue to work with the state's elected leadership on these and other important issues.

What does early learning have to do with getting students ready for college or the workplace?

Quality early learning resources provide a critical foundation for educational success. Research has consistently shown that brain development takes place significantly faster at early ages than it does as children grow older. Further, students who are not school-ready when they enter kindergarten are more likely to struggle and lag behind their peers throughout their school careers.

How can you advocate for increased graduation requirements in math when so many students are having problems meeting the existing standards?

The global economy is not going to wait just because schools in Washington are struggling to prepare students. State standards should reflect what students really will need to be successful in college or the workplace. Many local employers report difficulty finding qualified candidates, and nearly half of our high school graduates require remedial math instruction in college. Given this, it is clear that the Legislature's decision to require three years of math is a step toward establishing a standard that reflects the skills students will need to be successful. Next we must focus our efforts to ensure that our schools can help students reach that standard.

When so much emphasis is being placed on individualized learning opportunities, why do you support limiting the number of approved math curricula available to schools?

Requiring local school districts to choose from a small number of proven math and science curricula has several advantages. It allows for better alignment between state standards, curricula and assessments. It also makes for more efficient and effective professional development for teachers. Finally, limiting the number of approved math or science curricula does not eliminate opportunities to tailor instruction to the needs of individual students.

Do you support pay-for-performance and other differential compensation schemes for teachers?

We support additional compensation flexibility to help recruit quality teachers into hard-to-fill positions, including those in schools serving primarily low-income students. We also support the decision to provide additional bonuses to those teachers who improve their skills through rigorous professional development programs, such as certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. To ensure students have the skills they need in college and the workplace, Washington's schools will need to continue attracting highly qualified teachers and reduce out-of-field placements, especially in math and science. Replacing the traditional tenure-based system with a more market-based, pay-for-performance model may be necessary to accomplish these objectives.

What did you think of what the Legislature did on education issues during the 2007 session?

We think the 2007 session produced strong gains in early learning and high-demand degrees but mixed results in the K-12 arena. In early childhood learning, we support the voluntary rating system for childcare and early learning facilities and the phase-in of all-day kindergarten in low-income schools. In higher education, we support the moves toward producing more degrees in high-demand fields and the incremental investment in research in areas such as global health, agriculture and bioproducts. In the critical area of improving K-12 math and science education, some important gains were made in strengthening state standards; focusing instruction by limiting curricula in these fields; and creating a common test for assessing college readiness. However, these gains are overshadowed by our concern with the decision to delay the math and science graduation requirement until 2013, a full two decades after the Legislature initially launched Washington's standards-based school reform system.

What specifically concerns you regarding the state's decision to delay implementation of the math and science WASL graduation requirements until the Class of 2013?

We were disappointed by the length of the delay in the state math and science graduation standards, as these skills are increasingly important to preparing kids for family-wage jobs. We are also concerned with the establishment of multiple additional alternatives that are not specifically aligned to state standards. With these changes, the state effectively has abandoned its effort to hold all students to common standards, undermined the integrity of the accountability system, and sent the message that our schools are incapable of responding to student needs on a timetable that reflects the pace of change in the global economy.

What was your reaction when some legislators proposed that the WASL reading and writing graduations requirements should also be delayed?

We need some consistent measure of student performance to ensure equity across the educational system by providing at least a baseline set of skills to all students. Reading and writing scores have shown steady progress, and now more than 80 percent of the class of 2008 have met or exceeded these standards. We were pleased that the Governor and the majority of the Legislature agreed that delaying the requirements when we are this close to the goal would not be a wise move, as it would allow more students to graduate without the skills they will need after high school.

The budget surplus clearly indicates that the state economy is humming along. So what is so important about producing more bachelor's degrees?

According to the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington ranks among the top 10 states in scientists and computer specialists employed per capita, and lead the nation in engineers employed per capita. However, Washington ranks 36th out of the 50 states in per capita production of bachelor's degrees. This means local employers have to import talent from other states and nations, and our children may not be qualified for the best jobs available. As the global economy continues to be more technically driven, our children's futures and our state's continuing economic viability will be closely tied to the production of bachelor's degrees, especially in high-demand, high-impact fields.

Who identified the so-called high-demand fields for targeting additional bachelor's degrees?

The Washington State Department of Employment Security estimates that nearly half of all new job openings for positions requiring bachelor's degrees will be in the following limited number of fields: computer science, engineering, life sciences, medical research, nursing and secondary teaching.

What will it take to produce more bachelor's degrees in these fields?

We applaud the decision to codify the goal of producing an additional 10,000 bachelor's degrees in high demand fields by 2020 and to fund more slots within the existing physical capacity at our higher education institutions in the 2007-2009 biennium. The next steps will be to identify what capital investments could be needed to expand capacity, and to conduct a public awareness campaign to inform students, parents and educators of the economic opportunities available in these fields.

Why should we devote additional resources toward university research that doesn't directly produce more graduates with the bachelor's degrees we need?

The global economy is becoming both more competitive and more technologically dependent. Our state's economy reflects this trend, as we are among the leaders in per capita employment of scientists, engineers, and computer specialists. University research uncovers new opportunities and when those technologies are transferred to the private sector, they create returns for the state and long-term economic and employment opportunities for Washington citizens. Research is an investment in our continuing economic health.

How can I get involved with the College & Work Ready campaign?

To find out what you can do to support this effort, visit our website at www.collegeworkready.org