

WashingtonLearns

EARLY LEARNING • K-12 EDUCATION • HIGHER EDUCATION

2005 Interim Report

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Washington Learns

Steering Committee

To: House and Senate Leaders

We are very pleased to transmit the first Interim Report of **Washington Learns**, approved on November 14, 2005.

The Washington Learns enabling legislation includes an ambitious list of subjects to be addressed. While the list of assignments is long, taken as a whole, we believe we have one over-arching purpose:

We must raise educational attainment in Washington through a world-class, learner-focused education system in order to compete globally and thrive locally.

To achieve this ambitious goal, we are engaged in a comprehensive review of our entire education system, its structure and its funding, as required by our authorizing legislation (E2SSB 5441 and E2SHB 1152).

Washington Learns will issue the majority of its recommendations next year, in a final report to be issued on November 15, 2006. However, this first Interim Report offers recommendations for consideration in the 2006 session of the state Legislature. These are focused on four areas of immediate concern:

- Improving the quality and availability of early learning programs and resources for parents of infants and young children;
- Investing in intensive, focused academic support for high school students who need extra help to meet the state's academic requirements in reading, writing and math, and providing schools and classroom teachers with additional resources specifically for this purpose;
- Reducing the high school drop out rate and helping students plan and prepare for college, work or post-secondary job training; and
- Developing a statewide student information system.

Our recommendations on early learning mark a new and much deeper level of commitment to the importance of early learning and to the value of public/private partnerships to help improve the quality and availability of early learning education, support and programs. This is a truly transformational change.

The balance of our recommendations call for immediate actions to reduce the dropout rate, help all students meet our state's academic standards, and ensure that all students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to make the most of school and plan how they will prepare for a career. These are incremental changes.

Next year, when Washington Learns issues its final report and recommendations, we intend to focus more on the transformational and less on the incremental. We believe that this interim report, and the research we have commissioned, will lay the groundwork for a deeper, broader look at the entirety of our educational systems. We intend to make recommendations that go to the heart of what we must change to meet the challenges of the future.

We have also taken the liberty of adopting a "Statement on the WASL Graduation Requirement" in support of the current standard that students must demonstrate proficiency on the reading, writing and mathematics portions of the WASL as one graduation requirement beginning in 2008 (and science beginning in 2010).

Washington Learns

Steering Committee

It will be important to provide resources to help all students – especially many low-income students and students of color – master the necessary skills and knowledge by demonstrating proficiency on the 10th grade WASL or an alternative assessment of comparable rigor. Funding to extend the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) into high schools was provided in the 2005-07 biennial budget by the 2005 Legislature. These dollars were targeted to help students gain the skills necessary to pass the WASL. A focused, intensive program of academic support for students who need extra help to pass the WASL should augment these existing dollars.

We hope you will act on these recommendations in the 2006 legislative session, and we look forward to working with you over the next year to transform our education system.

Sincerely,

The Washington Learns Steering Committee

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
SYSTEM OVERVIEW	7
Early Learning Today	9
Washington’s K-12 Public Schools	11
Washington’s Higher Education & Workforce Training System	13
REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES	15
Early Learning	15
K-12 Public Education.....	15
Higher Education & Workforce Training.....	17
PURPOSE & WORK PLAN	19
2005 INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS	23
Early Learning	24
Recommendation 1	24
Recommendation 2	25
Recommendation 3	25
Helping Students Achieve Standards.....	26
Recommendation 4	26
Student Planning for Life After High School.....	27
Recommendation 5	27
Recommendation 6	27
Recommendation 7	27
Student Pathways During 11 th and 12 th Grades	
Recommendation 8	28
Post-secondary Readiness in Mathematics	
Recommendation 9	29
Student Data System	30
Recommendation 10	30
LIST OF APPENDICES	31

Introduction

Born to learn

Human beings are born to learn. From the moment of our first breath, we observe, interact, experiment, and analyze. How much we learn depends on whether our earliest hunger for learning is stimulated, and on the opportunities and rewards for learning and positive relationships available to us throughout our lives.



The new century of learning

As the 21st century begins, our capacity to learn has emerged as the single most important determinant of what kind of future we will have, both as individuals and as a society. Those who learn well will do well; those societies where learning is stimulated, rewarded and revered will prosper. Where learning is scarce, everything will be scarce. Without an educated populace, prosperity, democracy and social harmony will elude us.

Learning has always been a prerequisite of progress. But today, the economic role of knowledge has changed. Today, knowledge is not something we apply to the use of capital; it *is* capital. We live in a knowledge economy; a system in which *brain power* – not minerals or land or fish or trees or even factories – is the single most important creator of wealth. Brainpower created and sustains the success of Microsoft, our biotech industry, and other emerging industries.

A matter of survival

In every economic sector, from agriculture to health care to auto repair to construction, new technologies and global competition have made constant learning, innovation and improvement a *matter of survival*. Today, the pace of change means that what a newly minted doctor learned in medical school is just the beginning of his or her education. The same is true for mill workers, carpenters and auto mechanics, who need higher levels of knowledge and skill to enter their trades, and lifelong opportunities to keep learning to adapt to change.

In Henry Ford's first factories, a highly educated assembly line worker was no more productive than a poorly educated one. Today, highly educated workers can virtually spin straw into gold. Smart, educated workers make the best use of ever-changing technology and information; they innovate, they improve productivity – in short, they are vital to their employers' ability to compete and survive. Thus, improvements in

education pay dividends in economic well-being unimaginable 100 years ago.

The emergence of the knowledge economy is something new in human history. It raises the economic value of education; indeed, it makes education essential in a wholly new way. Today, employers need more people with post-secondary technical training, more employees with baccalaureate degrees, and more highly trained researchers than ever before.

Learning and the future of democracy

But economic change is not the only mandate for educational improvement. The knowledge-based economy has produced a corollary: the knowledge-based democracy and society. Our families, our communities, and our democratic institutions all need more highly educated parents, leaders, and citizens than ever before. We are already engaged in public debates that require scientific knowledge to make moral choices about how we should – or should not – use new medical advances. Our changing global climate requires critical evaluation of scientific research to guide public policy. And new technologies will need to be developed to provide non-polluting sources of energy to power our future. These are new challenges.

New twists on old challenges

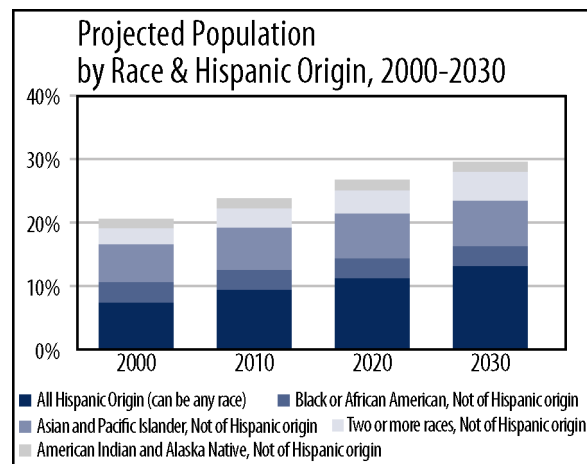
But global economic competition and technological advances also present a new twist on an old challenge: the challenge of how we ensure that our education system evolves so that it is synchronized with the needs of our society and economy.

The more important education becomes, the more catastrophic its absence becomes. In 2004, 45 percent of Washington businesses reported that they had difficulty finding qualified job applicants. High-tech industries must often import people to fill jobs that require advanced degrees or training. And in every industry, the

specter of international competition spurs worry about our ability to keep up with the growing global population of highly educated competitors. But it isn't just our international competitors who are creating the need to raise the bar of educational attainment. Our homegrown, Washington economy is changing before our eyes.

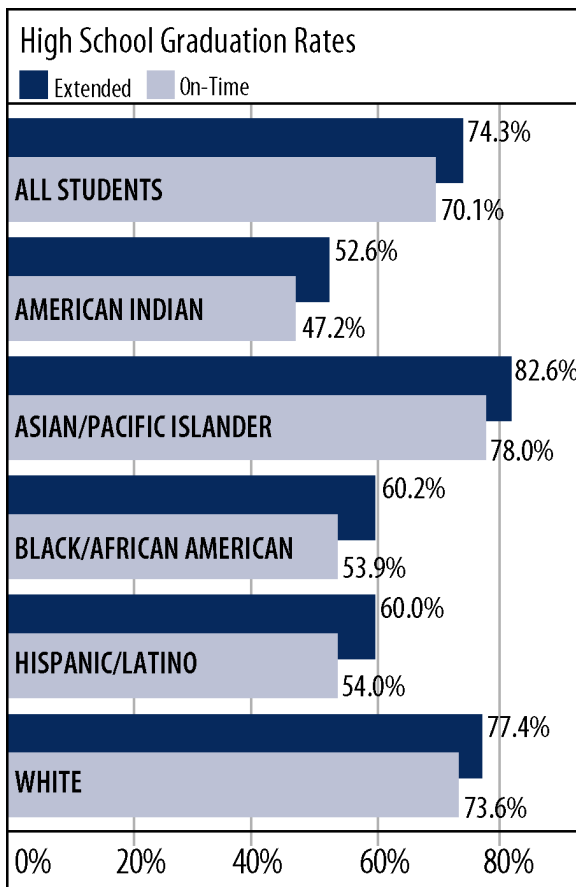
It is no longer enough to front-load our lives with education in our youth and then coast through a career on that base of knowledge. Today, life-long learning is not just a high-minded slogan; it is an economic imperative for blue- and white-collar employees alike. Economic security – for individuals, industries and our state – can only come from constant learning, adaptation and innovation.

At the same time, the face of Washington is changing. We are more diverse, and there are more and more of us. Nearly half a million adults in Washington do not have a high school education; about 250,000 speak limited English. And we continue to produce more under-educated adults each year. Only about 70 percent of today's high school students will graduate with their peers. Of those who drop out, only about 30 percent will reappear within a few years at our community and technical colleges. These colleges estimate that they serve only about 5 percent of the under-educated adults who need adult basic education, English classes and job training.



SOURCE: OFFICE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

As our population becomes more diverse, our schools are the first to feel the change. In Franklin County, 80 percent of the under-five age group is Latino. But for a host of reasons, our schools are not succeeding in educating many low-income students and students of color. Among low-income students of all races, and among African American, Latino and Native American students, the dropout rate is both shocking and tragic. And though statistics show exemplary academic performance by Asian American students overall, there are significant Asian and Pacific Islander subgroups who are also not succeeding in school.



SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

These significant differences in academic achievement threaten the very premise of American democracy and prosperity. Research shows a high correlation between poverty and low academic achievement. Current educational data also shows a significantly higher percentage of low-income students and students of color are

dropping out of school, or are not on track to graduate with their peers. We must act to close this achievement gap. We know, without the slightest doubt, that these students are as bright and capable of learning as any. We also know that these students need 21st century skills and knowledge as much as any.

To close this gap – and to serve all students better – we need an education system that is focused on the learning needs of each individual; a system that takes into account the abilities, cultural heritage, interests and aspirations of each student; and provides learning opportunities that are engaging, relevant and challenging.

Washington at the crossroads

Education, however, is expensive. Our state and local budgets are already stretched tight, and we know that we are not providing enough space in our job training programs, colleges and universities to meet the needs of our people or our employers. Our public schools struggle to find the time and resources they need to help all students master the academic standards required to earn a high school diploma. And in spite of overwhelming evidence that investments in early learning – from birth to age five – pay enormous dividends and are urgently needed, we have only just begun to think about our youngest learners. Today, the focus of federally subsidized childcare programs is to make it possible for parents to work – not to stimulate learning and brain development of small children.

We are truly at a crossroads. Looking backward, we can see that we built an education system that was exemplary in meeting the needs of an industrial economy. Looking forward, we can see that we need something much different – an education system designed for a global, knowledge-driven and culturally diverse age.

We know that the new education system must start at the beginning, by addressing the learning needs of infants and young children and their

parents in their homes, in child care, and in preschool. We must create a K-12 public education system in which students from every income level and culture succeed. And we must erase the boundaries between public school and the post-secondary job training and college system, so that every student can find his or her way to success.

This enormous challenge is not an option – it is an imperative. To do anything less is to choose poverty over prosperity and deepening division over expanding opportunity. The very nature of our society and our economy is at stake.

With these high stakes in mind, the Washington Learns steering committee poses eight core questions to guide us today and in the future as we create and sustain a world-class, learner-focused education system. Getting to “yes” on these questions is the goal. Anything less than “yes” will demand a rigorous, sustained focus to solve the economic, social, demographic and fiscal challenges we face.

Rigorous standards make sense

As we seek answers to these questions, one thing is already clear: our state did the right thing in 1993, when we adopted a sweeping education reform law that set clear academic standards in our public schools. Starting with the graduating class of 2008, high school students will be required to demonstrate that they have met our standards for reading, writing, and math. These are modest standards. They do not constitute college readiness; rather they measure a basic, 10th grade level of skill and knowledge.

Washington’s four basic education goals, as defined by RCW 28A.150.210, and the academic standards developed to achieve those goals lay a strong foundation for every student’s future success. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) provides a means to assess student achievement and progress towards proficiency.

EIGHT QUESTIONS ONE SYSTEM - BETTER LIVES

- 1 Are all children entering kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life?
- 2 Are all students achieving proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics (and, in a few years, science), as measured by state and international standards?
- 3 Are all students graduating from high school ready for college, work and continued learning?
- 4 Are enough Washingtonians receiving post-secondary degrees and certificates?
- 5 Are post-secondary opportunities accessible and affordable?
- 6 Are under-educated adults, immigrants and displaced workers participating in literacy, job skills training and further education?
- 7 Is the state education system coordinated, efficient and accountable?
- 8 Are we investing enough to achieve our educational goals?

Data show steady progress in improving student academic achievement. Growing numbers of struggling students are meeting the proficiency standard, and more and more students are exceeding the state’s required performance levels. We support the heroic work our public schools and teachers are doing to produce these gains.

We are aware of the deep concerns expressed by some teachers, parents and students about the use of the WASL as a “high stakes test”. The answer, in our view, is not to abandon the current approach, but to focus on helping all students to achieve proficiency on the academic standards represented by the WASL or on an alternative assessment of equal rigor. Thus, we have agreed on the following statement:

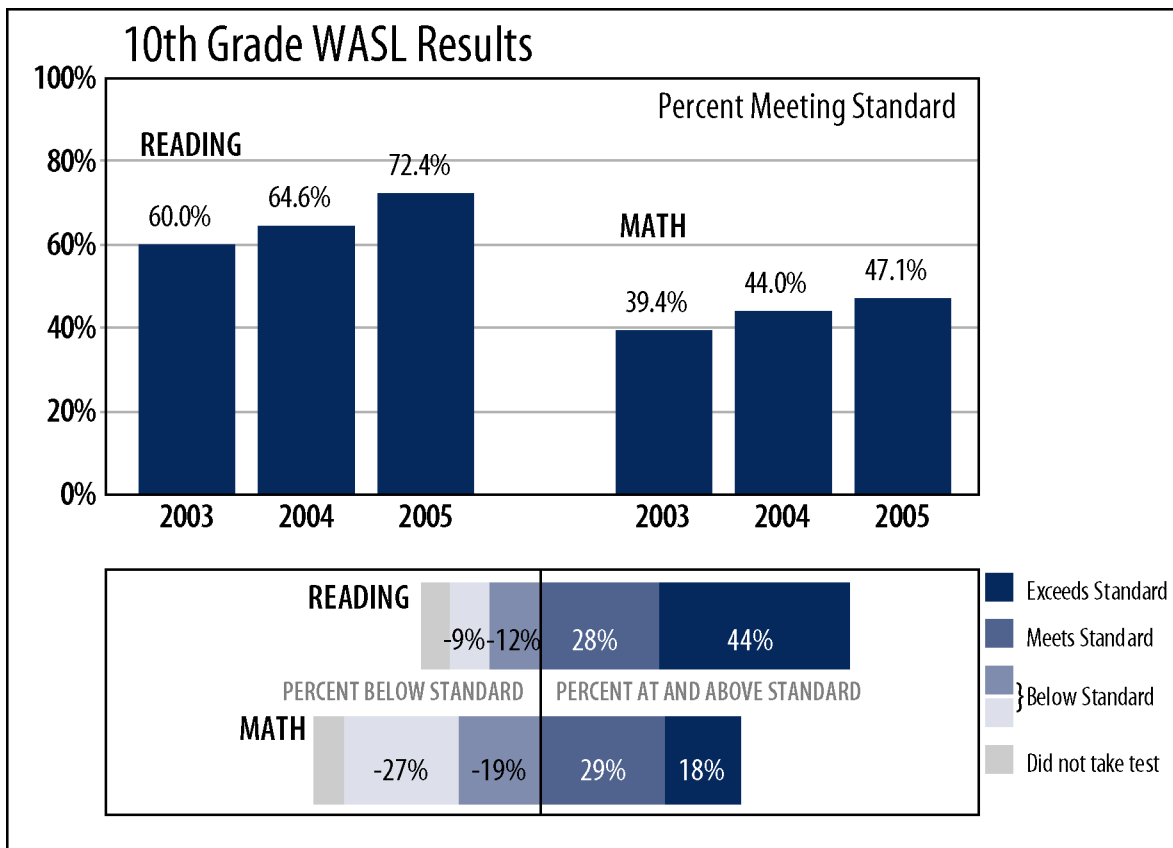
STATEMENT ON THE WASL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

Washington Learns supports our standards-based policy framework for school improvement because we believe no student should be sent out into the world unprepared for the demands of the 21st century economy and society. Therefore, we believe that requiring students to pass the 10th grade WASL in reading, writing, mathematics, and science - or alternative assessments of comparable rigor - is the right thing to do. It should remain as one graduation requirement beginning in 2008 (science beginning in 2010).

We applaud our schools and teachers for helping students make extraordinary gains over the past 10 years. Washington students now test in the top tier of states on several national assessments, and student achievement on the WASL has nearly doubled.

However, we believe that over time, even this standard will need to be raised. The current standard articulates expectations for 10th grade achievement. It is significantly below international standards. Ultimately, the standards should be more closely aligned with readiness for post-secondary education and the 21st century world of work.

We also recognize that based on current results, extraordinary measures will be required to help all students - especially some low income students and students of color - master the skills and knowledge set out in our state's essential academic learning requirements. Intensive, focused, accelerated learning programs must be provided to these students. Our objective is to improve the rigor and fairness of the learning environment without penalizing individual students who are a product of a system in need of further improvement.



SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

System Overview

It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.

ARTICLE 9, WASHINGTON STATE CONSTITUTION

Washington's education legacy

Our state constitution's clarion call for educational opportunity and equity is the strongest in the nation. Successive waves of progressive legislation have supported this constitutional commitment. The Barefoot Schoolboy Act of 1895 established the state's obligation to fund public schools. In 1977, the Basic Education Act clarified and expanded the state's obligation, and limited the role of local school funding. In 1993, a sweeping new education reform law established rigorous academic standards for public schools, and set in motion a process for measuring progress towards achieving them.

Our higher education system is equally strong. Starting with the opening of the Territorial University (University of Washington) in downtown Seattle in 1861, we have developed a system that now includes two distinguished research universities, a strong and geographically dispersed community and technical college system, a nationally acclaimed public liberal arts college, and three regional institutions founded as normal schools in the late 19th century that are now comprehensive universities offering baccalaureate and graduate education. Washington is also home to more than 300 independent colleges and career



schools, including 10 independent liberal arts colleges and universities.

Washington's youngest learners

Washington state government has worked for well over a century to build a system of public schools and colleges. But unlike most European countries, who have long understood society's interest in getting infants and small children off to a good start, early learning is a much more recent subject of state attention. The first federal Head Start programs were created as part of the 1960s war on poverty. The state's corollary to Head Start – the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program – was created in 1985 to serve low-income children not served by Head Start. Initially, the primary policy focus for early

learning was to help poor children overcome the educational disadvantages of deprivation.

As more and more women entered the workforce in the last half of the 20th century, there was enormous growth in out-of-home care for children at all income levels. In 1996, the passage of federal welfare reform legislation acknowledged that paid work outside the home was the new norm for mothers and fathers alike. It shifted resources from subsidizing stay-at-home moms to paying for childcare so that mothers could go to work. Today, only about 20 percent of subsidized child care is used by parents who are working their way off welfare. The rest are working parents in low-wage jobs who need this support to stay in the workforce.

The problem of separateness

Washington currently has three distinct education systems – or, to be more accurate, two and a half. Our early learning programs, which have been scattered in various agencies, are just now being brought together under the umbrella of the Early Learning Council. This is the beginning of our state’s efforts to create something that might be accurately called an early learning system.

One striking feature of our two-and-a-half systems is their separateness. Each system is its own world, with its own legal framework, its own funding system, and its own culture and sense of purpose. In fact, higher education is composed of several sub-systems including workforce training programs, adult basic education, two-year degree programs, four-year and graduate institutions, and research institutions – each with its own culture, purpose and funding streams.

Another striking feature is the difference in the way each system approaches learning itself. In early education, the emphasis is on the whole child – on the balance of social, emotional, cultural, physical and cognitive development necessary for a healthy life. Early learning also focuses on families, cultures and communities, and recognizes

that learning can – and ought to – be happening whenever a child is awake.

In public schools, the focus is primarily on the learning that happens in classrooms. It is also compulsory. Every student that walks through the schoolhouse door must be educated. And increasingly, the focus of public education is also on preparation for success in post-secondary education and the world of work.

Our post-secondary education system has a variety of diverse approaches to learning. Adult basic education and English language instruction are widely regarded as anti-poverty strategies. Workforce training and apprenticeship programs are deemed critical to the supply of skilled workers. The baccalaureate degree continues to be our culture’s gold standard of education and is considered the ticket to a secure, middle-class, professional life. Graduate study and research are viewed as the high-octane fuel in the state economy’s tank. In each of these sectors, the desired outcome defines the nature of the educational program.

Our challenge is to identify the wisdom – and perhaps the errors – in these distinct approaches to learning, and to weave from these strands a stronger, more responsive, more seamless system that supports lifelong learning and the achievement of human potential. Our challenge is also to honor the legacy of those who have created these remarkable systems, to carefully preserve their best features. Ultimately, we must find ways to elevate the enterprise of learning to a new level. That is the challenge presented by this moment in our state’s history.

Early Learning Today

More than 400,000 children (approximately 7 percent of the total state population) in Washington are ages birth through four years old. Currently, the state provides early learning programs only to children in low-income families, children who have been abused, and children with disabilities.

More than 16 percent of Washington children live in homes with a family income under 100 percent of the federal poverty level.

Washington currently has four basic roles in the arena of early learning:

- subsidizing child care for low-income families;
- providing preschool programs such as Head Start, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, and programs for children with disabilities or at risk of disability;
- licensing and regulating child care centers and homes; and
- working to improve access and quality.

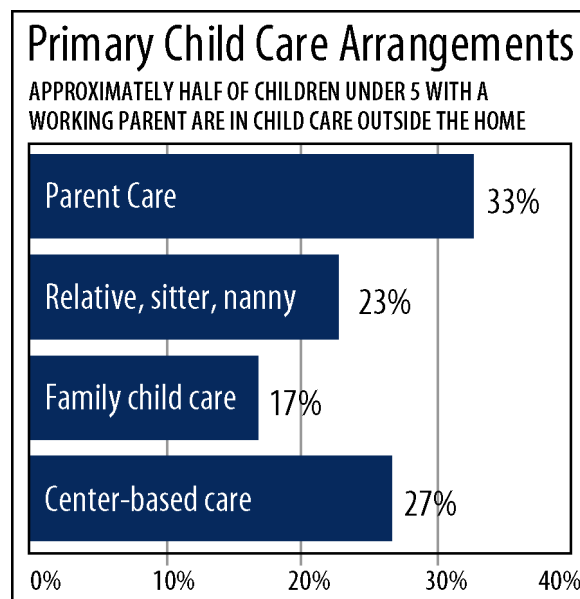
In fiscal year 2001, statewide funding for child care and early learning was an estimated \$490 million; 80 percent from the federal government, and 20 percent from the state.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)

Working Connections subsidizes child care for low-wage working parents, and for those who are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as part of Washington’s WorkFirst program. This program serves an average of 39,536 families each month. The federal government funds 75 percent of its cost; state government provides 25 percent. The program cost in the current fiscal year (2006) is \$290.6 million. This program serves children in families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

ECEAP is a state program that contracts with local school districts, educational service districts, local governments, tribes, community colleges and non-profit organizations to operate preschool programs. The local entities provide part-time services that include early education and development, health and nutrition, parent involvement, and family support services, at sites across the state. The central ECEAP office is responsible for providing oversight and technical assistance. ECEAP’s total budget in the current fiscal year (2006) is \$34.4 million. Sixteen percent of the ECEAP dollars are used to meet the state share requirements of the federal Child Care



SOURCE: THE URBAN INSTITUTE

and Development Fund. ECEAP serves three- and four-year-olds who live in families with incomes up to 110 percent of the federal poverty level.

Head Start

Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) are federally funded programs that are designed, managed and partially funded through local community policy councils. Early learning opportunities and support are provided through child care centers and/or home-based settings, both of which include extensive family training and support in addition to full-time or part-time child learning experiences. Families are eligible for HS/EHS if they meet federal poverty guidelines, or if they are receiving public assistance. Young children in foster care are also eligible. HS/EHS served over 13,000 children in 297 centers across the state in 2001. Funding to serve these children, totaling just under \$96 million in the last biennium (2003-2005), came primarily from federal funds (80 percent); the remaining funds are secured locally. Head Start serves a small number of infants and toddlers in a small, “Early Head Start” program, but most are three- and four-year-olds. Their families must have incomes under 100 percent of the federal poverty level.

Programs for children with developmental delays or disabilities

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides two early learning programs.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers the Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP). Its purpose is to identify and serve all infants and toddlers with developmental delays and/or disabilities. This program must coordinate education, health and social service options for each eligible infant or toddler (birth to three) and his or her family. The focus of early intervention services must be based on the developmental needs of the child and are to

MAJOR EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

CHILDREN SERVED

Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program (ECEAP)	6,000
Head Start & Early Head Start	11,056
Migrant & Indian Head Start	3,917
Infant & Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP)	6,806
Special Ed Preschool (IDEA, Part B)	13,000
Working Connections Childcare	33,474

provide family centered services to maximize the optimal development of the child and reduce or eliminate the impact of developmental delay or disabilities. ITEIP must coordinate state and local resources to ensure evaluations and assessments are provided for each infant or toddler identified or referred to the ITEIP system. Early intervention professionals are available statewide through a coordinate community system, as part of the ITEIP program. Based on the evaluation and determination of delay or disability, ITEIP and services are to be accessible by all families with concerns about their child’s development. This program is available to all families regardless of income.

ITEIP is funded with approximately \$8 million in federal funds each year, and an additional \$17 million in state and local funds. When available, insurance and health care resources pay for required services as the first payers. This program served 6,800 children in 2004.

A second program, operated by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction through the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides special education preschool to children with disabilities beginning at the age of three. This program also has no family income requirement. This program provides access to

public education for young children meeting state special education eligibility criteria. Funding comes primarily from the federal government. In 2005, the total funds were approximately \$45 million.

Licensing

The State of Washington has licensed child care centers since the 1930's and began licensing family child care homes in the 1960's. The Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL), within the Department of Social and Health Services, is responsible for licensing centers and family homes. Both types of facilities provide out-of-home care for children for less than 24 hours per day. By law, family child care homes must be licensed if they provide care regularly for one or more non-related children. Licensors are responsible for licensing and monitoring facilities, investigating and resolving complaints about facilities, providing technical assistance to facilities, and taking legal action if required to enforce licensing rules. Currently, 6,022 family childcare homes are licensed by the state, with a licensed capacity of 54,837 children. There are also 2,353 centers licensed, with a capacity of 121,522 children. Thus, the state has licensed capacity for 176,359 children.

Washington's K-12 Public Schools

Washington's 296 school districts serve just over one million students in kindergarten through high school. In the 2003-04 school year, school districts received a total of \$7.5 billion in revenues. Seventy percent of these revenues were state funds; 16 percent were from local school levies paid by local property taxes, and about 10 percent were federal funds. Four percent were from other sources.

Raising the bar

Over the course of Washington's history, the level of public education regarded as necessary has increased. At the beginning of the 20th century, an elementary education was the norm. By the middle of the century, approximately 50 percent of Washington students earned high school diplomas. Today, about 70 percent of students earn high school diplomas, and among those who

Improving access and quality

Quality is inconsistent across early learning programs and, child care in particular, is characterized by low-worker wages, worker turnover and difficulties for parents in finding care that is convenient, affordable and supports the early learning needs of young children. Programs such as the Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network and its local affiliates, the State Training and Registry System (STARS) operated through the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children, and child care health consultants in local health departments are funded with state and federal dollars to support parents, improve worker training and stability, and improve the quality of early learning programs.

do not, it is estimated that about 30 percent eventually enroll in community or technical colleges for more education or job training.

The meaning of a high school diploma is changing. In the past, students received high school diplomas for attending school for 12 years, regardless of whether they learned very much. The diploma did not distinguish between students who earned straight Ds and those who earned

straight As. Thus, some high school graduates were unable to fill out a job application, much less perform jobs that require even basic levels of reading, writing, math or science skill and knowledge.

Today, public schools are in the midst of an ambitious and far-reaching process to improve student academic achievement that began with the passage of a sweeping school reform law in 1993. Washington teachers, parents and business leaders established Essential Academic Learning Requirements that students must master in order to succeed in the 21st century. For the past decade, school districts have worked to adapt to these new standards. Students take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in the 4th, 7th and 10th grades to measure progress towards meeting the new standards. Beginning with the high school class of 2008, students will be required to pass the 10th grade WASLs in reading, writing and math in order to graduate. Alternative assessments of equal rigor are currently in development and require the approval of the 2006 Legislature. Current law adds science achievement as a graduation requirement in 2010.

Some students with disabilities for whom the 10th grade WASL is not appropriate will earn Certificates of Individual Achievement based on criteria spelled out in their Individual Educational Plans.

A new federal mandate

In addition to the requirements of the 1993 state law, schools are also now required to comply with the 2000 federal No Child Left Behind law. This complex law requires annual improvement in a host of measures including test scores, attendance and drop out rates. The law also requires specific levels of improvement for every major ethnic group in any school where 30 or more are enrolled. Schools are regarded as failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) if the rate of

improvement on any one of these measures is insufficient. School *districts* must also comply with this law by meeting a variety of AYP measures, and are required to create district improvement plans if they do not.

Schools that fail to meet AYP goals face sanctions that become more severe year by year unless the school remedies its shortcomings. Schools defined as “needing improvement” must offer free tutoring and other special assistance. If they fail to make improvements, they are deemed “persistently failing” and must provide transportation for students whose families choose to transfer to other schools that have met AYP goals.

The legal and financial framework of public schools

The legal requirements and funding structures of Washington’s public education system are complex, to say the least. A more detailed summary of both is included in this report as Appendices VII and VIII.

Washington’s unique constitutional mandate for public education has given rise to repeated court cases seeking to define what level of funding the state is obliged to provide to local school districts. In 1977 and 1983, Washington courts held that the state is constitutionally obligated to *fully fund basic education*. It is up to the Legislature to define what basic education includes within rules set forth by the court as it interprets the state Constitution. Clearly, the level of educational attainment necessary for success changes as the economy, society and technology change. Thus, the Legislature’s power to define basic education is critical.

However, the delivery of public education is a local function. The state’s role of defining and funding it exists side by side with a strong tradition of local control, vested in 296 locally elected school boards. Thus, even though the state is obligated to fully fund whatever the Legislature defines as basic education, local school

boards have substantial power and responsibility to decide how the funding is spent.

Included in the current definition of basic education is a base amount for all students and additional amounts for special education for students with disabilities, instruction in English for immigrant students, extra help for struggling students, and certain student transportation costs. The bulk of state funding is allocated to school districts according to student/staff ratios and salary formula allocations.

Eighty-two percent of school district expenditures are for compensation. Unions bargain with local districts for salaries, benefits, hours of work and other working conditions of teachers and other school staff. The state provides funding for teacher salaries based on their years of service and academic credentials, but the specific pay and working conditions of teachers and other staff are determined at the local level. In 2000, voters passed Initiative 732, which requires annual cost-of-living salary increases for all school district staff.

Beyond the funds considered “basic education” and thus protected by the Constitution, about 12 percent of state funding is for such purposes as supporting the implementation of education reform, professional development, school safety, technology and special grants. In 2000, the passage of Initiative 728 created the Student Achievement Fund, adding \$629.4 million in state funding to local schools in the 2005-07 biennium.

Local voters also tax themselves by passing school levies, financed with local property taxes, to provide what is legally defined as “enrichment” activities in local school districts. This may include such expenses as computer systems, extra-curricular activities, electives, extra staff and paying for extra time and responsibilities undertaken by staff. State law limits the percentage of a school district’s budget that can come from local funds. To equalize the local taxpayer effort required to support schools, the state provides \$357.2 million to school districts that have lower than average property values.

Washington’s Higher Education & Workforce Training System

Washington supports two research universities and four public universities that grant both baccalaureate and advanced degrees. These institutions serve 104,000 students, and produce about 20,500 graduates with baccalaureate degrees each year. Ten accredited, independent liberal arts colleges and universities, which comprise the Independent Colleges of Washington (ICW), enrolled 33,000 students in 2004. Nearly one in four of the baccalaureate degrees produced in Washington are from an ICW member college.

While Washington has the 10th highest percentage of adults holding baccalaureate degrees in the nation, many of them received their education elsewhere. Our higher education participation rate – that is, the percentage of people who enroll in post-secondary education – is 25th in the nation. Our production of baccalaureate degrees ranks Washington as 33rd among the 50 states.

We also have 34 community and technical colleges that have three distinct missions – providing academic programs, job training, and adult basic education and English language instruction.

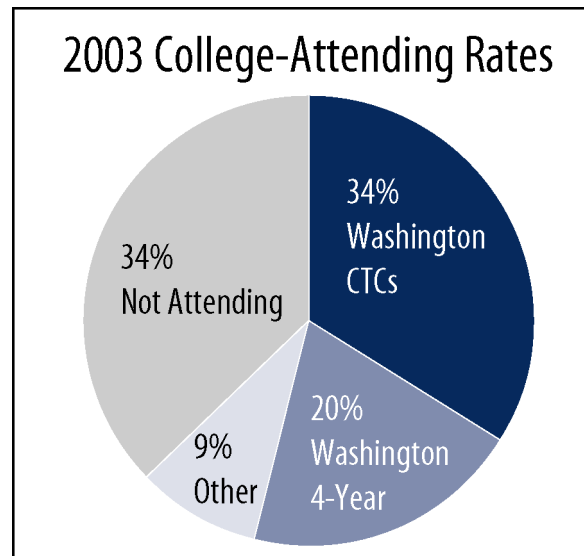
Our community and technical colleges serve about 260,000 students. About 14,000 students earn two-year Associate of Arts degrees each year; an additional 21,000 earn industry skill certificates, or complete apprenticeship training or other job preparation programs. Approximately 32,760 immigrants are being provided with English language instruction, and 31,900 under-educated adults participate in Adult Basic Education programs.

Discretionary in the state budget

Public higher education finance is the polar opposite of K-12. There simply is no constitutional or legal requirement to fund post-secondary education. In the overall scheme of state expenditures, higher education is discretionary and often serves as the budget-balancer. Similarly, tuition is often seen as a revenue source independent of the impact that rising tuition may have on broader state objectives such as educating more of our population.

The discretionary nature of public higher education funding runs counter to the importance of higher education investments to our economy and to individual prosperity. As the Competitiveness Council noted in January 2004: “investments in a well-educated and trained population provide social and economic benefits from higher incomes, reduced welfare expenditures and unemployment, lower employee absenteeism and lower crime rates.”¹

Despite these long-term benefits, funding for higher education falls short of the need. Washington currently ranks 33rd out of the 50 states in its production of students with baccalaureate degrees. And all of the colleges and universities are “over-enrolled,” serving students that are paying tuition but are not funded by the state.



SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

The mechanics of public higher education funding are simple. The institutions receive state appropriations to pay part of the cost of enrollment “slots” that are then filled with tuition-paying students. Students with financial need may qualify for financial aid funded by the state and federal governments. Financial aid is also available for students attending any accredited private college or career school.

Addressing higher education finance, then, requires a holistic approach that considers the size of the system needed to meet demographic and workforce needs and the interrelationship among tuition, financial aid and state appropriations.

¹ Washington Competitiveness Council, Phase II: Final Report, January 2004, p.5.

Review of Previous Studies

This section provides a high level summary of the findings from a number of recent studies of the state’s education system. A more comprehensive summary of these reports is included in Appendix VII, and full description of each of these studies is available on the Washington Learns website, www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov.

Early Learning

In the past decade, revolutionary research on early brain development has confirmed what elementary teachers have known all along: the first five years in a child’s life are crucial to his or her success in school and in life. From the moment of birth, every child’s capacity to learn is shaped by nutrition, sensory and cognitive stimulation, stable, loving relationships, and early exposure to language and books. The critical, life-altering consequences of social, emotional and cognitive stimulation – or lack of it – for infants and young children has also become the subject of intense interest among economists.

Through various longitudinal studies, research as shown that investments in early learning pay big dividends – both in causing good things to happen, and in preventing bad things from happening. The rates of teen pregnancy, delinquency, welfare dependency and adult incarceration are lower for those who receive good quality early learning, thus saving significant tax dollars. The rates of school completion, post-secondary participation and employment are higher.



As a society, we have a new understanding of how profoundly every child’s capacity to learn throughout life is established in these earliest years. This new understanding challenges us to find new ways to satisfy this early hunger for learning, and to craft public policy that supports parents, child care providers and preschool programs in developing ways to do this.

K-12 Public Education

If all the studies of public education – international, national, state and local – were stacked up, they might very well reach the moon. And it was the quest to reach the moon – or to be more specific, the Soviet Union’s 1957 launch of Sputnik – that first alerted the American public to the role that public education plays in sustaining America’s position as a leader in the world. Then, as now, the advances of other nations alerted us to the danger of falling behind our global competitors in education generally, and math and science particularly.

In 1983, “A Nation at Risk” developed this theme, and decried the “rising tide of mediocrity” that afflicted public education. The National Commission on Excellence in Education asserted, “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.”

Much has changed since then – but much has remained the same. Today, in spite of steady and commendable increases in student academic achievement, our public school students still lag behind their global peers in math and science, and in many international comparisons of overall academic performance. More recent studies and tests conclude that while we have been making significant progress in elementary education, it is only in the last three years that we have seen some gains in middle and high school.

Closer to home, a wealth of state and local studies and data have pinpointed specific issues and areas that need attention. These findings are described below. Our work over the next year will be to build on these findings and recommendations, where appropriate, and to change or augment them as our own research may prescribe:

- Although academic achievement levels (as measured by the Washington Assessment for Student Learning) are rising, a gap in educational achievement persists between white, more affluent students and students of color and students from low-income families. The achievement gap has narrowed across all grades in reading, but while all age and ethnic groups are making gains in mathematics and writing, the achievement gap persists. Increased investments in early learning, family and community involvement, and more culturally responsive education programs, are needed to close these gaps.
- A growing population of students who speak a language other than English has increased demand for transitional bilingual instruction,

but state funding for this program (\$721 per student per year) is not directly related to its costs. School districts spend 43 percent more for services to English language learners than the state provides.

- The way we recruit, train, compensate, deploy and evaluate teachers is critical to improving student academic performance and to closing the achievement gap. The role of quality teachers is central to every effort to improve educational outcomes, but teachers are not rewarded for achieving this goal. We have made important strides towards creating a teacher preparation and licensure system that recognizes teachers’ skills, but this skills-based approach is not yet reflected in our compensation system.
- In addition, Washington’s system of teacher compensation does not recognize regional differences in housing costs, or provide incentives for highly qualified teachers to work in low-performing schools where they are needed most.
- We face shortages of teachers in math, science and special education, and a shortage of teachers of color and bilingual teachers.
- Special education funding formulas are so complex as to be opaque to parents and educators alike. Special education students range from those with mild and transitory disabilities to those who are medically fragile and face profound, lifelong challenges.
- Specific funding formulas within Washington’s school finance framework should be more closely aligned with our new standards-based education system.
- Several organizations conclude that funding levels are inadequate to achieve the state’s learning goals and implement the 1993 education reforms.

Higher Education & Workforce Training

The bottom line of every significant study of post-secondary education is simple: *We need more of it.* We need a higher rate of participation in job training, apprenticeship programs, technical skill development, four-year college programs, and graduate programs. We need more nurses and medical technicians, and more scientists, engineers, and mathematicians. And, equally urgently, we need more capacity to educate the least educated: our growing population of under-educated adults and immigrants who need to learn English.

The Washington Competitiveness Council has made clear that fulfilling these needs is essential to preventing the erosion of Washington's economy and standard of living. No one disputes this conclusion; recent studies focus not on *whether*, but *how* to meet these burgeoning needs in ways that are efficient, egalitarian, and responsive to specific local and regional requirements. Recent studies also address how to make the best use of the institutional capacity we already have, and how to fund both operating and capital costs in ways that are both expandable and sustainable.

The studies summarized in Appendix VII address these key questions:

- What is the best way to increase the state's capacity to provide four-year college degrees, and what role should various parts of the higher education system play? The current system includes four-year colleges and universities, branch campuses, two-year colleges, cooperative agreements between two-year and four-year colleges, private colleges and online learning. Can we do a better job of combining all these elements into a more coherent, effective and efficient whole?
- Does Washington adequately support the graduate education and research capacity needed to stimulate new, high-value added industries such as biotechnology and nanotechnology? What is the right level of state support, and how can it be leveraged to increase support from other sources?
- Given the need for greater numbers of people with technical skills, which two-year college job training and retraining programs should be highest priority for expansion?
- Knowing that lack of education is the primary cause of poverty and demand for social services, what investments do we need to make to improve the skills and prospects of under-educated adults? Would an increased investment in adult basic education also pay dividends in higher academic achievement among children of these adults?
- How should the state and students share the cost of post-secondary education? Financial aid, tuition policy and state support ought to add up to equal access to education for people from every income group. How can we make these policies coherent and stable?
- How can we finance the expansion of higher education in order to increase the participation rate, and meet the needs of both Washington citizens and employers?
- What do we need to do to smooth the transition from high school to post-secondary education, reduce the dropout rate in post-secondary programs, and improve the timely completion of these programs?
- Does the way we govern post-secondary education make sense? Are there actions we can take to make the system more seamless, and better connected with public schools?

Purpose & Work Plan

Washington Learns was proposed by Governor Gregoire, and created by the Legislature's passage of E2SSB 5441 (and E2SHB 1152) in 2005.

This first interim report fulfills the first requirement of the legislative mandate. A second interim report is due in June 2006, and a final report and recommendations is due on November 15, 2006.



The purpose of Washington Learns

The Washington Learns enabling legislation includes an ambitious list of subjects to be addressed. In summary form, they include one over-arching purpose and five key issues.

The over-arching purpose is to raise educational attainment in Washington through a world-class, learner-focused education system in order to compete globally and thrive locally.

The Plan

As required by legislation, Washington Learns is led by a 13-member Steering Committee, chaired by Governor Gregoire. The Steering Committee provides overall direction, and seeks advice from three Advisory Committees:

- The Early Learning Council was created by E2SHB 1152 to pull together previously disparate programs and to help create a coherent, high quality early learning system for

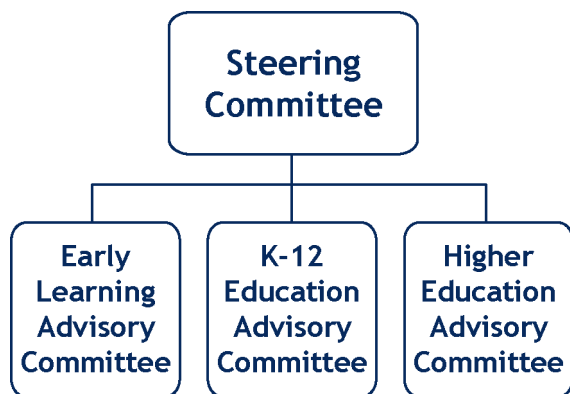
FIVE KEY ISSUES

- 1 Improve access to quality early learning programs and parent education so that families of very young children have resources to prepare their children to succeed in school and life.
- 2 Create a seamless, student-centered education system that is easy to navigate and that fosters the higher levels of learning needed in a global, knowledge-driven and culturally diverse age.
- 3 Align the way we finance public schools and pay teachers with our intention to focus on improving student achievement rather than complying with rules and regulations.
- 4 Make post-secondary education and job training programs easy to access, affordable, available and responsive to population growth and the changing nature of our economy and society.
- 5 Ensure that all the parts of our education system have adequate, stable, sustainable funding and that we make the best use of every tax dollar we invest.

children from birth to five years. Early learning programs and services include: childcare; state, private, and nonprofit preschool programs; child care subsidy programs; and training and professional development programs for early learning professionals. Although this Council was created independently of the Washington Learns study process, it also serves as the early learning advisory body for Washington Learns.

- The K-12 Advisory Committee, which was created solely to advise the Washington Learns Steering Committee,
- The Higher Education Advisory Committee, also created by the Washington Learns legislation to advise the Steering Committee.

Altogether, 85 citizens from many walks of life, including 16 state legislators, serve on Washington Learns bodies. A full list of Steering Committee and Advisory Committee members is contained in Appendix III and IV.



2005 Interim Report & Recommendations

Washington Learns will issue the majority of its recommendations next year, in a final report to be issued on November 15, 2006.

However, this Interim Report offers recommendations for consideration by the 2006 session of the state Legislature. These are focused on four areas of immediate concern:

- Improving the quality and availability of early learning programs and resources for parents of infants and young children;
- Investing in intensive, focused academic support for high school students who need extra help to meet the state’s academic requirements in reading, writing and math, and providing schools and classroom teachers with additional resources specifically for this purpose;
- Reducing the high school drop out rate and helping students plan and prepare for college, work or post-secondary job training and
- Continuing planning and development of a statewide student information system.

The three Advisory Committees and the Steering Committee convened in the summer of 2005 and will continue to meet over the next year. Our 2005 recommendations begin on page 23.

Next steps

To fully understand and address the enormous challenges laid out in its enabling legislation, Washington Learns will contract for several major pieces of research and analysis.

Two major Requests for Proposals (RFP) are in progress.

The first, entitled **K-12 Funding Analysis for Washington State** (RFP No. 06-800), was issued on September 30, 2005. Three nationally recognized firms submitted proposals, which are currently under review by an evaluation team. The expected contract period is December 2005 through January 2007. This contract will assist in the development of a new K-12 funding structure that identifies how best to distribute current funding to better align with the new, standards-driven model the state has adopted in K-12 schools. This study will also assess whether additional funding is necessary to ensure that all students can achieve Washington's academic standards.

The second, entitled **Higher Education Funding and Enrollment Analysis for Washington State** (RFP No. 06-1200), was issued October 31, 2005. Proposals are due at the end of November, and the contract period will run from January 2006 through January 2007. The Steering Committee expects this contract to develop recommendations for enrollment and a new post-secondary funding structure that identifies how best to distribute current funding, and whether additional funding is necessary to achieve Washington's higher education goals.

Additional research may be contracted for, depending on the availability of resources.

Ongoing work

The Steering Committee has adopted a monthly meeting schedule through November 2006. All three advisory committees also meet monthly. The meeting schedules are available on the website: www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov.

A detailed work plan illustrating the flow of information between the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committees is contained in Appendix VI.

2005 Interim Recommendations

The following interim recommendations address immediate actions we hope the Legislature will consider in 2006.

The first recommendations, on early learning, mark a new and deeper level of commitment to the importance of early learning, and the value of public-private partnerships to help improve the quality and availability of early learning education, support, and programs. This is a truly transformational change.



The balance of our recommendations call for programs and actions to reduce the dropout rate, help all students meet our state's academic standards, and ensure that all students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to make the most of school and plan how they will prepare for a career. These are incremental changes.

Next year, when Washington Learns issues its final report and recommendations, we intend to focus more on the transformational and less on the incremental. We believe that this interim report, and the research we have commissioned, will lay the groundwork for a deeper, broader look at the entirety of our educational systems. We intend to make recommendations that go to the heart of what we must change to meet the challenges of the future.

In the meantime, we believe that not a moment should be lost. Our state must push ahead in its continuing efforts to improve the systems we have, and to build on the significant progress that has already been made.

I. Early Learning

Washington State’s best opportunity for competitiveness and distinction in the global economy is creating a world-class education system that starts early and supports life-long learning.² This system will include the infrastructure for a high quality, affordable and accessible early learning system that embraces the “whole child,” goes beyond “ready-for-school,” and responds to the diverse needs of all families and young children in communities throughout our state.

Research across many disciplines now tells us that what happens in the earliest years makes a critical difference in children’s readiness to succeed in school and in life. The data are clear and compelling – the first months and years are critical opportunities, not just for learning, but also for helping every child have the kind of positive attachments that make life-long differences in citizenship and the ability to care about other people. That research also makes it clear that high quality early learning experiences are among the very best investments we can make in reducing future costs associated with special education, abuse and neglect, health care, school drop-out rates, teen pregnancy, welfare and the criminal justice system.

And, while parents are their children’s first and most important teachers and decision-makers, many parents face challenges in meeting their children’s early learning needs and can benefit from support. This includes the large proportion of parents who now work outside the home. Many families do not know where to turn for help and face affordability and other barriers in trying to access high quality early learning services.

Historically, Washington State was a leader with its early implementation of state pre-kindergarten services through the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program or ECEAP, and was rated among the top 10 states for the quality of its child care program. In recent years, we have fallen behind other states in our support for early learning. Many children do not receive high quality early learning services, standards are lacking across types of programs, and early learning providers lack the supports and incentives needed to improve the quality of services they provide.

The Early Learning Council’s vision is for the creation of a sustainable, integrated and accessible early learning system that provides parents, families, caregivers and communities in Washington State with the information, support and services to ensure that *every* child is prepared from birth for success in school and life.

The proposed early learning system will support parent involvement and education. It also includes a streamlined and stable approach to governance and finance, partnerships between the public and private sectors, broad-based community education and dissemination of information about the importance of early learning, and incentives and supports for families, providers and teachers – so they can continuously improve the quality of early learning opportunities for all young children.

The Washington Learns Steering Committee endorses the Early Learning Council’s recommendations for a new early learning system with three major components:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Support a public-private partnership focused on public engagement and quality improvement.

² Rolnick, Art & Grunewald, Rob, *Early Childhood Development; Economic Development with a High Public Return*, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, January 24, 2003.

Philanthropic organizations and businesses in Washington State currently support early learning efforts and are poised to do more – particularly in efforts to improve the quality of early learning services. The Public-Private Partnership will create the framework for acknowledging the commitment of individual partners to early learning and challenge new partners to join the Partnership as “founding partners” in support of high quality early learning.

As a first step, the state will work with the Partnership to develop a coordinated public outreach campaign that will target various audiences with messages about the importance of early learning. The campaign will start by asking parents, community leaders, educators and others across the state about the supports families want or need, as well as the early learning needs of young children. The second step will be to establish a Partnership fund to support high quality early learning services and supports for parents, families, teachers, providers and communities.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Create a cabinet level department of early learning with a director appointed by the Governor.

Consolidating management of child care and early learning programs in a single agency will demonstrate the state’s commitment to greater priority and visibility for early learning, improve parent and family support and early learning choices, reduce fragmentation among programs, and increase the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of early learning programs.

In consultation with the Early Learning Council, the new department will make recommendations concerning:

- *Coordination and collaboration* between the new department and the K-12 system at the state and local levels to ensure appropriate connections and smooth transitions between early learning and K-12;

- *Ongoing coordination and collaboration* between the new department and other programs not included in the new agency;
- *Ways the new department will support local communities* in encouraging public-private partnerships, innovative solutions to local issues, coordination of early learning services, and improved transitions from early learning to kindergarten; and
- *The relationship between the new department and the Public-Private Partnership.*

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Implement a Voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) with incentives and Tiered Reimbursement.

The QRIS will provide clear steps, supports and incentives for early learning and school-age providers to increase the quality of services they provide. The program ratings will provide parents and communities with information about the type and quality of programs that are available in their communities. The ultimate intent is to improve developmental outcomes for children.

A Technical Advisory Committee of the Early Learning Council has developed a preliminary design for the QRIS, linked to quality incentives and Tiered Reimbursement. The design includes five levels starting with compliance with licensing (1) and program accreditation or its equivalent as the highest level (5). Encouraging providers to engage in the voluntary system will require resources to help providers improve the quality of services they offer, compensate them for the additional costs associated with providing high quality services including higher wages, and provide incentives for ongoing participation.

HB 1152 provides that subject to the availability of funds, implementation of the system will begin by March 30, 2006, in two pilot sites in different geographic regions of the state with demonstrated public-private partnerships.

II. Helping Students Achieve Standards

Washington’s four basic education goals and the academic standards developed to achieve those goals lay a strong foundation for every student’s future success. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) provides a means to assess student achievement and progress towards proficiency.

Data show steady progress in improving student academic achievement. Growing numbers of struggling students are meeting the proficiency standard, and more and more students are exceeding the state’s required performance levels. We applaud the hard work our public schools and teachers are doing to produce these gains.

We are aware of the deep concerns expressed by some teachers, parents and students about the use of the WASL as a “high stakes test”, especially in light of the number of students currently not achieving proficiency. The answer, in our view, is not to abandon the current approach, but to focus on helping *all* students to achieve proficiency on the academic standards represented by the WASL or on alternative assessments of equal rigor.

We also recognize that based on current results, extraordinary measures will be required to help *all* students – especially some low income students and students of color – master the skills and knowledge set out in our state’s essential academic learning requirements. Intensive, focused accelerated learning programs must be provided to these students. Our objective is to improve the rigor and fairness of the learning environment without penalizing individual students who are a product of a system in need of further improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Invest in intensive, focused academic support for high school students who need extra help to meet the state’s academic requirements in reading, writing and mathematics, and provide schools and classroom teachers with additional resources specifically for this purpose.

III. Student Planning for Life After High School

Many students do not see a connection between their high school work and what they plan to do after high school. Many middle schools and high schools are not organized to assist students in seeing the connections in a meaningful way. Parents are also unaware of the options available for their children and how to access information about them.

Upon entering college, many students find that they do not have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college-level classes. These students must then take remedial classes to prepare themselves. Students and the state pay for these classes but students do not receive credit toward a degree for remedial classes.

The K-12 and Higher Education Advisory Committees acknowledge the need to expand early planning programs that provide students with the advice and tools they need to be successful in high school and prepare for life after graduation.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

All secondary school (grades 6 through 12) students shall participate in a program that is integrated into the curriculum and provides an adult mentor for each student. The mentor shall directly engage the student and the student's family members by providing: 1) ongoing skill assessment information and necessary skill building support; 2) information and referrals the student and family can use to assist with post-secondary planning; and, 3) assistance with course and activity planning that links school work with the student's future plans.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

In addition to other assessment opportunities, all high school students shall have the opportunity, during 10th or 11th grade, to assess whether they are on-track to be college-ready. Using commercially available college placement tests, students' "readiness gaps" will be revealed in mathematics and language arts in time to influence their course taking decisions for the remainder of their high school years. These assessments may also be used to assess students' readiness for admission to college courses in Running Start or College in the High School programs.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

The State Board of Education shall include indicators of program effectiveness and student outcomes in the development of their school accountability matrix. Measures will document: whether students and families have access to advising and tools they need to plan for the students' lives after high school; whether students' choices for post-secondary work, training and education are related to planning activities during high school; how student course taking decisions are impacted by mathematics and language arts readiness assessments in 10th or 11th grade; how high school completion rates and dropout rates are affected; what students actually do after high school; and, whether college remediation rates are impacted by these planning programs and assessments.

IV. Student Pathways During 11th and 12th Grades

Many high school students choose to participate in occupational training and education programs offered through Tech Prep and Vocational, Career and Technical Skills Centers throughout the state. These programs offer a variety of career and technical education pathways, primarily for 11th and 12th grade students that prepare students for entry-level jobs and for related post-secondary education and training programs. Some high schools and Skills Centers offer “pre-apprenticeship” classes and programs that prepare students for apprenticeship programs after graduation. However, pre-apprenticeship programs are not widely available throughout the state.

Labor market projections indicate that the shortage of skilled workers in the construction and building trades will continue to increase in the coming decade. Pre-apprenticeship programs for high school students leading to apprenticeships in the trades could be used to pilot a statewide pre-apprenticeship program for qualified high school students.

The advisory committees acknowledge the need to create additional pathways for 11th and 12th grade students that prepare them for work, training and/or college after high school.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

An additional career pathway shall be developed to create pre-apprenticeship programs for high school students that lead to an apprenticeship after graduation. Appropriate agencies and stakeholders shall work together to create guidelines for program development and implementation. Students who participate in this pathway will be expected to meet all academic requirements for high school graduation.

V. Post-secondary Readiness in Mathematics

Too often, students graduate from high school and enter the workforce or college without having mastered the mathematics knowledge and skills they need in order to be successful. Many students who go directly from high school to post-secondary education and training find that remedial math coursework is required. The Transitions Mathematics Project (TMP) aims to clearly define what students need to know and be able to do upon graduation, and then develop curricula and assessments for 11th and 12th grades that mirror those standards.

TMP is a partnership of government agencies (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Council of Presidents, and the Higher Education Coordinating Board) and private and non-profit organizations (The Gates Foundation, The Washington Roundtable, and the Partnership for Learning). TMP has completed the work of defining College Readiness Standards in math and has begun to provide students, families, teachers and counselors informational materials. This phase of TMP's work was funded by Washington State (\$300,000) and the Gates Foundation (\$423,000). Project funding ends in December 2005.

Next steps for this project would include the development of curricular materials and assessments aligned with the College Readiness Standards, professional development for teachers and an examination of the alignment among the College Readiness Standards, college placement tests, the 10th grade mathematics WASL, and the Trends International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The Advisory Committees acknowledge the benefit to students of solid preparation and a clear understanding of what they need to know and be able to do in mathematics for work and further training and education after high school.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

The Transitions Mathematics Project shall continue its public-private partnership by developing course frameworks, curricular materials, and assessments aligned with the Readiness Standards for Mathematics.

VI. Student Data System

Good data are fundamental building blocks for a cohesive, coordinated, learner-focused education system. We need timely student data to be able to assess and improve individual student achievement, identify best practices, and follow individual students across levels. We need longitudinal student data to begin to answer such questions as:

- How many students who enrolled in an early learning program entered and completed college?
- What is the relationship between course-taking patterns in high school and the need for remedial work in college?
- What intervention strategies are most effective in reducing the achievement gap and the drop out rate?
- How do secondary school students' course-taking patterns and program choices impact their college and career outcomes?

Most existing data systems were developed to provide compliance reports and to audit expenditures. A standards-based education system requires something quite different – an integrated student data system that spans the educational continuum. While progress has been made toward this goal, we believe that cross-sector coordination and improved data capabilities should be accelerated.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Support the development of a robust longitudinal student data system that will track student data and student academic achievement and ease transitions from early learning to K-12 to post-secondary, and among post-secondary providers.

Dissenting View: Rep. Glenn Anderson

I have concerns about language in a number of sections of the interim report, but will confine myself in this minority report to comment on the recommendations on early learning.

I oppose Recommendation 2, “Create a Cabinet Level Department of Early Learning with a Director Appointed by the Governor.”

The Steering Committee has not received information sufficient to support the creation of a new state agency for early childhood education. Indeed, if the committee’s purpose is to “weave . . . a stronger, more responsive, more seamless system that supports learning” (p. 11), and one of its goals to “smooth transitions between early learning and K-12” (p. 27), it seems to me exactly the wrong way to go.

In the last few years we have seen a number of pieces of legislation introduced to better coordinate the state’s child care programs. The House of Representatives passed legislation in the 2003 session (HB 1545) to require the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to coordinate the administration of early learning and child care programs and services. Former Gov. Gary Locke submitted request legislation (HB 1042) for the 2005 legislative session to consolidate early childhood education and assistance programs in the Department of Social and Health Services. Proposals have also been made to place principal responsibility for administration of early learning and child care programs in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The goal of this committee should be better coordination of early childhood education, not the building of a new bureaucracy. Not the erecting of new walls between the different parts of Washington’s education system. The report complains (p. 8) of “the problem of separateness” in Washington education, and then proposes to increase the separateness by creating a new state agency. The state has long and hard experience with trying to coordinate the activities of separate state agencies with similar goals and purposes. Why then would the Committee wish to repeat that mistake by giving child care its own, bureaucratic redoubt separate from the state’s social services and education agencies? From a governance standpoint, it makes little sense.

We all know that despite the better economic news of late, the state faces a large budget challenge in the next biennium. Taxpayers’ dollars are not endless. The overhead costs of creating and operating a new state agency necessarily take away resources that could be available for the actual delivery of services to the children of the state of Washington. At a time when we face strong demands for increased funding in both K-12 and higher education, this seems particularly unwise.

I therefore recommend that the Committee delete Recommendation 2.

List of Appendices

All appendices are available on the Washington Learns website: www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov.

- I. Enabling Legislation
 - a. E2SSB 5441
 - b. E2SHB 1152
- II. Organization Chart
- III. Membership of the Steering Committee
- IV. Membership of the Advisory Committees
 - a. Early Learning Council
 - b. K-12 Advisory Committee
 - c. Higher Education Advisory Committee
- V. Schedule of Meetings
- VI. Detailed Timeline and Work Plan
- VII. Summary of Previous Education Studies
- VIII. Legal Context for K-12 Finance (Kristen Fraser)