

The Career Connect Washington Plan: Ensuring every student in Washington has meaningful, hand-on career experiences and pathways toward economic self-sufficiency

Washington state's economy is strong—we have low unemployment, high wages, strong exports, and good job growth. These and other measures put our economy ahead of most other statesⁱ. There are also strong indications that this period of growth and stability will continue: There are an estimated 740,000 job openings in the next five years, a growth rate faster than the national rate.

At the same time, students in our educational system are largely disconnected from the jobs and opportunities that surround them. Even though 70% of our jobs require completion of a post-high school credential or certificate, only 40% of our students do so, and 20% are not even completing high school. This leaves 60% of our young people on the economic sidelines.

Career Connect Washington is about giving young adults an awareness of, exposure to, and preparation for the full range of career opportunities. Career connected learning helps young people understand and access the multiple pathways to economic success and life fulfillment.

Most importantly, it is about offering these choices to all our students across all sectors and all regions of our economy.

The Vision for Career Connected Learning in Washington

It is our vision to ensure that every young adult in Washington will have multiple pathways toward economic self-sufficiency and fulfillment, strengthened by a comprehensive state-wide system for career connected learning.

We're not starting from scratch. Career connected learning is a well-tested approach to providing career opportunities and developing a highly skilled workforce. Across Washington, there are many examples of programs developed by educators and employers that give students on-the-job learning opportunities. These programs are in our Career and Technical Education classrooms and other K-12 settings, in community colleges, and in our universities.

While some programs, such as state's robust and well-established registered apprenticeship program and programs such as Core Plus, operate in multiple regions and school districts, most others operate on smaller scale and are not connected to one another. What is needed is a way to turn many excellent local programs into a broader set of opportunities for students and employers.

Career Connect Washington's plan will create:

- a framework and common language to define the types of career connected learning so that it becomes more easily understood and navigable for students, parents and employers,
- a way to scale programs through the help of regional networks and program experts,
- support from community-based organizations for high school students and young adults to navigate career connected learning opportunities,
- tuition waivers and enrollment support for students who engage at the highest level of the career connect continuum,
- a high level of accountability for achieving the goals of the plan through reporting on established metrics.

The Framework: Establishing a common language and set of experiences for students

Everyone learns in different ways. Career connected learning programs are a great way for students to experience how their learning preferences and interests can help them pick careers and industries. Those experiences vary in approach and intensity, allowing students to develop their goals and find the path that works for them. Here are some general categories and examples:

1. **Career Awareness and Exploration:** Resources and events can provide early exposure to new jobs and industries. This can take many forms, including job fairs, guest speakers, job shadows, job-site tours and similar activities.
2. **Career Preparation:** These programs give students hands-on skills and knowledge experience with a particular business, career track or industry, and help them be more prepared for being hired in a professional setting. For example, career and technical education (CTEs) courses, on-site internships, pre-apprenticeship programs and other similar opportunities.
3. **Career Launch:** The most intensive type of career connected learning program. Career Launch programs combine paid, meaningful work experiences with aligned classroom learning so students can receive a credential and become a competitive job candidate. Students earn academic credit and gain real-world skills. This includes formal registered apprenticeships and Career Launch programs in the K-12, CTC, and 4-year systems.

Career Connect Washington's ambition is to enable all Washington young adults to experience career connected learning and explore and prepare for their future careers. And by 2030, we aim to give 60 percent of students the Career Launch experience.

The plan reflects thinking from business, labor, educators, government leaders and most importantly, students and parents

Governor Jay Inslee convened industry, education, workforce, government and other leaders to develop an approach to ensuring that all of our students have the opportunity to connect to the work force. These stakeholders have been convening regularly to better understand the problem and identify the best ways for Washington state to move forward. The leaders who have committed time and expertise to Career Connect Washington are sending a strong signal that the time is right to take on this challenge:

Students and Families: The engagement of students and their families is obviously essential to this work. Career Connect Washington has done extensive research to better understand the needs, challenges and concerns of students and their families. Parents and students are eager for more pathways to jobs and careers; they are often leery of debt but also unaware of other available pathways.

Industry groups, labor unions and major employers: Many industry groups and major employers representing health care, aerospace, construction, technology, and life sciences have joined CCW to help share information and facilitate connections within the industries. Labor unions are working together with industry to gather data, identify emergent needs of their memberships, and create programs in new sectors such as information technology and health care, adding to their robust existing apprenticeship programs. See www.CareerConnectWA.org for a list of partners.

Regional networks: Many of the career connected learning opportunities already in place are based upon regional networks. These networks help navigate the system for employers and educators and develop regional strategies based on their needs and unique assets of their community. Strongly motivated to develop good jobs close to home, regional networks provide essential lifelines between employers, community colleges, the K-12 system, and other economic development efforts.

Education leaders: Education leaders are essential to helping students develop the pathways to their future, by ensuring programs are meeting high quality academic standards. Continued leadership from K-12, Community & Technical Colleges and our public and private four-year colleges and universities is essential.

State leaders: Current leaders of parts of the system, such as the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Community & Technical College system, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Labor & Industries, the Employment Security Department and the Washington Student Achievement Council have been deeply engaged in the planning effort and are critical to its success.

Building on a strong foundation to scale statewide

The most successful learning opportunities in place right now are based on employer need on pathways with long term opportunity. The Career Connect Washington strategy builds on the model, allowing the sharing of programs through networks across the state, ensuring credential and credit transfer and portability for students, and developing new programs where none exist. The ten-year vision will enable choices for students across a learning continuum in all industry sectors.

Initial components include:

1. **Activating employers:** We have strong employer engagement and will be continuing and broadening that engagement in the coming years. The partnership of large and small employers across the state is essential, and many have already committed to making investments in career connected learning programs. Other trusted partners, such as industry associations, are also engaging their members in expanding these opportunities.
2. **Developing quality control:** Developing rigorous standards for programs to ensure students are having relevant and positive experiences in Career Connect Washington programs.
3. **Ensuring equitable access to career connected learning:** This program is not successful if we fail to ensure that all parts of our communities – geographically and across racial and socio-economic groups – can access the education and training they need to build strong futures.
4. **Spreading the word:** Sharing the high quality of new and expanded career connected learning opportunities will require a substantial amount of communications to policymakers, state leaders, educators, and of course, students and parents.
5. **Building the system:**
 - **Program development and transfer:** Supporting program development by strengthening regional network leadership and developing intermediaries who can bring educators and employers together to develop career connected learning opportunities.
 - **Increased resources for Career Launch student enrollment.** These are programs that are already helping young people get the credentials they need to be job-ready, but for which the demand outstrips the capacity. Additional resources would allow proven programs to increase student enrollment.
 - **Tracking progress.** A robust data system will be required to ensure that students of all kinds are participating across all the programs available, as well as to understand the impact of these programs on student outcomes.
 - **“Sustained leadership and accountability.** In order to open the doors to all students and improve the talent pipeline for established and emergent industries, we need continued

statewide leadership, coordination, and accountability. The Career Connect Washington Implementation Team (in concert with the Governor's office) will be responsible for developing effective strategies, building capacity, developing regional leadership and backing everything up with data and analysis. Most importantly, long-term the plan will be fully imbedded in the most appropriate state agencies and stakeholders, as this initiative becomes a part of how the state educates all students."

Conclusion

Washington state has so many important and valuable resources: Growing employers, great schools, and students and families eager to find new pathways from school to career. With strong leadership and statewide support, we can make the Career Connect Washington 10-year plan a reality. Join us and help us ensure every young adult in Washington can participate in a career connected learning program.

ⁱ <https://www.businessinsider.com/state-economy-ranking-q2-2018-2018-6> and <https://www.geekwire.com/2018/washington-states-economy-ranked-highest-nation-despite-relatively-low-investment-per-capita/>