

Washington Business Alliance Leads Coalition to Help State's Increasingly Disconnected Youth

Business, Labor, and Educators Rally Behind Legislation to Increase Funding for Career & Technical Education in Washington

SEATTLE, Wash. — February 15, 2016

The Washington Business Alliance today announced the launch of a new coalition designed to strengthen career and technical education for youth in Washington State. The “Career Tech coalition”, also has participation from coalition members including, League of Education Voters, Washington Building & Construction Trades, Association of General Contractors Education Foundation, Manufacturing Industrial Council, Washington Maritime Federation, and Pacific Northwest Aerospace Alliance.

Over the last decade, high school graduation rates have slid from 32nd to 42nd.¹ Since 2003, the achievement gap separating low income students from others in Washington has widened more than in any other state.² In fact, Washington’s K-12 system recently received a “C” grade from Education Week.³

Washington Business Alliance President Colleen McAleer noted that, “An inadequate supply of skilled workers is threatening Washington’s business growth.” The Business Alliance is a business community research and advocacy organization formed to combat the divisiveness and uneven progress in state politics. McAleer explained that “Washington industries can’t succeed if they can’t access the talent that they need. Disconnected teens and young adults represent a critical lost asset in Washington’s economy and have a significant negative impact on Washington business.”

The Business Alliance’s Career Tech Coalition is working to change that. They have a bipartisan vehicle in the legislature this session to strengthen funding for Career & Technical Education: [Senate Bill 6415](#).

Senator Christine Rolfes (District 23), the bill’s primary Democratic sponsor, stresses the “broad-based political support” behind stronger Career Tech education funding. “Employers throughout the state are clamoring for well-trained entry level applicants,” Rolfes said. “And teachers and parents recognize that some students learn better with hands-on classes with practical applications.”

Senator Ann Rivers (R-18) is a primary sponsor for the bill. She says that “over the next five years, 35 percent of jobs will require a bachelor’s degree or higher, but 42 percent of jobs will require mid-level training; the kind of training that our career and technical programs provide. It’s time to let *all kids* know we value their future and fund both paths as basic education.”

¹ America’s Promise Alliance, [Building a Grad Nation 2015](#); National Center for Education States, “[Table 3](#)” (2003 figure).

² Claudia Rowe, “[In Washington, gaps between low- and middle-income kids widening](#),” *Seattle Times* (January 7, 2016).

³ Education Week, [Quality Counts 2016](#).

Funding for Career & Technical courses has dropped in recent years, even with all the new education spending compelled by the state supreme court. With little revenue to go around in the new legislative session, disconnected youth and the hiring needs of employers are low on the list of priorities.

Students who complete Career Tech programs graduate at higher rates than their general Ed peers, and launch off in trajectories that lead directly to workforce credentials, credits, and living wage careers.

- For residents ages 20-24, the 2014 annualized unemployment rate was more than 14 percent. It's over 23 percent for those aged 16-19 years. Compare this with a rate of about 5 percent for those aged over 25 years.⁴
- Higher unemployment rates can harm lifetime earning potential. A young person who experiences a six-month period of unemployment can expect to miss out on at least \$45,000 in wages over the next decade—about \$23,000 for the period of unemployment and an additional \$22,000 in lagging wages.⁵
- Washington employers report having the most difficulty when hiring jobs which require vocational diplomas, degrees, and certificates.⁶
- About one in seven young Washington State residents ages 16-24 are disconnected from both school and work.⁷ This group isn't actively gaining credentials or skills, and they aren't earning a paycheck.

About the Washington Business Alliance

The Business Alliance was founded in 2010 by David Giuliani of Sonicare/Clarisonic and Howard Behar of Starbucks. Frustrated by the divisiveness and uneven progress in state politics, they imagined the results that could be possible if we brought the best business methods and entrepreneurial thinking to the work of government. The statewide business group is committed to bipartisan problem-solving and data-driven public policy. They work in collaboration with others to take on the state's most consequential policy issues.

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⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistic, [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#); Washington Business Alliance, "[Who Can't Find Work in Washington State?](#)" (Dec. 29, 2015).

⁵ Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, [2014 Youth Unemployment Report](#).

⁶ Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, [2012 Washington Employers Survey](#).

⁷ [Opportunity Index](#), "Disconnected Youth," State Rankings, Opportunity Nation & Measure of America (2015).