

DEVELOPING CONSENSUS HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM PROPOSAL FOR 2007 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



Prosperity
PARTNERSHIP

Quality education for all residents is essential in sustaining the Puget Sound region's prosperity. With a well-educated populace, companies are able to find qualified employees locally and residents are prepared to compete for good jobs. The region needs well-educated workers to replace retiring baby boomers and to meet the demands of the new economy.

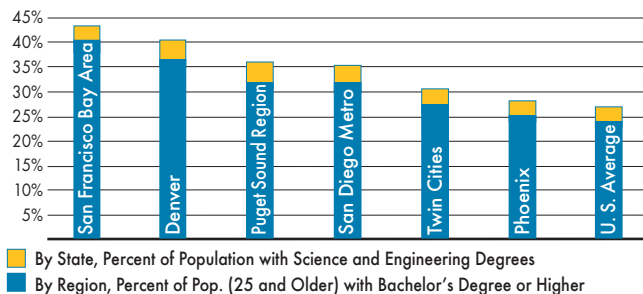
Knowledge of science and technology, ability to think critically and to adapt as the marketplace changes, and familiarity with different cultures and languages will be increasingly important. It is vital not only for established industries such as IT or aerospace, it is also important to make this region competitive in industries currently in their infancy, such as clean technology and bioinformatics. That is why we must take action to ensure a vibrant, well-educated and adaptable workforce with an entrepreneurial spirit.

In 2006, the Prosperity Partnership will develop a consensus higher education reform proposal for the 2007 legislative session.

What Are The Issues?

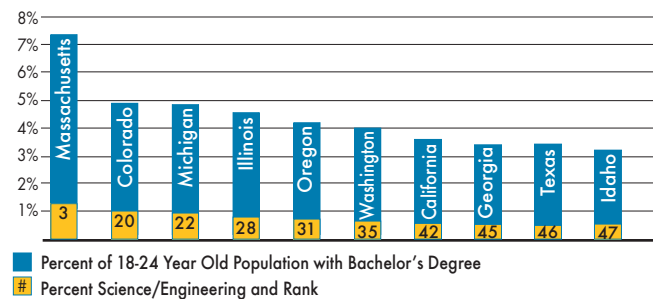
There is a shortage of workers with bachelor degrees, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math. Because of the region's concentration of high-tech jobs, employees today require a higher-than-average degree of skill and education. Unfortunately, the Puget Sound region ranks relatively low among the states in providing this sort of education.

Percent of Population Holding Bachelor's Degrees, 2003



Source: ECG, Global Insight

Bachelor's Degrees Granted as Percent of 18-24 Year Old Population, 2001



Source: Technology Alliance, U.S. Dept. of Commerce

The number of slots for admissions to bachelor programs has remained largely stagnant in Washington state, while the population of those entering college has increased. Washington residents are finding it increasingly difficult to gain admittance to a local four-year college.

If we do not meet the education and skill needs of the economy, our region will slip behind those that do.

Either the jobs will go elsewhere or we will import skilled workers from outside the region while our own residents fail to find meaningful work. It is especially problematic for occupations such as computer programming, where our state's colleges supply only 52 percent of projected workforce demand.¹ This particularly hurts our small and medium-sized businesses that do not have the time, money, or brand identity to recruit qualified workers from out of state.

What's In The Works?

Legislative leaders have been working for a number of years on different proposals to incrementally or, in some cases, dramatically reform our state's higher education system. The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HEC Board) has been active as well.

Recently, Governor Gregoire convened *Washington Learns*, an 18-month comprehensive study that will examine Washington's education system from early learning through higher education.

The Plan

The Prosperity Partnership will develop a consensus higher education reform proposal for the 2007 legislative session with a focus on producing more of what our present and future economy demands: high quality bachelor degrees. The coalition will also work to educate the public about the importance of higher education reform to the region's economic health.

GOAL: *Increase the number of bachelor and advanced degrees awarded in Washington, with emphasis on applied sciences and engineering.*

Specifically, the Prosperity Partnership will:

- Recruit a statewide coalition of organizations to develop consensus-based higher education reform to increase bachelor degree production in this state. The coalition will present a consensus higher education reform package to the 2007 Legislature and Governor. Possible options include: greater management flexibility for universities, expanded offerings at branch campuses, and bachelor degree granting authority at additional community and technical colleges.
- Work directly with leaders active in improving the state's higher education system, including the Legislature, HEC Board and Governor's office.
- Educate the general public, leaders in minority and low-income communities, key opinion-makers in the public and private sectors, and legislators, on the importance of higher education reform to our economy and communities.

A Broad Coalition

The Prosperity Partnership is a coalition of over 150 organizations, which has developed and is implementing a shared economic strategy for the four-county central Puget Sound region. The coalition will expand its partnerships to other regions around the state and include as many interests as possible to find effective, consensus-based higher education reform. This is the best opportunity Washington has had in many years to achieve truly meaningful reform to significantly increase the number of bachelor degrees awarded in the state.

The Central Puget Sound Economic Development District (EDD) unanimously approved the Prosperity Partnership's regional economic strategy on September 27, 2005. The strategy takes a two-pronged approach, creating action initiatives to increase this region's competitiveness in important industry clusters, as well as targeting concerns shared by all industry sectors about key economic foundations. Education is one of these foundations. To view the full strategy, visit www.prosperitypartnership.org.

¹ Sommers, Paul and Heg, Deena. "Occupational Demand and Supply by Industry Cluster." October 2003.