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# EDUCATION AS A PATH TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

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SUMMER 2016



## COMMUNITY COUNCIL REPORT

A report to the residents of Columbia and Walla Walla counties and the Milton-Freewater area



## COMMUNITY COUNCIL STUDY COMMITTEE

The 2015–2016 Study Committee met for 26 weeks, from Sept. 29, 2015, to April 12, 2016. The Study Management Team developed the study curriculum and met through the course of the study to guide the process.

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**Study Management Team:** Jock Edwards, Mark James, Beth Powers, Mike Smith

**Study Coordinator:** Catherine Veninga

**Assistant Study Coordinator:** Rachael Rapp

**Study Committee Members:** Katherine Boehm,\* Brian Burns,\* Glenn Carter,\* Dick Cook,\* Chris Crowder,\* Jessica Gilmore,\* Jim Gilmore,\* Joshua Gonzales, Steve Hudson,\* Randy James, Kathy Jansen,\* Bill Jordan, Julie Mae Longgood, Becky Martin,\* Dennis Matson,\* Brad McMasters,\* Trish Niemi, Steve Owens,\* Jim Peterson,\* Pete Peterson,\* Arleen Rice,\* Kim Rolfe,\* Josh Slepín,\* Darlene Snider,\* Barbara Stubblefield,\* Danielle Swan-Froese,\* Nick Velluzzi, Jessalyn Waring,\* Andrea Weckmueller-Behringer,\* Kristi Wellington-Baker,\* Tracy Williams

\*Participated in the development of conclusions and recommendations

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## Summary



STEM teachers in the field. Photo courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Identifying strategies to invest in education to drive economic growth is especially important in our current context of economic uncertainty. Rapid technological change and increasing global interdependence challenge us to identify the types of knowledge and skills that enable individuals to engage in rewarding employment now and in the future. Reductions in public spending on education emphasize the importance of ensuring that everyone in our region has access to high-quality education at all levels—from early learning to a postsecondary degree or credential.

The relationship between education and economic growth is complex and dynamic. The framework that organizes this report suggests that investments in education drive economic growth because they generate increases in productivity. Increases in productivity tend to generate higher wages for individuals, increase profits

for corporations, and improve the health and wealth of communities. Investments in education are both short-term and long-term. In the short term, individuals may need a particular skill set or credential to enter the labor force immediately. Long-term investments seek to ensure that individuals have a foundation that enables them to “learn how to learn” so that they can adapt to a changing workplace.

The question posed for this study asks, “How can we strategically invest in education as a way to drive economic growth?” Over the course of 17 weeks, the Study Committee sought multiple perspectives to learn about regional economic development, employment trends, educational attainment, and learning. The committee then spent an additional nine weeks engaged in a consensus-based process of reviewing findings, generating conclusions, and developing recommendations.

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CHALLENGES	RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS
<p><b>Engagement.</b> Engagement, which refers to an emotional commitment to an organization and its goals, is essential for success in school and in the workplace.</p>	<p>Develop an educational culture where students feel valued and can pursue their interests and develop their skills by creating physically and emotionally safe environments, expanding guidance and mentoring programs, and hiring staff and faculty that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the population.</p>
<p><b>Equity.</b> Gaps in educational attainment and academic achievement that are associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and income harm our community and perpetuate existing inequalities.</p>	<p>Reduce or eliminate differences in educational attainment that are associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and income.</p>
<p><b>Skills.</b> 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, dependability, adaptability, and the ability to work on a team, are essential for success in school and in the workplace.</p>	<p>Emphasize the importance of 21st century skills and enhance their development by supporting and expanding teaching strategies and learning experiences that promote them.</p>
<p><b>Educational attainment.</b> Jobs that require postsecondary education make up the largest part of the labor market and tend to pay higher wages. Jobs that do not require a postsecondary degree increasingly pay low wages.</p>	<p>Increase educational attainment in the region by developing strategies to support completion of degrees and credentials, and reduce the financial barriers for students seeking a postsecondary degree or credential.</p>
<p><b>Exposure.</b> Students at all educational levels need opportunities to engage with businesses and community organizations in order to cultivate their interests, enhance their skills, and gain valuable work experience.</p>	<p>Develop partnerships among educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations that create avenues for students to engage in internships, mentorships, cooperative learning experiences, and job shadowing.</p>

# A summary of what was heard

These findings represent information received by the Study Committee and the Study Committee's consensus as to the reasonable validity of the information received. They are derived from published materials, from facts reported by resource people and from a consensus of the committee's understanding of the opinions of resource people.

As a responsive community, we are challenged to ensure that our continuing investments in education are in line with economic change and provide individuals with the skills they need to participate in sustainable economic growth.

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of increasing economic complexity and diversity. The old economy of mass production and mass consumption that generated predictable labor market demand and sustained wage growth is a thing of the past. Now, rapid technological change drives the creation of new businesses, products and markets, while aging industries are restructured to remain competitive or are shut down. Economic change places demands on the labor force to adjust and increasing global economic interdependence generates uncertainty.

As a responsive community, we are challenged to ensure that our continuing investments in education are in line with economic change and

provide individuals with the skills they need to participate in sustainable economic growth.

Shifting education policies make it difficult to effectively sustain and deliver quality educational programs. Over the past several decades public spending on higher education has decreased significantly, which has made it challenging for institutions to provide accessible, high-quality education. For example, Steve VanAusdle, President of Walla Walla Community College (WWCC), reported that in 1984, 94 percent of WWCC's budget was funded by the State of Washington; today only 36 percent is. Further, the provision of many valuable K-12 educational programs and services depends on the passage of local levies. It is in this context of reduced state support and precarious local funding that we seek to ensure investments in education are appropriate and strategic.

## Framework: Investing in human capital

This study sought to answer the question, "How can we strategically invest in education as a way to drive regional economic growth?" Implicit in that question is the premise that education has a strong, direct relationship with economic growth. VanAusdle presented a model for economic growth that incorporates education, infrastructure, and capital investments



Family design challenge: Pipe cleaner towers. Photo courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

(public, private, and foreign). Together, those factors drive innovation and entrepreneurialism, which increase productivity and result in more jobs, higher wages, and a better standard of living. While we acknowledge the importance of infrastructural and capital investments to economic growth, this study focuses specifically on investing in education as a way to increase human capital. Increases in human capital drive economic growth because they generate increased productive capacity.

Human capital refers to the economic value of an individual's knowledge, abilities, and experiences. Speakers noted that investments in human capital are important because they generate returns at several levels: wage returns to individuals; innova-

tion, creativity and productivity returns to businesses; and wealth and health returns to the community. VanAusdle suggested that a well-educated workforce can also attract employers from outside the region, further stimulating economic growth. Investments in human capital are vital as we move into an increasingly postindustrial economy, characterized by competition and insecurity. In this age of rapid technological change, our economic future is profoundly uncertain—we may not even be able to imagine the kinds of jobs that will exist in a few decades. In the face of so much change and unpredictability, the ability to “learn how to learn” is essential to long-term employability.

A key way to increase human capital is to invest in education. In

this study, education is considered broadly—from early learning to postsecondary education. We consider returns to human capital produced through investments in education in two different ways: educational attainment and quality education. Educational attainment is defined in terms of terminal year or degree. Quality education is a broader concept; in this report, we use it to describe practices, environments, and content that helps learners acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that support employability in living-wage jobs. Because both are important to the development of human capital, this study takes into account strategies to increase educational attainment and strategies to increase quality education.

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## REGIONAL ECONOMIC TRENDS

Our study region includes Columbia and Walla Walla counties and the Milton-Freewater area. Economic growth in our region has been slow over the past decade, and employment rates are uneven. Data from the Washington state Employment Security Department show that among all counties in Washington state, Walla Walla County had the least employment loss over the past decade, but employment growth has been much slower (0.4 percent compared to 2 percent in Washington state), wage loss has been greater and postrecession wage recovery has lagged. Columbia County has an aging population (47 percent are 50 years and older), and a low unemployment rate (5.2 percent). Milton-Freewater is a small town with slow population growth and a high number of seasonally employed workers. Its unemployment rate is 19 percent, yet 15 new businesses opened in 2014, and another 19 opened in just the first six months of 2015.

## High-wage sectors

Some speakers encouraged investments in education that prepare workers for sectors that employ large numbers of workers and pay high wages. The average annual wage in Walla Walla County was \$39,212 in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Average annual wages in Walla Walla County are highest in professional and technical services, manufacturing, finance and insurance, educational services, government, and health care and social services. As the table below illustrates, some of those sectors have a relatively small presence in our economy. For example, only 1.8 percent of Walla Walla County’s labor force is employed in professional and technical services and only 2.5 percent are employed in finance and insurance. In our region, government is the largest sector, employing 20 percent of Walla Walla County’s labor force. Due to the relatively high wages that sector pays, government accounts for 25 percent of the county’s wages. Health care and social services is the second largest employment sector in

<sup>1</sup>The average annual wage in the Walla Walla Metropolitan Statistical Area (WWMMSA), which includes Columbia and Walla Walla counties, was \$39,070 in 2014.

**HIGH-WAGE SECTORS**  
**SHARE OF WAGES, SHARE OF EMPLOYMENT, AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE**  
**WALLA WALLA COUNTY, 2014\***

Sector	Percent of total Walla Walla County wages paid	Percent of Walla Walla County labor force employed	Average annual wage
Government	25	20	\$48,453
Health care and social services	17.5	16.6	\$41,270
Manufacturing	17.1	13	\$52,009
Educational services	4.4	3.6	\$48,705
Finance and insurance	3.2	2.5	\$50,989
Professional and technical services	2.6	1.8	\$54,905

\*Washington State Employment Security, adapted from the Port of Walla Walla (2015).

the county. It employs 16.6 percent of the county's workforce and pays 17.5 percent of the county's wages. Manufacturing, which employs about 13 percent of the labor force, pays 17.1 percent of the county's wages.

Local employers in high-wage employment sectors (government, health care, and manufacturing) reported that technology plays an increasing role in what they do. Firms are investing in information technology (IT), technological systems, and automation to remain competitive. The increased use of different forms of technology means that workers need more skills when they are hired or companies have to invest in additional training. For example, a representative from a local manufacturing firm reported that while automation of the manufacturing process has not necessarily resulted in fewer jobs, it has required more training. Increased investments in IT in the health care field affect all levels of employment and require additional training. Rapid change in that sector means that

employees need to be flexible and adaptable to keep up with new systems. While work at the Department of Corrections (DOC) has not changed significantly, greater incorporation of technology, such as cameras and computers, means that employees have to be literate in those systems.

### Low-wage sectors

Wages in Walla Walla County are, on average, 12 percent lower than the average wage in Washington State, not including King County.<sup>2</sup> The relatively low average wage is partly due to large employment in low-wage categories. Over 40 percent of full-time jobs in Walla Walla County pay \$15 per hour or less; in Columbia County, 33 percent of full-time jobs pay \$15 per hour or less. Agriculture, with an average annual wage of \$26,165, is the third largest employment sector in Walla Walla County; it employs 13.9 percent of the labor force but accounts for only 9.3 percent of the county's wages. Average annual wages are also low in accommo-

tion and food services (\$16,807), retail trade (\$26,046), arts and entertainment (\$20,842), and other services except administrative (\$19,783). The table below shows the percentage of total Walla Walla County wages paid, the percentage of Walla Walla County labor force employed and average annual wage for low-wage sectors.

### Growth and decline

Data from the Employment Security Department show that over the past decade regional employment declined in construction, real estate, finance, and insurance wholesale and retail trade. Much of that decline is related to the recession of 2009; those sectors tend to recover more slowly than others. Over that same period, regional employment has grown in transportation and warehousing; professional and technical services; and administrative and waste services. Economic forecasters expect those sectors to sustain steady growth of around 2 to 3.5 percent per year through 2023. Employment in con-

<sup>2</sup>Wages in King County are so much higher than in other counties throughout the state that their inclusion skews the data. For example, the average wage in Washington State including King County is \$55,003; without King County it is \$44,322 (2014).

## LOW-WAGE SECTORS SHARE OF WAGES, SHARE OF EMPLOYMENT, AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE WALLA WALLA COUNTY, 2014\*

Sector	Percent of total Walla Walla County wages paid	Percent of Walla Walla County labor force employed	Average annual wage
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	9.3	13.9	\$26,165
Retail trade	5.5	8.3	\$26,046
Accommodation and food services	2.6	6.1	\$16,944
Other services, except public administration	1.2	2.3	\$19,783
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	0.4	0.8	\$20,842

\*Washington State Employment Security, adapted from the Port of Walla Walla (2015).

## Findings

struction has recently picked up, and that sector, along with health care and social services, manufacturing, leisure and hospitality, is currently expanding at a rate of 2 to 4 percent per year. Reports from local employers seem to confirm those projections. For example, one small manufacturing firm expects to hire 6 to 10 additional employees this year. A medium-sized manufacturing business did not anticipate significant growth in the near future but did note that its aging workforce will need to be replaced in the coming years. The passage of the Affordable Care Act and the aging of the population have increased demand within the health care sector. Because our area has a number of large health care employers, regional wage competition has made it more difficult to fill positions and retain employees in that sector.

### Economic growth in a rural region

A decade of slow employment growth in our region prompted discussions about different ways to encourage economic growth. In addition to directly supporting educational attainment and quality education, several speakers identified additional models of economic growth that include investments in human capital.

#### Attracting outside investment

Jim Kuntz, Executive Director of the Port of Walla Walla, encouraged investments that enhance the regional quality of life in order to attract employers from outside the area. Noting flat economic growth for the past 15 years in the region, he suggested that growth in the local labor force will be externally driven, especially at higher wage levels. Employers may be drawn to our



Walla Walla Community College Enology and Viticulture students operating an optical sorter donated by Key Technology to process wine grapes. Photo courtesy of wwccmedia.

rural location to avoid competition for highly skilled labor, and workers may find the regional quality of life appealing. To make our valley more vibrant and attractive, other speakers encouraged supporting strong public schools and nurturing local institutions of higher education.

#### Value-added agriculture

Clive Kaiser, Associate Professor of Horticulture at Oregon State University and Agricultural Extension Agent in Umatilla County, encouraged investments that support value-added agriculture. *Value-added agriculture* refers to processes that increase the value of an agricultural product. He noted that our region has a comparative advantage in that industry—since we can produce and process agricultural goods locally, we can avoid transportation costs for inputs. Some examples of value-added agriculture

that have been developed and could be expanded in our region include wine, cider and spirits, as well as third-party certifications (such as Salmon-Safe or organic certifications). Kaiser suggested that low wages in the agricultural sector should be addressed and that value-added agriculture offers opportunities for higher wage employment.

#### Entrepreneurial ecosystem

Art Hill, Director of Small Business Centers and Vice President of Economic Development at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC), suggested that investments in education should teach people how to create new jobs, not simply fill the ones that already exist. In addition to supporting individuals as they start, run, and grow their own companies, it is also important to recognize that new jobs can be generated from within an existing business

by finding new markets, developing new value-chain alliances and creating new products. In order to support job creation, Hill advised investing in an entrepreneurial ecosystem—a layered system that encourages entrepreneurial activity by aligning investments in:

- Material resources, such as access to capital.
- An entrepreneurial culture that expects, encourages, and engages new ideas.
- Human capital to drive innovation.

Investments in an entrepreneurial ecosystem recognize that human capital forms the core of economic innovation, but that individuals need support to convert their ideas into economic activity. Hill stated that since youth are the talent of the future, entrepreneurial education should be presented early in elementary and middle school.

Hill and other speakers suggested that an entrepreneurial ecosystem should include activities that expose youth to new possibilities and allow them to interact with the business community. These include:

- Pitch-it! competitions (forums supported by the region's schools that connect youth to potential collaborators, mentors, and investors).
- Ignite Talks (forums for delivering short, informative presentations).
- Youth Entrepreneurial Award (sponsored by the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce).
- Angel Investment conferences (forums that connect entrepreneurs to potential investors).

### *Opportunities and challenges*

Local employers said that our rural location has positive and negative impacts on their businesses. The founder

of a small manufacturing firm said that while a port location would be more profitable for his business, he chooses to keep production local. Having attended Walla Walla University (WWU), he and his co-founders have lived in the area for some time and have developed social ties here. He has not had a difficult time finding employees (who receive on-the-job training), and noted that the location might be an advantage: customers are interested in the firm just because it is in a rural area.

Nelson Irrigation located in Walla Walla in 1973 because the region had a large agricultural sector that depended on pivot sprinklers but had no local supplier. The firm currently sells a diverse product line around the world and chooses to keep production local. According to the human resources manager, employees at Nelson Irrigation value the rural setting, and combined with a strong compensation package, the family-friendly environment promotes worker retention and career longevity.

Regional health care providers face a number of hiring challenges related to our location. First, there is considerable competition for health care workers because of the large number of regional employers—Walla Walla Clinic, the DOC, Providence St. Mary's, Walla Walla General and Kadlec (in Tri-Cities), to name the largest. These institutions compete for qualified candidates. Investing in on-the-job training can be costly to firms if newly skilled-up workers move to other institutions. Second, it is especially difficult to recruit physicians to a rural region. Medical students can be up to \$500,000 in debt by the time they complete their training. To pay that off,

many opt for high-paying jobs in large urban areas. Third, there is a smaller applicant pool for the type of doctor most needed in rural locations. Rural areas depend more upon primary care physicians than specialists, yet more physicians are training as specialists because those positions pay higher wages. Finally, the health care industry has been consolidating, and many workers seek employment in large health care systems that seem safe and stable.

### **21ST CENTURY SKILLS**

In this report, we use *21st century skills* to refer to the general set of skills and behaviors that speakers identified as important for success in work and school. Speakers from both the educational and economic development sectors reported that critical thinking, problem solving, and effective written and oral communication are fundamental. Other important skills, sometimes referred to as "soft skills" or "habits of mind," include a range of behaviors and attitudes, such as adaptability, dependability, punctuality, ability to work in teams and across cultural divides, curiosity, imagination, and professionalism. Several speakers reported that soft skills and behaviors are just as important as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills for academic and professional success.

For local employers, the top priority for new hires is a good work ethic, a positive attitude, and dependability. Because many employers provide on-the-job training, they want new hires who are adaptable and express a desire to learn. Other important skills include critical thinking, problem

—Continued on page 13

# 21st Century Skills

SPEAKER	SKILLS	SOFT SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS
<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>		
Jennie Weber, Employment Security Department, referencing Workforce Readiness Skills*	Critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication	Enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, professionalism
David Woolson, President and CEO, Walla Walla Chamber of Commerce	Critical thinking, effective communication, technical skills	Adaptability, customer service
<b>EDUCATORS</b>		
Dan Calzaretta, Director of the proposed Willow School	Critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication	Ability to work in a team
Brent Cummings, Director, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, referencing Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development†	Critical thinking, effective communication	Persistence, listening, and understanding with empathy, managing impulsivity, thinking flexibly, striving for accuracy, applying past knowledge to new situations, gathering data through all senses, taking responsible risks, responding with wonderment, finding humor, thinking independently, innovating, imagining, lifelong learning
Kathleen Murray, President, Whitman College and Bob Cushman, Vice President, Walla Walla University, referencing Hart Research Associates‡	Critical thinking, complex problem solving, effective communication	Capacity for new learning, ethical judgment and integrity, intercultural skills
Pete Peterson, Principal, Wa-Hi, and Mira Gobel, Principal, Pioneer Middle School, referencing Seven Survival Skills§	Critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication	Agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, curiosity and imagination, accessing and analyzing information, collaboration across networks, leading by influence
Kim Rolfe, Director of Business Engagement, Whitman College	Critical thinking, informed decision making, effective communication	Collaborative problem solving, integrity, grit, polish, punctuality
<b>EMPLOYERS</b>		
Health Care (Walla Walla Clinic)	Critical thinking and problem solving, business acumen, IT skills	Customer service, adaptability
Government (Department of Corrections)	Effective communication, judgment and problem solving, computer skills	Relationship building, ethics and integrity, embracing diversity and cultural difference, safety, treating others with respect and courtesy, dependability, accountability, leadership
Manufacturing (Nelson Irrigation, ProtoParadigm)	Effective communication, applied math	Work ethic, positive attitude, dependability, ability to work on a team, life skills, budgeting, financial management, trainability

\*U.S. Department of Labor, "Soft Skills to Pay the Bills." DOL, n.d.

†Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, "Habits of Mind." 2008

‡Hart Research Associates, "It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success". The Association of American Colleges and Universities, April 10, 2013.

§Tony Wagner, *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need—And What We Can Do About It*. New York: Basic, 2008.

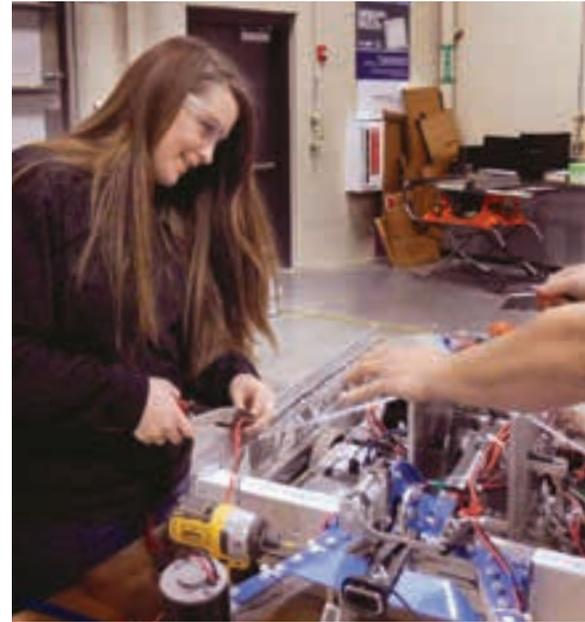
—Continued from page 11

solving, effective written and oral communication, basic applied math, technical skills, customer service skills, financial management, budgeting, and the ability to work on a team. Business acumen—the ability to make good decisions in an uncertain environment—is especially important within the health care field where employees must navigate a continuously changing regulatory environment.

A number of speakers suggested that many 21st century skills, some of which are difficult to teach through traditional curricula, can be fostered and practiced through project-based and experiential learning. To that end, many speakers encouraged the expansion of project-based learning throughout K–14 curriculum. Also important are opportunities to engage with community groups and businesses through activities that provide students real-world learning experiences. The table on page 12 represents 21st century skills as presented by various speakers.

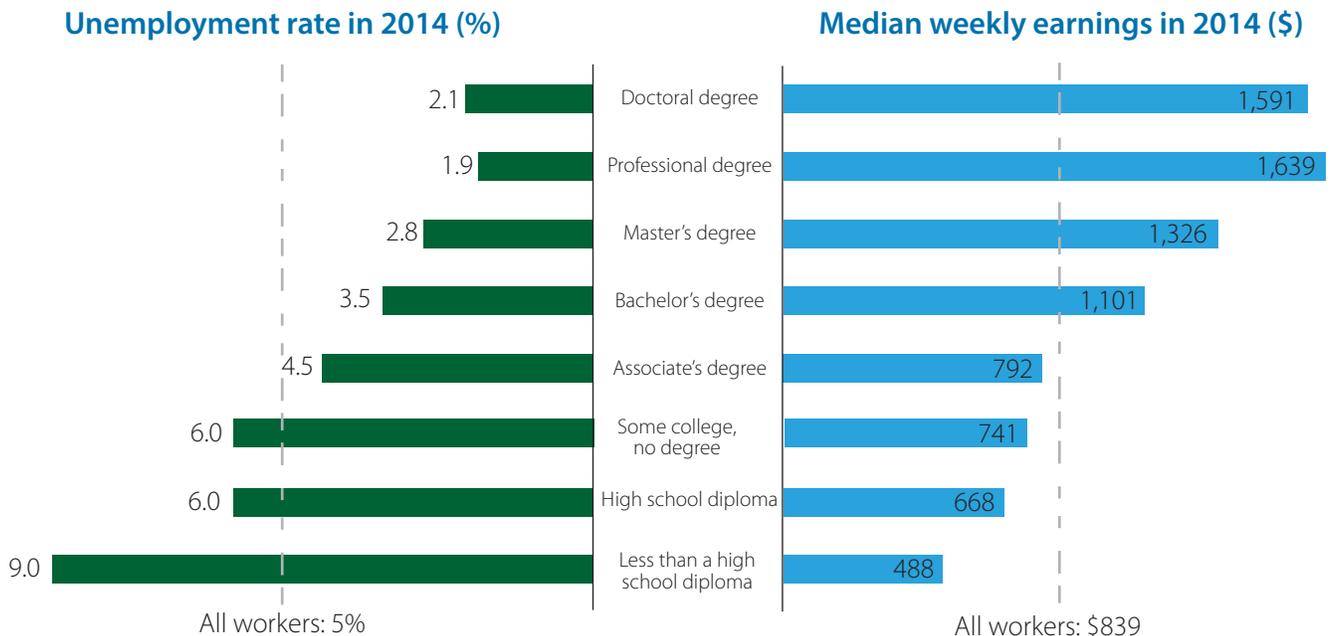
### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, WAGES, AND POVERTY

Though higher educational attainment does not always result in higher earnings for each individual, the link between education and employment and income is evident at the aggregate level. The chart below, based on national



Walla Walla Public Schools SEA-Tech students working on a robot. Photo courtesy of Walla Walla Public Schools.

## EARNINGS AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.  
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor

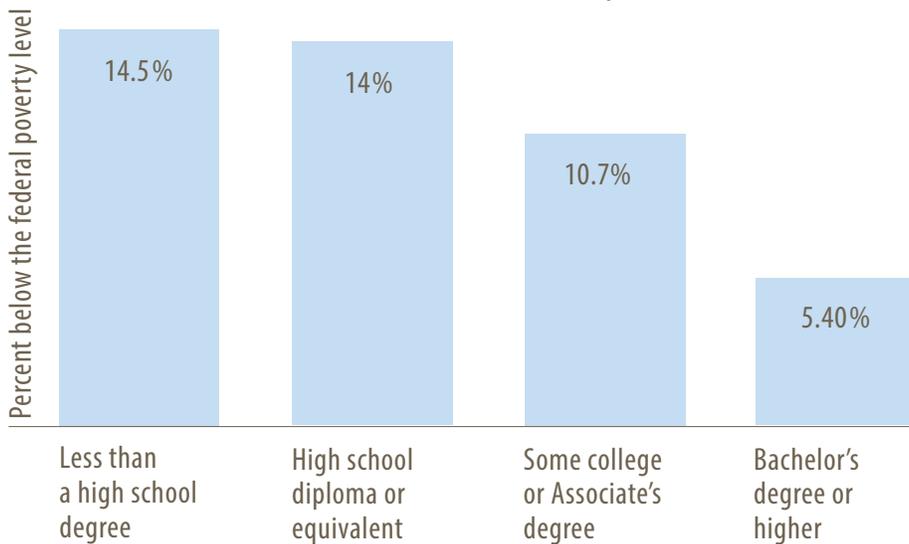
# Findings

data, shows that the higher the educational attainment, the smaller the percentage of people who are unemployed. It also shows that the higher the educational attainment, the higher the median weekly earnings. Data for the Walla Walla Metropolitan Statistical Area (WWMSA; see below) shows a similar link between poverty rates and educational attainment: The higher the level of educational attainment, the less likely a person lives in poverty.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS TO LIVING-WAGE JOBS

Strategically investing in education requires flexibility in the type of educational programs that are supported and their delivery. Speakers emphasized that there is not a single, predetermined path to a family living-wage job, and contrary to common perception, not everyone has to earn a four-year degree to get a good job. For example, entry-level positions at local manufacturing firms do not typically require more than a high school diploma or GED. While entry-level jobs do not always pay family wages, they can be an important starting point in that direction; employers from local manufacturing

## POVERTY RATE AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT POPULATION 25 AND OLDER, WWMSA



For local employers, the top priority for new hires is a good work ethic, positive attitude, and dependability. Because many employers provide on-the-job training, they want new hires who are adaptable and express a desire to learn.

firms reported that in-house training can lead to advancement and higher wages.

It is important to note, however, that jobs that do not require postsecondary education are fewer than in the past and are increasingly low-wage. Living-wage jobs that do not require postsecondary education will become even rarer in the future as technological progress raises the demand for more highly skilled labor. For example, within the DOC, an increasing number of positions require higher levels of educational attainment, and

that trend is expected to continue. In addition, changes to the regulatory framework that governs the health care field, together with the increased reliance on IT, means that employment in that sector requires specialized certificates, licenses and stronger technical skills.

### Career and Technical Education

Many speakers highlighted the importance of Career and Technical Education (CTE) and encouraged investments that develop greater opportunity for CTE, beginning in elementary

school. According to Dennis Matson, Director of CTE for Walla Walla Public Schools (WWPS), there is currently industry demand for CTE graduates. CTE (traditionally referred to as vocational education) has been devalued in recent decades because of a "university for all" mentality that suggested the path to successful employment required a four-year degree. Currently, CTE is being reframed as programs are adapted to more closely align with high-wage and high-demand industries through programmatic pathways. While high school CTE courses are

designed to provide students the skills they need for immediate entry into the workforce, they also provide a foundation that can lead towards careers that require postsecondary credentials—from technical certificates to PhDs. High-quality CTE programs encourage students to pursue postsecondary education as they develop a passion for their field of study. Thus, CTE is not simply training for the labor force but can be a first step toward a variety of options.

Matson suggested that at the programmatic level, CTE must be aligned with industry requirements and relevant to student needs. To provide students the skills and knowledge they need, CTE programs should be designed through coordination between employers and educators. CTE course development at SEA-Tech (Southeast Area Technical Skills Center) relies upon the input of advisory boards that provide feedback on curriculum and instruction. Engagement with representatives from local industries helps administrators align CTE courses with industry standards, and creates interest in local employment opportunities.

Aside from the image problem noted above, challenges to the expansion of quality CTE include:

- Difficulty hiring and retaining industry-qualified teachers because of wage competition.
- Rigid graduation requirements that provide students with little flexibility to choose CTE electives.
- The high cost of developing programs that rely on state-of-the-art technology and equipment.

## Workforce education

Many speakers highlighted the significance of middle-skills level training for workforce readiness. Middle-skills jobs refers to jobs that require more than

a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree—in other words, a technical certification or Associate's degree. Jobs that require some form of postsecondary education make up the largest part of the labor market nationwide. In Washington state, 50 percent of all jobs are middle-skill, according to data compiled by the National Skills Coalition. According to "Learning While Earning: The New Normal," in 2018, two-thirds of employment will require some sort of postsecondary education. Thus, in many respects, community college-level education is the new "basic education" for success in today's economy. Pete Peterson, Principal of Walla Walla High School (Wa-Hi), noted that even though not everyone will need a postsecondary credential to get a living-wage job, failing to prepare students forecloses opportunities. Currently, 38 percent of the population 25 and older in Walla Walla County has an Associate's degree or higher; in Milton-Freewater, the rate is half that (19 percent), and in Columbia County, it is 32 percent (U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2014).

WWCC provides many options for workforce training, and the largest percentage of students at WWCC (42 percent) are enrolled in workforce programs (compared to 30 percent in transfer programs, 12 percent in basic skills and 16 percent in other programs). The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges governs the development of workforce programs. It requires that workforce programs are aligned with job demand and growth, and put graduates on a path to a living-wage job (see chart on pages 16 and 17). Since a living wage is difficult to pinpoint because it varies by family composition, administrators seek job categories that pay relatively high hourly wages

**Living-wage jobs that do not require postsecondary education will become even rarer in the future as technological progress raises the demand for more highly skilled labor.**

with potential to increase. Like CTE, workforce programs rely on the expertise of advisory boards to provide feedback on program design, curriculum, and industry standards. Advisory boards are composed of volunteers from local industries, and their input is vital to quality workforce education.

Workforce programs at WWCC aim to provide students with the academic skills, soft skills and technical skills they will need to be employed in living-wage jobs. Technical training forms the core of the curriculum, and academic skills are developed through courses in "related instruction," such as math and communication. To help students acquire soft skills, many workforce programs combine practical skill acquisition with real-world work environments. For example, the Enology and Viticulture program operates a vineyard and winery; the Culinary program runs a café, food truck, and seasonal restaurant. As in a workplace, students wear industry-appropriate apparel and are expected to show up on time and interact with the public. Workforce programs that do not incorporate a business com-

# Findings

ponent, such as computer science, rely on internships to provide students with work experience.

Jessica Gilmore, Dean of Business, Entrepreneurial Programs and Extended Learning at WWCC, provided several suggestions to make workforce education more valuable and effective:

- Higher wages for employees who have earned relevant certifications and credentials to compensate for the value that additional training adds.
- Strategies to increase enrollment among populations who tend to be underrepresented in workforce programs such as Hispanic, low-income and first-generation college students.
- Funding for proactive advising (as opposed to on-demand advising) and other support services to improve retention and completion.

Several employers reported that there is a need to expand opportunities for workforce education within our region to fill existing job demand, and to provide additional training and credentials for individuals who are already working. For example, within the health care field there is demand for medical scribes, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and health care administrators. One speaker suggested

<sup>3</sup>The Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board is now the Washington Student Achievement Council.

that cooperation among health care providers to support training programs for those jobs would be beneficial. In order to move up the job ladder into higher-paying jobs, employees at the DOC often need additional education. The state of Washington used to provide a generous tuition reimbursement benefit that helped employees gain additional training. That benefit has been reduced significantly due to budget cuts over the past several years. Shift schedules may also be a barrier for employees who would like to pursue additional education.

## Liberal arts education

As speakers repeatedly highlighted, our region is fortunate to be home to four institutions of higher education: BMCC, WWCC, WWU, and Whitman College. WWU and Whitman College are private institutions that offer a four-year liberal arts degree (WWU also offers graduate degrees) designed to provide students with the skills and abilities to be productive citizens. Kathleen Murray, President of Whitman College, noted that employers recognize the workforce benefits of a liberal arts education. According to “It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success,” by Hart Research

Associates (2013), employers seek the competencies and abilities that are the foundation of a liberal arts education, such as critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and the ability to make ethical decisions.

## THE LEAKY PIPELINE

VanAusdle reported that out of every 100 ninth-graders in Washington state, only 19 go on to earn an Associate’s degree or higher (from the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board’s Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education, 2008).<sup>3</sup> That suggests there is a “leaky pipeline,” where over 80 percent fall off the path to completing a post-secondary degree. There was a general concern among the speakers that the dropout rate must be addressed. Though the leaky pipeline statistic presented by VanAusdle refers to high school freshmen, other speakers noted that experiences prior to high school also impact the dropout rate. Several speakers identified leaks along the pipeline and reported strategies to keep youth on track.

## Early learning and kindergarten readiness

- Samantha Bowen, an early learning specialist, presented research that shows factors influencing the

## LIVING WAGE IN WALLA WALLA COUNTY\*

Hourly wage	1 adult	1 adult, 1 child	1 adult, 2 children	1 adult, 3 children	2 adults (one working)	2 adults (one working), 1 child	2 adults (one working), 2 children	2 adults (one working), 3 children
Living wage	\$9.22	\$20.84	\$25.00	\$31.20	\$15.34	\$18.87	\$21.46	\$23.72
Poverty wage	\$5.00	\$7.00	\$9.00	\$11.00	\$7.00	\$9.00	\$11.00	\$13.00
Minimum wage	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32

\* Living Wage Calculator (2014), Massachusetts Institute of Technology

dropout rate can be traced to prekindergarten. According to data from The Children’s Reading Foundation, lack of preparation at the kindergarten level tends to follow a child throughout their educational career, and can lead to dropping out if not effectively addressed.

### Transitioning from middle school to high school

- Brent Cummings, Director, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), suggested that a significant number of dropouts occur between eighth grade and high school. Dan Calzaretta, Director of the proposed Willow School, reported that if students are not successful in middle school, they probably will not be successful in high school. He noted it is crucial that students achieve grade-level proficiency in both reading and math prior to entering high school in order to access learning (through reading) and keep up with the curriculum.
- Calzaretta also reported that all students need to be successful in eighth-grade math; those who are not tend to fall off the path to college and career readiness in math.



Looking through a microscope. Photo courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

### Successfully completing high school

- Drawing on national data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Cummings reported that a ninth-grader who fails two classes has an 80 percent chance of dropping out of high school or not graduating within four years. Several speakers suggested that social promotion (passing a student to the next grade even though they have not achieved grade-level competencies) at the lower grades tends to catch up with students when they are held accountable for competency in high school.
- In 2015, most dropouts (23 out of 37) at Wa-Hi occurred during senior year. Peterson noted that could be due to one or more of the following factors: high-stakes testing, unmet graduation requirements and the possibility that failing one class will derail graduation plans.

### Transitioning from high school to college or university

- Another leak in the pipeline is the transition from high school to college or university. *Summer melt* refers to the loss of students who

have been accepted to college in the spring but fail to enroll in the fall.

- Not all students have the resources necessary to access and complete a postsecondary credential. Kristi Wellington-Baker, Dean of Student Success at WWCC, reported that some qualified students do not even apply to WWCC. While the reasons behind the lower rates of enrollment for certain populations (such as Latino males) are not fully understood, it is clear that the cost of education is an important factor; 70 to 80 percent of students at WWCC receive need-based financial aid. Mindi Vaughan, Principal of McLoughlin High School, noted that since the state of Oregon passed legislation to provide community college education free of charge for those who qualify, there has been greater interest, especially among Latino students, in Milton-Freewater. To increase the rate at which Wa-Hi students access WWCC, Wa-Hi graduates will be automatically accepted to WWCC without a formal application or application fees, beginning in 2016.

2 adults	2 adults, 1 child	2 adults, 2 children	2 adults, 3 children
\$7.67	\$11.55	\$13.85	\$16.00
\$3.00	\$4.00	\$5.00	\$6.00
\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32	\$9.32



Students with computer, Raspberry Pi challenge. Photo courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

## Successfully completing a postsecondary degree

- Full-time students have higher rates of completion than part-time students, according to a study of community college students in south King County conducted by the Community Center for Education Results (as reported in *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 13, 2016). The authors of the report concluded that if employers gave employees more predictable schedules, then students who work would be able to structure their jobs around their classes.
- Though WWCC has relatively high retention rates, administrators continue to develop ways to keep students moving toward completion. For example, they have begun to use proactive advising, which addresses student persistence proactively, allowing counselors to make more timely interventions. Additional staffing makes proac-

tive advising more expensive than traditional “on-demand” advising, requiring greater financial support. In addition, WWCC calculates probabilities to identify students that are at risk of dropping out, and creates targeted interventions to retain them.

- Mira Gobel, Principal of Pioneer Middle School, reported that sometimes students drop out of college because they are not prepared for the rigor of college. She said the problem can be addressed by increasing rigor at the primary and secondary levels. Within WWPS, increased rigor is provided in part through honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses at the high school level and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID).

According to Rick Griffin, Director of Jubilee Leadership Academy, the problem of dropping out is part of a larger set of challenges that are intergenerational. He noted that early

trauma and stress can lead to learning disabilities, asocial behavior, and diminished cognitive development. From there, there is a significant risk of substance abuse, which can result in school failure and dropping out. As adults, that population is more likely to be unemployed, on public assistance or in prison or have debilitating health problems, which in turn puts the next generation at risk to repeat the cycle.

## NURTURING ENGAGEMENT

Many speakers commented on the importance of student engagement, and reported that lack of engagement can lead to dropping out of school. Roger Bairstow, Director of Corporate Responsibility at Broetje Orchards, defined engagement as an emotional commitment to an organization and its goals. According to a Gallup report (2013), of full-time workers in the United States, 30 percent are engaged, 50 percent are not engaged and 20 percent are actively disengaged. In much the same way that worker engagement is important to a successful business, student engagement is important to success in school. Moreover, just as active disengagement in the workplace is costly for businesses, active disengagement in education can lead to long-term social problems. Bairstow encouraged the Study Committee to target populations that are struggling the most and pointed to racial and ethnic disparities within the dropout rate. According to the Washington state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2015), the four-year high school graduation rate for blacks and Hispanics is 67 percent, compared to 80 percent for whites; for students with limited English the rate is 53 percent. Speakers identified a number of ways to nurture student engagement.

## Create safe spaces for learning

- Griffin suggested that people need to feel that they are in a physically and socially safe environment in order to become engaged and able to learn. When people feel physically safe, they will not be distracted by fears of physical harm. When they feel socially safe, they can participate without worrying about being devalued. Understanding the importance of a safe environment in that way shifts the meaning of access away from notions of open admittance toward a concept of active inclusion.
- Several speakers highlighted the importance of developing trauma-informed methods to address the impacts of adverse childhood experiences (ACES). ACES, such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, trigger fight-or-flight responses that limit an individual's ability to engage and make it difficult to learn. Training all teachers and staff in trauma-informed learning can help create a nurturing environment that supports all learners.

- Using positive behavioral interventions to support rather than punish students decreases the need for disciplinary actions and enhances student engagement. Following that model, teachers seek the reasons behind behavioral issues and offer assistance instead of imposing punishment. Peterson reported that the implementation of positive behavioral intervention systems (PBIS) at Wa-Hi has reduced the suspension and expulsion rates and has resulted in fewer cases of disciplinary actions.

## Build positive relationships with students

- Teachers and staff need to facilitate communication and build relationships with students to better engage them in learning. Staff at College Place High School are able to know all students because the student population is relatively small; a commitment to knowing all students will be important as the school grows. At Wa-Hi, the Link Crew alert system provides rapid support for students

whom peers or staff identify as needing immediate help.

- Students need positive relationships with adults who care about them. Mentors can inspire youth to realize their full potential and help them understand what it takes to be successful. Positive relationships with caring adults make a huge difference in the lives of struggling youth. Kaiser noted that adult mentorship presents a unique challenge in Milton-Freewater, where over half of the student population is Hispanic and the vast majority of teachers and staff are white. In that environment, Hispanic students rarely have opportunities to interact with adults who share their cultural heritage.
- Students need role models—people they can identify with and look up to. Wa-Hi's Link Crew program connects each freshman with an upper-class mentor.
- Dual-language education affirms positive self-identity, which enhances engagement. When student identity is positively affirmed, especially by teachers, students are more likely to be engaged because they feel validated. By contrast, failing to affirm linguistic and cultural identities makes those students feel invisible and suggests their academic efforts do not count. Students whose identities are negated may act out, resist authority and disengage, which can start a cycle of failure.

## Cultivate student interest

- Several speakers suggested that students are more likely to be engaged when they are involved in project-based learning. While project-based learning can be used in any curriculum, speakers noted that it is often used in CTE and STEM.
- According to the National Associa-



Students and design challenge. Photo courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

## Findings

tion of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium, students enrolled in CTE programs are 8 to 10 times less likely to drop out and students who concentrated in CTE graduated at higher rates than those who did not—90 percent compared to 75 percent.

- Speakers noted that students need a variety of resources to be successfully engaged. Vaughan suggested that giving every student access to a computer is like placing a library at their fingertips.

### Support student success

- A high school schedule with one extra class period allows students who fail a class to graduate on time. The extra period at Wa-Hi, which is supported by levy dollars, will become even more important when Washington State high school graduation requirements are increased from 22 to 24 credits in 2021.
- Several administrators suggested that building resiliency among youth can enhance student confidence and engagement. Doug Johnson, Superintendent of Dayton Public Schools, reported that resiliency can be taught, and McLoughlin High School in Milton-Freewater has instituted a new focus on developing GRIT: great resilience and internal toughness.
- Additional barriers to engagement include poverty and inequality. Peterson reported that the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch at Wa-Hi increased from 24.5 in 1999–2000 to 45.5 in 2014–2015. According to Cummings, over 50 percent of middle schoolers at Garrison and Pioneer middle schools receive free and reduced lunch; at Blue Ridge Elementary, the rate is 85 percent.

In addition to those strategies, speakers also told the Study Committee about programs that seek to enhance student engagement and support educational attainment outside the traditional classroom. The Study Committee recognizes there may be other programs it did not hear about; the discussion below is limited to what was reported to the Study Committee.

### 21st Century Community Learning Centers

CCLC is a federally-funded program that provides students opportunities for educational and social enrichment after school and during the summer. The grant targets low-income, minority and struggling students, but activities are open to all students. The program operates at five sites in Walla Walla (Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, Pioneer Middle School, Lincoln High School, and Wa-Hi) and seeks to nurture life-long learning through activities that have real-world relevancy, engage active participation, and encourage ownership of ideas. CCLC offers unique activities, such as weather balloon launches, 3-D printing, BMX racing and robotics, designed to

**Adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, trigger fight-or-flight responses that limit an individual's ability to engage and make it difficult to learn. Training all teachers and staff in trauma-informed learning can help create a nurturing environment that supports all learners.**

make learning fun and spark a passion for continued learning. According to Cummings, these programs, provided outside of school hours, foster the development of habits of mind that are important for academic success. He measures the impact of CCLC programs by tracking a range of student outcomes such as attitudes and beliefs, resiliency, attendance, test scores, and credits (for Wa-Hi ninth-graders). The ability to track students long-term is limited by the five-year grant cycle, and expansion of the program is limited by funding. One clear measure of success is when former students return to the program to serve as leaders, which has begun to happen.

### Summer of Exploration

The Summer of Exploration engages middle-schoolers at Valle Lindo (formerly known as the Farm Labor Homes) in fun activities that stimulate their intellectual curiosity, raise their educational and vocational sights, and invite them into the wider valley community. Developed by the Friends of the Farm Labor Homes, the program is supported primarily through generous grants and donations from local individuals and businesses. The program is run in partnership with the YMCA, which provides insurance, skilled counselors, transportation and access to its facilities. Activities are designed to:

- Continue learning during the summer (e.g., stream ecology, Carnegie Picture Lab and aeronautics).
- Provide windows into other cultures (e.g., Tamástslíkt Cultural Institute and Whitman Mission).
- Help students understand the importance of community (e.g., working with the Humane Society and the Parks Department).
- Challenge youth physically and facilitate interaction with friends

(e.g., swim lessons, Jubilee Lake visit, ropes course and fishing).

- Participation in Summer of Exploration is limited to 20 students. Additional funding is required to expand the program.

### Open Doors

Rick Griffin, Director of the Jubilee Leadership Academy, suggested that there will always be a population unable to engage in traditional education because of ACES. Students with ACES may show up at school but are unable to participate in learning in the midst of a “hurricane” of stress. In some cases, it is the educational setting itself that causes a traumatic response. The Open Doors program (enacted through House Bill 1418 and defined through RCW 28A.175.100 Statewide Dropout Re-Engagement Program) allows students to access approved curriculum in a nontraditional educational setting so that they can reengage in the learning process. Currently, the only Open Doors program in our region is at the Jubilee Academy near Burbank, which serves students from around the country. At Jubilee, students work through curriculum at their own pace with help from pro-social adults—caring adults who are supportive rather than judgmental.

### ENHANCING QUALITY EDUCATION

Administrators at the postsecondary level reported that students often come to college academically and socially unprepared. Sometimes students do not have the knowledge or skills they need to engage in college-level work and need remedial education. Others do not have the soft skills or behaviors that support success in college. In addition, there are disparities in educational outcomes based on ethnicity

and income within WWPS. The table on this page shows rates for WWPS middle schoolers who met eighth-grade standards in math and reading in 2013.

Calzaretta said that we also see differences in achievement at the high school level based on ethnicity (e.g., enrollment in AP math is 81 percent for non-Hispanic whites and only 9 percent for Hispanics) and at the postsecondary level, where only 12 percent of Hispanic students are accepted to a four-year college, compared to 37 percent of non-Hispanic white students.

There are a number of programs and initiatives designed to enhance preparedness for everyone by boosting academic outcomes, narrowing achievement gaps, and developing soft skills. The Study Committee learned about a number of those programs, but recognizes there may be other efforts it did not hear about. The discussion below is limited to what was reported to the Study Committee.

### Early childhood education

Early childhood education refers to the formal and informal teaching of young children from birth to age 8 and seeks to promote the cognitive, social, and emotional development of the child. Bowen suggested that our community should consider early education as part of our economic development plan because investments in early learning generate significant cognitive and economic returns. Recognizing

that the skills and behaviors of young children vary, early childhood education programs can help children become kindergarten-ready so that they enter school with appropriate grade-level skills. Research shows that children who are behind grade level when they enter kindergarten tend to stay behind unless successful interventions are made. Children who start kindergarten below grade level are more likely to drop out of high school and are less likely to enroll in a university than their peers who enter at grade level. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, early interventions in learning are important because cognitive development is most rapid when children are young. As a person ages, more effort is required to change brains and behaviors. Research conducted by James Heckman shows that the earlier the investment in the development of human capital, the greater the economic return.

It is important to engage parents in early learning, but outreach and accessibility are challenges. People hear about early learning programs primarily through word of mouth, and trusted messengers are important for reaching populations whose children are not already served.

### School culture

Several speakers emphasized the importance of developing strong systems and cultures within schools to

	Low-income students	All students	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic white
Passed middle school reading test	50%	62%	46%	74%
Passed middle school math test	37%	50%	33%	64%

# Findings

Our community should consider early education as part of our economic development plan because investments in early learning generate significant cognitive and economic returns.

support student learning. Calzaretta suggested that schools that have low dropout and high college-going rates have created a common culture of expectation and a system to achieve that. According to Calzaretta, teachers need to support the vision of the school, they need expertise in their field and they must enjoy working

with youth. Calzaretta, who has been working towards the creation of a charter school in our region, reported that charter schools cannot raise capital for facilities though bonds but they have more control of the money that they receive from the state. Kirk Jameson, Principal of College Place High School, told the Committee that all staff must work towards the same goals, and therefore hiring is the most important part of his job. According to Jameson, teachers should have personal and professional integrity, and be “kid magnets”—the kind of adult that students want to be around. Cummings stated that teachers must have compassion for students, a passion for learning, and enable student creativity. Several administrators reported that opportunities should be created for

students and teachers to take risks and learn from mistakes. Finally, administrators said that students need more time to learn and reflect, and teachers need more time and resources to develop their teaching.

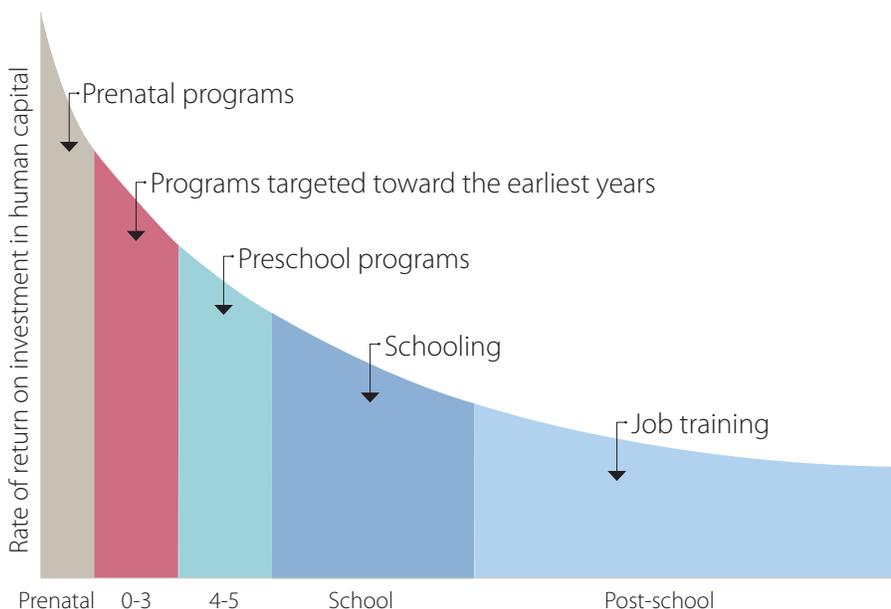
## AVID

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a teaching practice that seeks to improve educational attainment and quality by increasing rigor and teaching soft skills. AVID methods challenge students and teach the “hidden curriculum” of schools: how to take notes, keep a schedule, be organized, advocate for yourself, and access resources. Nationally, AVID students tend to graduate from high school on time, complete four-year college entrance requirements, and apply to college and university at higher rates than their non-AVID peers. As reported by Gobel and Peterson, within WWPS, AVID students outpace non-AVID students in terms of graduation rates, attendance at a postsecondary institution upon graduation (95 percent vs. 69 percent), and average scholarship awards (\$12,000 vs. \$3,000). The number of AVID slots is limited (60 per grade at Wa-Hi), and admission is selective. AVID students are chosen based on their grades (they tend to be 2.0–3.0 GPA students who appear to be underperforming relative to their potential), and their commitment to the program. AVID students must take the AVID elective course, which limits their schedules for other electives.

Speakers reported that AVID teaching strategies improve the learning environment for all students. The use of AVID techniques varies throughout the study region and the primary barrier to the expansion of AVID is cost, particularly costs associated with professional

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

### THE EARLIER THE INVESTMENT, THE GREATER THE RETURN



Source: James Heckman, Nobel laureate in Economics

development. Nonetheless, administrators seek to integrate AVID techniques throughout their curriculum to maximize student success. Peterson reported that though the AVID elective course serves only 15 percent of the student population at Wa-Hi, his goal is to have all of his teaching staff using AVID strategies. Jameson said that at College Place High School they choose from among various AVID strategies and use the ones they think are most successful. Vaughan reported that Nike has provided a grant to fund professional development to support AVID schoolwide at McLoughlin High School and AVID elective sections for first-generation college students.

### Music education

Music education helps students develop many 21st century skills. Music practice encourages critical thinking, complex decision making and problem solving, because playing requires one to disassemble a piece of music to learn it and reassemble it to perform it. Performance teaches the communication of a message to an audience, developing intention, poise, confidence, self-awareness, and self-expression. Music literacy demands skill acquisition, math competency, and scientific reasoning and teaches history and literature. In practice, ensemble work requires teamwork and consensus building. Like the performing arts, music education relies on the passage of school levies.

### Dual-language education

According to Jennifer Cowgill, Principal of Edison Elementary, dual-language education (instruction in both English and a second language from kindergarten through at least fifth grade) affirms self-identity, promotes problem-solving skills and supports cultural sophistication to work across cultural



*The Little Mermaid.* Photo by Kevin Peck, courtesy of Walla Walla Public Schools.

barriers. Dual-language education also promotes metalanguage awareness, which helps students to see the world through multiple perspectives. Research suggests that the neurocognitive benefits of bilingualism increase when a student reaches a high level of proficiency (which can take 5 to 10 years of study, depending on the context). Those benefits include the improvement of executive function, which supports problem solving and decision making. Because executive functioning skills are important to student success, they should be promoted throughout our educational system.

### STEM education

STEM education is an approach that integrates science, technology, engineering, and math. Through rigorous, hands-on learning experiences, STEM education promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative

team work. Peggy Harris Willcuts, Senior STEM Education Consultant for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, encouraged STEM literacy for all students, including those who do not pursue STEM careers, because STEM skills enable people to troubleshoot problems and make informed decisions. She further suggested that science education should be offered to all students, K–12, every day, and that it should be “hands-on and minds-on,” instead of just textbook learning. Currently, STEM education is delivered unevenly throughout the schools within our region. At the elementary level that is partly because many STEM subjects, such as science, engineering and technology, are not regularly tested. Willcuts reported that a second barrier to science education at the elementary level is that teachers sometimes lack confidence in their ability to teach subjects outside their

## Findings

area of expertise or formal training. The employment of science specialists is especially useful in that regard.

There is significant growth in jobs that engage STEM fields, both nationally and within Washington state. At the national level, growth in STEM jobs is outpacing growth in other sectors by a factor of three. In Washington State, STEM jobs are expected to increase 24 percent by 2016. According to data compiled by Washington STEM, Washington state ranks No. 1 in terms of the concentration of STEM jobs. STEM education has not been keeping pace with job growth: there are currently 23,200 unfilled STEM jobs in Washington state, and that is expected to grow to 45,000 by 2017 (Washington STEM). Speakers suggested that we need to develop ways to better include women and minorities in STEM education, since they are underrepresented in the STEM labor force.

### Junior Achievement

Junior Achievement (JA) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to prepare all youth for success in the global economy by supporting work readiness, entrepreneurialism, and financial literacy. Junior Achievement curriculum meets Common Core Standards and is taught by volunteers who spend five to six 45-minute sessions inside a classroom working with students. Surveys conducted by JA have found that students who participate in the program demonstrate better critical thinking and problem-solving skills than those who did not and have higher expectations for themselves after high school graduation. Junior Achievement is currently available in many classrooms throughout the region, and could be expanded to serve more students. There is no cost to students or schools, but it costs JA \$500 to imple-

**A common theme in many study meetings was the importance of developing and sustaining strong partnerships among educational institutions, businesses, and the broader community.**

ment each program, which is a barrier to expansion. Another impediment is time constraints—some teachers are reluctant to allocate classroom time for JA activities, due to other commitments and requirements.

### Community partnerships

A common theme in many study meetings was the importance of developing and sustaining strong partnerships among educational institutions, businesses, and the broader community. School administrators

at both the K–12 and postsecondary levels, emphasized the importance of creating avenues for students to interact with adults through mentorship, academic coaching, and leadership opportunities. Cooperative educational programs, community service projects, and internships allow students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world environments and create networks that may lead to jobs. Employers also reported an interest in more job-shadowing and summer work opportunities for high school students.

While there currently are opportunities for students to engage in these important partnerships, many speakers reported that they need to be expanded and relationships need to be cultivated. For example, Murray hopes that Whitman College will find more ways for faculty and students to collaborate within the community so that off-campus engagement is



Walla Walla Community College Wind Energy Technology student. Photo courtesy of wwccmedia.

part of student learning, not separate from it. Bob Cushman, Vice President for Academic Administration at WWU, reported that more cooperative learning programs at WWU would help students gain valuable job experience prior to graduation. Several high school administrators noted that expanded job-shadowing opportunities could benefit all students. Willcuts suggested that STEM education could be enhanced through partnerships between STEM businesses and educational institutions to provide a range of mutual benefits. Administrators at the high school and postsecondary level told the Study Committee that the active engagement of advisory boards for CTE and workforce programs is crucial because it helps to align curriculum with labor demand.

### **Professional development**

Many speakers reported that the quality of teaching matters and professional development—for staff and teachers—is central to providing and sustaining excellence in education. As one administrator noted, good teaching helps students learn in subjects for which they may have no natural affinity. Professional development is particularly important for AVID, where teacher training is a cornerstone of the program. Professional development in STEM education helps teachers gain confidence to teach subjects outside their expertise. More opportunities for professional development for high school counselors would enhance efforts to provide adequate services for all students. Training for staff and teachers is critical in any trauma-informed practice, where behavior is understood as a form of communication. Professional development and leadership

opportunities that do not necessarily lead to purely administrative roles can reduce teacher burnout.

### **PERSONAL PATHWAYS**

Administrators and educators in our region's high schools regard preparing students for life after graduation as a significant part of their mission. Some school administrators say they are preparing students for "career and college," and others talk about getting students ready to step into their "five-year plan." Both entail helping students define a career path and identify the steps it will take to achieve their goals. While some schools place a greater emphasis on encouraging students to go to a four-year college or university, there is recognition that a four-year degree is not for everyone. The key is to help students identify a postgraduation goal, understand the steps it will take, and ensure that course work supports that goal. Speakers highlighted the importance of engaging students in the development of a pathway early in their educational careers and involving families in the process.

High school guidance counselors are tasked with leadership in student advising. Speakers noted that because the state does not adequately fund school counselors, they are stretched too thin in most schools. Dayton Middle and High School has not had an academic counselor since 2008; they hope to create a position through the passage of a levy in spring 2016. In order for students to explore career options, all freshmen at Dayton High School take a required career class.

At Wa-Hi, there is one counselor for each grade, which results in a counselor-to-student ratio of 1-to-422; the American School Counselor Association recommends a 1-to-250 ratio.

Since high school counselors also provide support for struggling students, most students get no one-on-one interaction with a guidance counselor until senior year when they have a required 10-minute session to ensure everything is in place for graduation. Counselors at Wa-Hi provide planning information through in-class presentations several times a year. In addition, a software program, Career Cruising, provides an electronic platform for students to investigate careers, examine colleges, and create online career portfolios. All students must develop a fifth-year plan and present it during their senior year. Students who participate in AVID at Wa-Hi receive additional college and career counseling through their elective class.

Each student at College Place High School develops a five-year plan through a variety of activities, including counseling sessions, evaluations, weekly course work, community service projects, and conversations with parents. A pathway specialist works with each grade level to define interests and skills, identify strengths and weaknesses, and consider a full range of opportunities.

The development of a personal pathway is important at the postsecondary level as well. At WWCC, many students falsely believe there is a general transfer degree that will lead directly to a program at a four-year institution. Instead, transfer programs imply defined pathways and require specific courses. Thus, students who do not pursue a specific transfer path often find they do not have the required prerequisites for their intended field of study and that they have paid for unnecessary credits. The development of more clearly defined pathways will help eliminate that problem.

## Resources



Walla Walla Community College  
Collision Repair student. Photo  
courtesy of wwccmedia.

Next Generation Science Standards  
(NGSS): [www.nextgenscience.org](http://www.nextgenscience.org)

Seattle Angel Conference:  
[www.seattleangelconference.com](http://www.seattleangelconference.com)

Soft Skills: [www.dol.gov/odep/  
topics/youth/softskills](http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills)

The Washington State Board for  
Community and Technical  
Colleges: [www.sbctc.edu](http://www.sbctc.edu)

21st Century Community Learning  
Centers (CCLC): [www.k12.wa.us/  
21stcenturylearning](http://www.k12.wa.us/21stcenturylearning)

Washington Employment Security  
Department: [www.esd.wa.gov](http://www.esd.wa.gov)

Washington Leadership Assistance for  
Science Education Reform (LASER):  
[www.wastatelaser.org](http://www.wastatelaser.org)

Washington state Department of Early  
Learning: [www.del.wa.gov/care/  
find-hs-eccap](http://www.del.wa.gov/care/find-hs-eccap)

Washington Student Achievement  
Council: [www.wsac.wa.gov](http://www.wsac.wa.gov)

## RESOURCES

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES):  
[www.resiliencetrumpspaces.org](http://www.resiliencetrumpspaces.org)

Advancement Via Individual  
Determination (AVID):  
[www.avid.org](http://www.avid.org)

Association of Career and  
Technical Education (CTE):  
[www.acteonline.org](http://www.acteonline.org)

HB 1418 Open Doors: [www.k12.wa.us/  
GATE/SupportingStudents/  
StudentRetrieval.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/StudentRetrieval.aspx)

Junior Achievement of Washington  
(JA): [www.jawashington.org](http://www.jawashington.org)

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## CONCLUSIONS

- 1** Investing in human capital—an individual’s knowledge, abilities, and experiences—is central to creating economic growth. Not only does human capital drive innovation, which generates increased productivity, but a well-educated workforce can also attract employers from outside the region.
- 2** High-quality education is a valuable community resource and is essential to economic growth. Many educational programs, facilities, and services in our region depend on school levies and bonds. It is important to educate the public about the value our educational institutions bring to our region and the ways in which public schools depend on the passage of bonds and levies to support student learning.
- 3** New and shifting education policies and decreased public investment make it difficult to effectively sustain and deliver high-quality educational programs.
- 4** The ability to “learn how to learn” is essential to long-term employability because workplace environments can change quickly, and because acquiring new skills on the job can lead to career advancement.
- 5** Engagement, which refers to an emotional commitment to an organization and its goals, is essential for success in school and in the workplace.
- 6** It is important to increase educational attainment because jobs that require postsecondary education make up the largest part of the labor market, and because they tend to pay higher wages. Jobs that do not require a postsecondary degree increasingly pay low wages.
- 7** Dropping out prior to the completion of a high school diploma can limit an individual’s ability to obtain a living-wage job and can result in increased costs to the community.
- 8** It is important to track student dropouts and progress from sixth grade through the completion of a postsecondary credential or degree in order to develop targeted interventions.
- 9** Not all students have the resources necessary to access and complete a postsecondary credential or degree. The cost of higher education can act as a barrier that prevents students from starting or completing a postsecondary credential or degree. Additionally, students from disadvantaged backgrounds or first-generation college students may lack the social and cultural knowledge of what is expected and required to be successful in college or university.
- 10** Some students come to college academically unprepared for a variety of reasons, which can be addressed:
  - Increasing rigor by using pedagogical strategies that promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills can help better prepare students for college and support degree completion.
  - Actively identifying and engaging students who are underperforming relative to their potential can increase their achievement.
  - Social promotion in grades K–8 may result in a lack of preparation at the secondary and postsecondary levels.
  - It is crucial that students achieve grade level proficiency in reading and math prior to entering high school in order to keep up with curriculum.
- 11** Working students need predictable work schedules so that they can effectively structure their time.
- 12** Quality education should help students find inspiration, cultivate their talents, and build their skills around their interests.
- 13** Gaps in academic achievement and educational attainment that are associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and income harm our community and perpetuate existing inequalities. Schools can work to address the impacts of poverty and inequality, which are barriers to student engagement.
- 14** One educational model will not necessarily generate success for every student. An effective educational system will include alternative learning environments that provide opportunities for all students to be successful.
- 15** 21st century skills are essential for success in school and in the workplace and are expected by employers. These skills include critical thinking, problem solving, effective written and oral communication, dependability, adaptability, and the ability to work in a team.
- 16** It is important to incorporate digital literacy into education because technology skills play a large and increasing role in all employment sectors. Proficiency in these skills is especially important in high-wage jobs.
- 17** School culture and environment have a significant impact on student engagement and success. To increase student engagement and reduce the dropout rate, it

## Conclusions

is important to create learning environments where students feel safe and valued. A school culture that puts a priority on perseverance and academic achievement can reduce the dropout rate and increase post-high school success. A school is more likely to achieve the results it seeks when it creates, sustains, and institutionalizes a shared vision for success.

- 18** Teachers and staff play important roles in fostering students' social development and in supporting their academic achievement. Teachers who have expertise in their subjects, are well-trained in pedagogy and enjoy interacting with students can have great influence on schooling. Effective teachers have integrity and empathy and encourage student creativity.
- 19** Students need positive role models they can identify with and relationships with adults who care about them in order to build self-esteem and achieve success. Because most faculty and staff in our region's schools are not Latino, Latino students often lack adult role models at school who share their ethnic or cultural heritage.
- 20** Adverse childhood experiences (ACES) can lead to diminished cognitive development, learning disabilities, substance abuse, and other behavioral issues, which can lead to disengagement and dropping out. Trauma-informed practices generate better learning outcomes for students with ACES.
- 21** Significant investments in early learning, including prenatal programs, are important because children learn most quickly in the first five years of life and because early learning programs generate high levels of cognitive, social and economic returns.
- 22** High-quality early learning is important because children who are behind grade level when they enter kindergarten will have difficulty catching up, are more likely to drop out of high school and are less likely to complete a four-year degree. It is important to engage parents in early learning programs for their children.
- 23** Project-based learning enhances student engagement at all levels.
- 24** Postsecondary workforce programs that are aligned with industry standards and labor force demand generate jobs and promote regional economic growth.
- 25** After-school and summer educational programs offer students important opportunities to learn in fun environments. Through hands-on, engaging, creative activities, these programs promote 21st century skills and expand students' horizons.
- 26** It is important to teach students the "hidden curriculum" of schools—such as how to take notes, keep a schedule, be organized, advocate for yourself and access resources—because those skills boost academic achievement, graduation rates, college application rates, and scholarship awards.
- 27** STEM education integrates instruction in science, technology, engineering, and math through project-based learning. Providing high-quality STEM education, beginning in elementary school and offered on a daily basis, promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative teamwork and can help students better prepare for employment opportunities in the growing STEM workforce.
- 28** Music and arts education enhances engagement in school and provides opportunities to learn and practice 21st century skills such as problem solving, effective communication, teamwork, and professionalism. Our region's vibrant arts community and creative economy supports and is supported by music and arts education.
- 29** High-quality Career and Technical Education that is aligned with industry standards can prepare students for immediate entry into the labor market and can lead to postsecondary education as students develop a passion for their field of study.
- 30** Dual-language education affirms positive self-identity, which enhances engagement, and increases executive functioning skills, which promote student success.
- 31** The AVID program increases on-time high school graduation rates, and AVID strategies promote success for all students.
- 32** Junior Achievement supports students' work readiness, entrepreneurialism, and financial literacy.
- 33** Investments in professional development for teachers and staff enhance their efforts to address student issues, support student success, and effectively teach valuable content.
- 34** More resources are needed to support the role of guidance counselors and career advising at both the high school and postsecondary levels. Effective career development at all levels can help students

develop self-awareness and expose them to career opportunities.

**35** Partnerships among educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations create avenues for students to engage in internships, mentorships, job shadowing, and cooperative learning experiences. Providing students with opportunities to engage with local community organizations and businesses can help students gain 21st century skills and expose them to employment possibilities.

**36** Entrepreneurial education is important for economic growth in our region because it teaches people how to create new jobs, not simply fill the ones that already exist. Investment in an entrepreneurial ecosystem would provide access to resources and foster a culture that expects, encourages and engages new ideas and advances innovation. Programs that support entrepreneurial activities in partnership with education can expose students of all ages to new possibilities while engaging them with the business community.

**37** Investing in educational programs that support value-added agriculture could expand employment opportunities in living-wage jobs and increase the value of agricultural products in our region.

## INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Recommendations are the Study Committee’s specific suggestions for change, based on the findings and conclusions. They are listed without prioritization.

- 1** Improve our community’s understanding of and commitment to high-quality education in our region.
  - a. Establish an educational attainment alliance that will regularly inform residents of the economic, social and personal benefits of educational attainment.
  - b. Actively support investments in learning by educating the public about the necessity of passing local levies and bonds and by advocating for the region’s state legislators to fully fund pre-K–14 education.
- 2** Create an educational culture that emphasizes the value of each student, cultivates their talents, develops their skills and supports their aspirations so that they are truly engaged in school and later in work.
  - a. Encourage schools to create environments that are physically and emotionally safe for all.
  - b. Hire staff and faculty that represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population.
  - c. Increase the number of guidance and career counselors to at least the levels recommended by the American School Counselor Association (1-to-250) in middle and high schools.
  - d. Expand and support high-quality nontraditional alternatives to high school completion.
  - e. Encourage the development of a formalized education plan for each individual student, K–12.
  - f. Invest in the expansion of quality mentoring programs and support their effective utilization.
- 3** Reduce or eliminate differences in educational achievement that are associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and income.
- 4** Enhance outreach, availability and accessibility of early learning opportunities so that 100 percent of children in the region are prepared to enter kindergarten at grade level by age 6.
  - a. Increase investments in early learning opportunities in the region.
  - b. Educate the community on the importance of early learning programs.
- 5** Increase and expand trauma-informed practices in all schools, pre-K through postsecondary, and in the community.
- 6** Expand and sustain professional development opportunities.
  - a. Develop schedules that provide professionals time to engage with each other to network and develop their capacity.
  - b. Create professional development opportunities that support the incorporation of 21st century skills and project-based learning into curricula.

## Recommendations

- c. Provide professional development opportunities that support trauma-informed learning and student engagement.
- 7** Emphasize the importance of 21st century skills and enhance their development in all curricula.
  - a. Support and expand teaching strategies that promote critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication skills, and teach students the “hidden curriculum” of schools—how to take notes, keep a schedule, be organized, advocate for yourself, and access resources.
- 8** Expand dual-language education to all schools, starting in kindergarten.
- 9** Support the incorporation and expansion of project-based learning at all levels of education.
- 10** Support and expand STEM educational opportunities for all students, kindergarten through postsecondary.
  - a. Facilitate partnerships between regional educational institutions and industry partners to support the development of additional STEM curricular opportunities.
  - b. Develop or attract a STEM school to our region.
- 11** Expand opportunities in and access to Career and Technical Education at the secondary level (grades 9–12).
- 12** Support and promote digital literacy.
  - a. Incorporate a more computer/internet-based curriculum.
  - b. Expand opportunities for computer certification programs in middle schools, high schools and adult education programs.
- 13** Support regional economic activity related to the arts and other creative endeavors by increasing opportunities for arts education for all students.
  - a. Enhance collaboration between arts programs in schools and the region’s arts community.
  - b. Increase access to school-based, private and semiprivate music and arts programs, particularly for underserved populations.
  - c. Develop or attract an arts-based school to our region.
- 14** Provide more opportunities for high-quality summer and after-school programs that enhance student engagement and support the development of 21st century skills for all students.
  - a. Build partnerships to increase access to and provide better support for summer and after-school programs.
  - b. Explore the creation of a destination summer education program through collaboration between educational institutions and tourism partners (e.g., outdoor certifications, engineering programs, Walla Walla Valley resources).
- 15** Increase educational attainment in the region by increasing the percentage of adults (age 25 and older) with a postsecondary degree, certificate or other credential from an accredited institution to 60 percent by 2025.
  - a. Define and measure gaps in access and retention at all educational levels and measure educational attainment (completions) so that schools and colleges develop strategic interventions that are grounded in reliable data.
- b. Shorten pathways to educational attainment by recognizing prior work-based learning.
- 16** Reduce or eliminate financial barriers for students seeking a postsecondary credential.
  - a. Establish an investment fund that enables every high school graduate from regional high schools to access and attend the first two years of college.
  - b. Advocate for policy changes to make the first two years of community college free to students who are accepted.
  - c. Reduce students’ out-of-pocket expenses for housing, food, and childcare.
  - d. Encourage employers to support working students by accommodating their course schedules.
- 17** Support and expand regional postsecondary workforce training programs.
  - a. Advocate for state legislatures to fund workforce training programs.
  - b. Foster robust engagement between regional industries and workforce training programs to increase the development and retention of talent.
- 18** Develop a mechanism through which businesses, governmental agencies, nonprofits, educators and students can engage with one another in a number of partnership activities, including cooperative learning, job-shadowing, mentorships, volunteering, and internships.
  - a. Creatively address cooperative

teaching opportunities so that students receive education from teachers and professionals with passion and expertise in their field.

- b. Encourage businesses to offer opportunities for teachers to work as summer interns to expand their skills and vision.
  - c. Encourage employers to support flex time or compensate employees who volunteer as mentors in schools.
  - d. Encourage collaborative activities that teach entrepreneurialism, financial literacy, and career readiness (e.g., Junior Achievement).
- 19** Advocate for public and private investments in educational activities that directly support regional economic development.
- a. Encourage the ports to expand their incubator activities to include STEM-oriented businesses and support value-added agricultural activities.
  - b. Address regional internet deserts, and increase bandwidth in all areas.
  - c. Create and support an entrepreneurial ecosystem that includes access to resources and fosters a culture of innovation.
  - d. Cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset and foster related skills in students (K–16) through mentorships, internships, and other opportunities.

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Walla Walla Public Schools SEA-Tech students TIG welding. Photo courtesy of Walla Walla Public Schools.



Mesa prosthetic arm challenge. Photo courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

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The mission of Community Council is to foster a civic culture that inspires a citizen-driven, consensus-based, problem-solving process to prepare the greater Walla Walla area for future growth, change and challenges to enhance the quality of life for everyone. Community Council studies may be downloaded at [www.wwcommunitycouncil.org](http://www.wwcommunitycouncil.org).



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