

## Legislative Objective

# Education & Training

## Background:

President Obama created the “Race to the Top” (RTTT) education reform grants to support states in their efforts to improve student achievement, close achievement gaps, improve graduation rates and ensure students are able to succeed in whatever career or educational choices they pursue beyond high school. In July 2009, the U.S. Department of Education published its proposed criteria for the RTTT grants. These proposed regulations require that all states applying for RTTT grants must take a systemic approach to education reform including implementation of world-class standards and assessments, enhancing teacher effectiveness, providing transparent data systems that support instruction, and turning around low-performing schools. Washington falls short in not allowing intervention in persistently struggling schools, not tying student performance to teacher evaluation and compensation, and not allowing innovative and flexible school designs, including expansion of charter schools, to better meet student needs. Separate from RTTT, Congress passed into law the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (PL 105-220) to prepare youth, dislocated workers, and adults for entry into the workforce, and to provide for the planning, implementation, and ongoing oversight of a comprehensive state workforce development system.

## Problem:

Washington State’s competitiveness rests on the cornerstone of a well-educated and technically competent workforce. The Federal government’s \$4.3 billion “Race to the Top” (RTTT) grant program, available only in 2010 to a select group of forward-looking States, provides a unique opportunity to improve Washington schools’ ability to prepare students for the rigors of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Unfortunately, our state’s current laws fall short of requirements necessary to compete for this one-time grant that could bring our state \$200-\$400 million in additional federal education dollars. To qualify for the RTTT funds, Washington will need to make critical, student-focused reforms such as implementing a statewide accountability program, including the use of achievement data in the evaluation of individual student and teacher performance, and joining 40 other states in authorizing the creation of public charter schools. Separate from RTTT, the workforce development and training system in Washington is very complex and access to workforce development programs for small business is difficult. Additional improvements are necessary in all levels of the educational system and in workforce training programs to ensure Washington maintains its edge in an ever-globally competitive environment.

## Solution:

1. Maintain and improve a high quality standards-based education system:
  - Ensure that students have meaningful opportunities to learn; require K-12 system accountability; and grant state education agencies authority to intervene in the persistently lowest performing schools.
  - Ensure school funding is tied to student achievement of established standards and school accountability, and provides schools with the flexibility they need to deliver high-quality, focused instruction.
  - Support quality K-12 education through standards-based curriculum, assessments and the Certificate of Academic Achievement. Support the State Board of Education’s plan to align graduation course requirements to reflect real-world expectations.
  - Allow the creation of public charter schools that will be held accountable to the same education standards as existing public schools.
  - Improve K-12 and higher education alignment. Significantly reduce the number of high school graduates that need remediation in reading, writing or math before beginning post-secondary education or vocation-specific training. Establish system to measure performance and focus resources.

- Ensure a commitment to improving mathematics and science education and achievement through increased rigor in course instruction, and accelerating recruitment, training and compensation strategies to address the shortage of qualified math and science teachers.
  - Promote the delivery of individual instruction consistent with state standards through use of electronic media and other innovative practices
  - Encourage career counseling and guidance programs that enhance student retention and adequately prepare graduates for post-secondary opportunities.
  - Take steps to ensure Washington is among the top ten states with the highest graduation rates.
2. Encourage policies that support additional enrollment of Washington students, at both state and independent institutions, in high demand programs that are critical to the state's economic growth.
- Maintain and improve General-fund State funding for high demand job skills, incumbent worker training and transferable skill sets programs and funding for higher education, and advance investments in research at the state's research universities. Eliminate those programs that are not successful or relevant.
3. Fill the needs of the workforce at all levels of skills.
- Support the enhancement of Career Technical Education (CTE) programs in middle schools and high schools to ensure alignment with economic development trends and higher education opportunities.
  - Support apprenticeship programs, skills centers, vocational programs, partnerships with educational institutions, and other innovative ways to provide more opportunities for students and increase the supply of skilled craft workers. Review existing programs to ensure they meet the needs of the workplace.
  - Authorize employer tax incentives for the employment of students in workforce training programs for high demand job skills such as math, science and health science.
  - Establish central clearinghouse for available workforce pool with coordinated outreach to employers. This should include private plant closures, lay-offs and public efforts with military Transition Centers.