

Building Allies

Washington State Adult Education-Business/Industry Advocacy Connections

The adult education system in Washington is administered by the state's community college system. They describe the advocacy connections between adult education and the business/community as being based upon the concept of messaging.

Their central message throughout the state focuses on the concept that adult education is directly linked to economic development. Adult education programs are preparing students with the skills that they need to be successful in the gaining high level employment.

The Adult Basic Education office in the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges has a full time person that provides assistance at both the state and local level in framing the economic development message in terms of adult education programs.

Specific advocacy related activities that are carried on in the state include:

- A. A Governor appointed advisory council for adult education that includes a variety of business/industry representatives.
- B. Each local community college adult education program has a similar advisory council with the membership similar to the state council.
- C. The Adult Literacy Week celebration each year focuses on printed materials in workplace sites that focus on the educational services available in adult education programs.
- D. Events are held each year in local communities that give "Honored Employers" awards that are given to businesses with workplace literacy programs and businesses that hire graduates of the adult education programs.
- E. The Boards of Trustees of each Community College have significant business representation. These individuals serve as advocates at the state level for adult education.
- F. Representatives of businesses that are very involved in the adult education programs are the prime advocates during state advocacy campaigns. They provide the direct briefings for state legislators on the need for additional state resources for adult education.
- G. Governor issues a special report to the business and industry community on the advantages of connecting with adult education programs through on-site programs or participation of employees at the local adult education site.

Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable

Often Massachusetts business and labor partners on specific workplace education projects make calls at budget time. Many have policies that prohibit or limit their participation in public policy advocacy—decisions are made elsewhere in the corporation. On both sides MA advocates rely mostly on industry associations like AIM (Associated Industries of MA), the MA Lodging Association, etc. and on the AFL-CIO or regional labor organizations, not on individual companies and union locals. These industry associations make calls and write letters every year. During the 2001 state budget crisis, several business and labor representatives spoke at a press conference at the State House explicitly on behalf of ABE. Among them were the Carpenters and Teamsters. They ran ESOL classes privately but believed a publicly funded ABE system was important.

Emerson Process Mgt./Fisher and Iowa Valley Community College

In 2007 a group of Iowa community leaders and advocates were invited to a meeting hosted by one of the major employers to discuss their worker shortage. There is a significant Hispanic population in the community and the industry wondered how to reach out to individuals in that sector. A program was developed and then refined the second time it was offered. Currently, the company and Iowa Valley Community College both recruit for and market the program. Individuals are instructed to come to one of the community college centers and take an initial math assessment. Those who do not perform well are offered a math refresher course and allowed to retest. If they reach a score, determined by the industry, they are then given a series of technical assessments.

Those who score high enough are referred to one of the temporary employment agencies to apply for a position with the company. The company will interview all who apply and hire a group of 8–15 individuals who then enter a short-term non-credit certificate Machine Operator Training at the community college. While they are in the full-time training for 7 weeks they are being paid by the company. The program consists of intensive math instruction, workplace success skills, and technical machinist skills. If students pass the course with an 80% pass rate they are retained by the company for a 30 day probation period. Students could also enroll in the two-year diploma program at the community college instead of going to work.

At the end of that time if they have been successful on the job they are hired as permanent employees by the company. The classes are held at the community college and on-site at the industry. The industry has donated equipment to the college for a lab experience, and allows one of the employees to help teach with the community college instructors. It is a beneficial partnership and a huge commitment on the part of the company to help unskilled and under-skilled individuals attain meaningful employment while addressing a skill shortage in the industry.