

Report highlights Wash. job skills gap

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A group of Washington State business leaders gathered in Olympia Thursday to raise awareness for what they describe as a statewide skills gap that makes it difficult to find qualified candidates to hire.

"Washington State is struggling to find qualified workers to fill jobs in healthcare, sales and construction management, finance, architecture, engineering, and Information Technology," said Brad Jurkovich, Principal at Fisher-Jurkovich Public Affairs.

Jurkovich was joined by Kathy Lombardo, former Senior Vice President of CH2M Hill Engineering and independent consultant, and Kris Johnson, Vice President of Operations at the Association of Washington Business (AWB) at AWB's headquarters in Olympia to announce the release of a report entitled Ensuring Washington State's Global Success. The report was compiled by America's Edge, a national non-profit organization that aims to strengthen businesses and the economy through investments in children and youth.

According to the report:

- Many students are graduating high school without the skills they need for college and career. In fact, only 39 percent of Washington class of 2013 graduates taking the ACT college admissions test met college readiness benchmarks in all four core areas tested: English, math, reading, and science. In addition, only 21 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree;
- Between 2013 and 2023, Washington jobs requiring a bachelor's degree are expected to grow 18 percent faster than jobs for high school dropouts. In addition, 47 percent of positions will require post-secondary education in those fields that are expected to have the highest deficits of skilled workers through 2023;
- Students that participated in innovative high school models, such as career academies, earned more and were more productive than those who did not participate in such programs. In addition, students of career academies were twice as likely as their peers to be working in computer, engineering or media technology sectors eight years after graduation, which will increase the supply of STEM workers.

The complete report is available online at americasedge.org.