

*Testimony by Dr. Charles H. Mitchell, Chancellor of Seattle Community Colleges  
Presented to  
The Field Hearing of the United States Senate H.E.L.P. Subcommittee on Employment and  
Workforce Safety  
South Seattle Community College  
November 28, 2007*

Good morning. My name is Dr. Charles Mitchell and I am Chancellor of the Seattle Community College District. I am pleased to be able to appear before the Subcommittee on Employment and Workforce Safety to present the perspective of the Seattle Community Colleges, as well as the community and technical colleges of Washington state.

I would like to first start by providing some background information about Washington's 34 community and technical colleges and their role in Washington state's economy. To give you a sense of the scope of the role of community and technical colleges in Washington's higher education system, in Fall 2006:

- More than 250,000 students enrolled in Washington's community and technical colleges (the colleges serve approximately 500,000 students annually, or about 60 percent of all students enrolled in Washington's higher education system)
- Almost 86,000 of these students were enrolled in workforce education courses. Workforce education students were older (median age 29) with almost 36,000 students enrolled full time (42 percent).
- Almost 65,000 students were enrolled in academic transfer programs. Transfer-bound students were typically young (median age 21) and enrolled full time (about 60 percent).
- Approximately 33 percent of transfer students and 14 percent of workforce education students were enrolled in pre-college courses to improve their math, reading, writing or study skills.
- Approximately 20,000 students were enrolled in basic skills training.

When we look at our workforce programs, we see the critical role that community and technical colleges play in Washington's economy. In responding to workforce needs, community and technical colleges offer a broad array of programs. They range from traditional transfer degree programs to highly sophisticated technical training programs that prepare students for high-wage jobs, to basic education and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. An increasing number of our students are "reverse transfers": people who have completed baccalaureate programs and decide to enroll at a community college to pick up specific occupational skills in order to work in new occupational fields.

At the Seattle Community Colleges, we educate more than 50,000 students annually at our three colleges, a vocational institute and five specialized training centers throughout Seattle. With more than 2,400 faculty and staff, we are one of the largest operating organizations in Seattle, providing a significant economic benefit to the region. We prepare students to successfully transfer to four-year institutions, successfully enter the workforce, gain basic skills training, and continue life-long learning.

We pride ourselves in our focus on diversity and are leaders in addressing the educational needs for students of color. Seattle is highly diverse, with residents reporting more than 100 different ancestries and speaking multiple languages. Reflecting this diversity, almost half of the students at the Seattle

Community Colleges (49%) are students of color and we transfer more students of color and international students to the University of Washington than any other higher education institute.

I would like to turn now to four key issues that I submit to the Subcommittee for consideration:

1. Current and future employer needs for highly skilled workers in Washington state
2. Pathways that engage students in high school, prepare them for postsecondary education and career training, and lead to family-wage jobs with good benefits
3. Successful partnerships that help youth gain career-building skills and that develop a supply of highly skilled workers for employers
4. Ways the federal government can serve as a catalyst in making connections between high school and post-graduation opportunities for students

### ***1. Current and future employer needs for highly skilled workers in Washington state***

Washington is the nation's leading state in international trade per capita, with one in three jobs tied to international trade. We are truly a globally competitive state in that we export three times as much as the average state and our total trade is more than two times of the average state. Washington's economy is a leader on many measures, including our favorable business climate, level of innovation, and attractiveness to new business ventures and start-ups.

While we enjoy one of the strongest economies in our nation today, our industries and businesses are experiencing severe shortages of skilled workers in key industries, impacting our economic prosperity. Jobs in demand requiring a community college level education include computer support specialists, health care professionals, aircraft manufacturers, mechanics and service technicians, and those working in the construction trades.

As the Subcommittee's research noted, this past spring there were more than 87,000 open positions and 148,000 unemployed people throughout Washington state. This shortage of skilled workers will continue to increase due to demographic changes, in particular, retiring baby boomers and an increasingly diverse population with greater educational needs.

In 2005, more than 22,000 Washington employers (11 percent) had trouble finding workers with either a professional-technical certificate or two-year degree. In particular, employers say that skills shortages were hurting their businesses by limiting output or sales, lowering productivity, and reducing product quality. And one-third of businesses report that the skills required to adequately perform even production or support jobs had increased over the last three years and that the need for workers with postsecondary training will continue to increase.

Some level of postsecondary education is now necessary for a job that pays a living wage. At a minimum, research by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges has shown that one year of postsecondary education and a certificate is necessary. Compared with students who earned fewer than ten college credits, those who took at least one year's worth of college-credit courses and earned a credential had significantly higher earnings, up to \$8,500 more annually.

Our community and technical colleges play a critically important role in addressing these issues and ensuring that we have a skilled workforce. We see this in our efforts to make sure that every student is ready for college. Within three years following high school graduation, about half (47 percent) of all high school graduates have enrolled at a community or technical college in Washington. We have more work to do, however. Compared with other states, Washington ranks poorly in the percent of students enrolling

in college directly from high school and in the percentage of ninth graders who complete an associate degree or higher.

We know that we face challenges in filling those jobs that require specialized skills unless our colleges and our business industries make major investments. Better preparation for high school students is one part of the solution, yet training more high school graduates alone will not meet Washington's job skills gap.

Now, our challenge is that in Washington we have 1.4 million individuals between the ages of 25 and 49 with a high school degree or less. This is equivalent to 10 years of graduating classes from all of our public high schools. Many of the individuals in the cohort of 25-49 years of age are people of color and people with ESL instructional needs. These are the students that we are working with and it is imperative that we are successful in bringing these individuals to our colleges and enrolling them in our workforce programs.

## ***2. Pathways that engage students in high school, prepare them for postsecondary education and career training, and lead to family-wage jobs with good benefits***

Washington's community and technical colleges have undertaken a number of initiatives to improve student pathways, including pre-college courses, the Transition Mathematics Project, the Running Start program, the Opportunity Grant program, and the Integrated Basic English and Skills Training (I-BEST) program. We have comprehensive articulation agreements with our four-year colleges and institutions and are one of several states to offer four-year applied baccalaureate degrees at our community and technical colleges. The federal government also plays an important role through the support provided by Department of Education programs and the Department of Labor's Community-based Job Training Grant.

Despite increasing demand for skilled workers with postsecondary training or education, recent high school graduates are not prepared to take college level courses and about half of all high school students entering our colleges require pre-college (or developmental) coursework. While the need for pre-college education programs at the postsecondary level is a significant policy issue, pre-college education is indispensable, given the overall level of the nation's educational system today and the demographics of the college population. It is important to remember that pre-college programs serve far more than just recent high school graduates, and that the need for remediation is not always reflective of the quality of current high school education.

To address the need for better college-level math preparation, the Washington State Transition Mathematics Project (TMP) has designed standards with teachers and faculty from high schools, community colleges and universities to help students meet admission requirements and avoid remediation.

Washington's highly successful Running Start program allows high school students to begin their college studies while still enrolled in high school, greatly shortening the time required to earn a post-secondary degree. At the Seattle Community Colleges, we are pursuing these and other articulation initiatives with the Seattle Public Schools to successfully enroll high school graduates in our vocational and academic transfer programs.

In the last legislative session, the Washington Legislature provided enhanced funding for two highly effective programs that get students into the workplace: the Opportunity Grant program and the I-BEST program. Based on Georgia's successful Hope Grant Program, Opportunity Grants provide educational access and support for low-income adults to progress further and faster along demand career pathways.

Opportunity Grant funding is used to provide eligible students with tuition and fee waivers, books, childcare support, and a variety of student wrap-around support services.

The I-BEST program is an effective instructional approach that pairs ESL/adult basic education instructors and professional-technical instructors in the classroom to concurrently provide students with literacy education and workforce skills. For instance, North Seattle Community College's I-BEST Accounting Paraprofessional program provides practical training to prepare ESL students for work as bookkeeping, accounting or office clerks. Students will receive support from ESL faculty while they complete four quarters (62 credits) of accounting and business courses. Similarly, South Seattle Community College has a large immigrant student population seeking job skills training. To address the needs of these students, the college has developed innovative health care job training courses that infuse ESL instruction into the curriculum.

Comprehensive articulation agreements also support students successfully transferring from our community and technical colleges to four-year institutions. Almost 500 Seattle District students transferred to the University of Washington Seattle campus in 2005-06 and about 12,000 students transferred statewide to four-year institutions. This is a significant pipeline for first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color. Statewide, students are transferring from community and technical colleges into high demand fields: 39% of math, science, engineering, engineering tech and computer science baccalaureates, and 55% of math and science teacher baccalaureates are two-year college transfer students.

In addition to hosting four-year university degree programs at our campuses, another important initiative at our community and technical colleges is applied baccalaureate degrees. South Seattle Community College is one of four community and technical colleges statewide authorized to offer an applied baccalaureate degree in Washington state. This initiative will further enhance pathways for students to gain the higher education skills needed to succeed in high-demand occupational fields. Other innovative programs include Seattle Central Community College's participation in the Lumina Foundation's *Achieving the Dream* program, and development of a new Employment Resource Center at North Seattle Community College that will co-locate several state agencies to support better integration of employment, educational and social service providers.

Federal programs are critical to community college initiatives to improve student success. The Department of Education's TRIO program is an important resource that provides early intervention and support services to encourage disadvantaged youth to complete high school and enter college. All of our colleges have benefited from the TRIO program. Seattle Central Community College has participated in the TRIO Student Services Support program since its inception and the colleges also participate in the Upward Bound and Talent Search programs. For instance, each year the TRIO Talent Search program provides educational opportunities to more than 600 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade school students from seven schools in the Puget Sound region. More than 3,500 students have benefited from the Talent Search program in its seven year history at South Seattle Community College. We have also received federal Title III funding to increase the number of ESL students transitioning into college-level coursework. Title III funding has been critical for non-native English speakers to succeed: 85% of the nursing students at South Seattle Community College were enrolled in the ESL program. In addition, many community colleges are also deeply involved with their local school systems through the Department of Education's GEAR UP program. Finally, the Seattle Community Colleges receive significant financial resources under the Perkins Act to support career and technical education that prepares students both for further education and for the workforce.

Another federal program, the Department of Labor's Community-based Job Training Grant, has provided \$2.8 million to the Seattle Community Colleges to train more than 700 students in high-demand health

care occupations. The capacity-building program will have long-term positive effects for our health care programs. As you can see, federal support is a critical component of our workforce development strategy.

**3. *Successful partnerships that help youth gain career-building skills and that develop a supply of highly skilled workers for employers***

As I have discussed, we have extensive partnerships with our public schools, universities, workforce development agencies, federal agencies, and business, labor and industry partners. In particular, community and technical colleges in Washington state have close relationships with business, labor and industry through our program Technical Advisory Committees, through close coordination with our workforce investment system, and through professional organizations, associations and state economic development agencies.

Recognizing the need to fill high-skill, high-demand occupations with qualified workers, the Washington State Legislature allocated significant high demand funding to community and technical colleges statewide in the right areas – science, technology, engineering, math, health care, and manufacturing. This included funding for an additional 700 FTES statewide and 55 FTES for the Seattle District. At the Seattle Community Colleges, we are using high-demand funding to respond to critical shortages of skilled staff in health care through our Health Care Education Institute and building successful career pathways for our students in a variety of high-demand fields.

**4. *Ways the federal government can serve as a catalyst in making connections between high school and post-graduation opportunities for students***

Several trends affect how we deliver training and instruction:

- Globalization and increasing international competition—nations with strong educational systems are going to be the ultimate economic leaders
- Rising skill requirements across the economy, ranging from manufacturing to professional services—jobs that pay a living wage increasingly require postsecondary education
- Rapidly increasing costs of education—rising costs of tuition, textbooks and living costs are far outpacing income growth in a period when advanced skills training and education requirements are increasing
- Increasing diversity in our population—Washington state will become increasingly diverse, with the highest growth rates among first generation students and students of color.

In response, community and technical colleges are:

- Restructuring instructional programs and classrooms to keep pace with global trends and new learning modes
- Launching new teacher-training partnerships with four-year colleges and universities to support student success
- Searching for new funding streams to ensure our students have the resources they need to successfully meet these challenges, especially first-generation and low-income students.
- Developing innovative instructional programs that focus on first-generation and non-English speaking students with effective ESL instruction. The Seattle Community Colleges are leaders in offering health care training using this method of instruction.

I would commend to the Committee the need to more closely examine these trends, examine how Washington's community and technical colleges are responding innovatively to these issues, and consider federal support for our efforts.

Congress plays a critical role in identifying and supporting programs that have been proven to increase the success of community and technical college students. The Federal TRIO programs, created within Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, are educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their intent is to provide equal educational opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic circumstance. As I noted previously, we have several TRIO programs underway at the Seattle Community Colleges; unfortunately, the programs have not received sufficient funding to keep pace with inflation and rapidly increasing higher education costs. This has resulted in drastic program cuts in staff development, student support services, and other program costs, with a likely reduction in program enrollment rates. Increased support is essential to maintain the quality of this highly effective program.

In addition, funding provided through the Department of Labor Community-based Job Training Grant has allowed the Seattle Community Colleges to substantially increase our capacity to serve students in high-demand health care training programs. Designed to build long-term capacity, these federal resources are a critical catalyst in addressing long-term workforce development needs and we hope the program continues. And continued support under the Perkins Act is vital to the long-term success of our career and technical education initiatives with our K-12 partners.

Finally, I would like to point out that the singular importance of federal financial aid and the need to make it more accessible for workforce-bound students. A recent study conducted by the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board found that the financial costs of tuition, fees and living expenses, coupled with lack of information about training opportunities and financial aid, were the greatest barriers to student success.<sup>1</sup> I would recommend that Congress consider ways to further consolidate and simplify the delivery of workforce education financial aid.

In closing, at the Seattle Community Colleges we are “democratizing education” by promoting diversity and excellence for all our students...whether it’s an immigrant learning a new field while undertaking English instruction, a transfer student intent on earning a baccalaureate degree, a dislocated worker seeking job retraining, or a retiree preparing for a second career.

Thank you for your invitation to speak to the commission on behalf of Washington’s community and technical colleges. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

---

<sup>1</sup> The report, *Workforce Education Financial Aid and Student Access and Retention*, may be retrieved online at: <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/Tab5-WorkforceEducationFinancialAid.doc>.