

2018

CHAIR'S REPORT



Since 1983 the Washington Roundtable has brought the state's senior business leaders together to effect positive change on public policy issues that are important to supporting economic vitality and fostering opportunity for all Washingtonians. We are currently focusing in two areas: promoting statewide economic growth and preparing Washington's young people for success in their home state. As we mark our organization's 35th anniversary, I am pleased by the progress made and the continued commitment to a better future.

Washington is thriving with 740,000 projected job openings by 2021, vibrant communities, and a diverse mix of market-leading employers. According to the [2018 Benchmarks for a Better Washington](#), our state continues to be a national leader for job creation and innovation. However, the statewide data masks a complex regional narrative in which prosperity is spread unevenly, and some communities—including many of Washington's rural areas—are outright struggling. Across the state, communities need infrastructure, workforce talent, and a policy climate that supports innovation, trade, and investment. We examine these challenges and propose a framework for diversified and inclusive growth in our 2018 report, "[Unlocking Washington's Full Potential](#)."

One thing is certain: A postsecondary credential—such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate—is essential to compete for most jobs available in our state. The hard truth is that Washington trails most states in building a culture that promotes—and an education pipeline that supports— post-high school education for all students. An estimated 40 percent of Washington high school students go on to attain a post-high school credential by age 26. Our goal is to raise that number to 70 percent by the high school class of 2030. We outline how to get there in our 2018 Washington Kids for Washington Jobs report, "[The Path to 70% Credential Attainment for Washington Students](#)."

Our goals for economic growth and student preparation are ambitious, and our state is making progress. Legislative action this year to resolve water rights issues and invest in rural economic development and state tourism are important steps in supporting growth. Significant new education investments will provide better educational supports for our students and increase access to postsecondary education and training.

This report further details 2018 outcomes aligned with our priorities. I encourage you to review it and hope you will engage with us as we look to the future. There is much more work to be done to make Washington a better place to live, work, and do business. We're excited to focus on that work, together.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betsy Cowles".

Betsy Cowles
Chairman, Cowles Company
2018 Chair, Washington Roundtable

EDUCATION: PRIORITIES & OUTCOMES

Pursue the highest leverage opportunities available to reach the following goal: By 2030, 70 percent of Washington high school students will go on to attain a postsecondary credential by age 26.

Drastically increasing enrollment of high school graduates into postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions is essential to reaching our 70 percent goal. To that end, lawmakers this year increased funding for the State Need Grant, a financial aid program for low-income students, and expanded eligibility for the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship and College Bound Scholarship programs. They also provided additional funding for computer science degrees at the University of Washington.

Maintain the state's commitment to rigorous learning standards, assessments, and high school graduation requirements.

The state's competency-based high school graduation requirements have been in place for more than a decade and, in that time, graduation rates have increased for all categories of students. In order to maximize their impact, legislators must ensure that these policies are implemented in a consistent manner. We commend the Legislature for maintaining these policies and students for continuing to rise to the challenge of meeting these requirements.

In implementing the K-12 education funding plan adopted in 2017, continue to direct resources to the students most in need and drive improvements at low-performing schools.

Lawmakers made adjustments to the 2017 McCleary package, including providing full funding for school employee salaries in 2018-19. These changes brought the state into full compliance with the Washington Supreme Court's McCleary ruling and that case is now resolved. We applaud lawmakers for their tenacity and commitment to provide better educational supports for Washington students.

Ensure Washington's youngest learners enter school ready to learn and excel.

The state continues to invest in high-quality early learning options for low-income students, with the intent of fully funding the state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program by 2022-23.

ECONOMIC VITALITY: PRIORITIES & OUTCOMES

Eliminate duplicative regulation and ease regulatory burdens, particularly in rural areas.

Lawmakers addressed water rights issues that arose because of the Washington Supreme Court's decision in the Hirst case. The state also committed to appropriating \$300 million for water mitigation projects through 2033.

Support policies that promote economic development and job growth, particularly in non-urban regions.

Lawmakers took multiple steps toward promoting diversified and inclusive growth, including:

- Requiring adoption of rules for the use of mass timber products for residential and commercial building construction, which has the potential to catalyze manufacturing and spur job creation in rural areas.
- Creating a program that will provide scholarships to rural students who are pursuing postsecondary education in high-demand fields.
- Investing in a statewide tourism marketing fund focused in part on rural, tourism-dependent counties.

Promote transportation infrastructure asset preservation and maintenance.

The state continues to implement the 2015 Connecting Washington package, which is providing \$16 billion in new transportation investments. As part of that implementation, lawmakers this year made additional investments to preserve and maintain our state's road and bridge networks.



The Washington Roundtable is a nonprofit organization comprised of senior executives of major private sector employers in Washington state. Founded in 1983, the Roundtable works to effect positive change on the public policy issues that are most important to supporting state economic vitality and fostering opportunity for Washingtonians. We are committed to making Washington a better place to live, work and do business.

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