

## **Community and Technical Colleges: A Win for the Students, A Win for the State**

In recent weeks, both the governor of our state and the president of our country have identified higher education as key to ending our economic recession and staying competitive in the global economy. We couldn't agree more.

We are the presidents of the "Five Star Consortium," a coalition of community and technical colleges that jointly educate 80,000 residents in Snohomish County and north King County. Our students - many of whom are working parents, non-native English speakers or recently unemployed - place their dreams in our hands. They rely on us to prepare them for careers in our region's high-growth industries like information technology, renewable energy, and nursing. All of our programs, from English as a Second Language to basic education to four-year university transfer preparation, are designed to serve as their bridge to opportunity. Community and technical colleges have done this exceptionally well. For example, 38% of those graduating from Washington's public universities last year transferred from a state community and technical college. But the bridge is currently under more stress than it can support.

Over the last three academic years, a record-breaking number of students have enrolled at local community and technical colleges to take advantage of our high quality programs at less than half the tuition charged by our public four-year universities. The fact is our enrollment levels have shot up at the same time our state funding has been slashed. The National Center for Higher Education Management ranked Washington's community and technical colleges third in the nation in terms of the number of degrees or certificates earned relative to the amount of state funding it receives. While we are proud of this accomplishment, the trend is not sustainable. The demand for our services is still on the rise, and more budget cuts loom ahead.

We understand the state faces a financial crisis and are prepared to accept our share of cuts. As it stands, Governor Gregoire has proposed another reduction to the community and technical colleges for the coming biennial which translates into a 23% cut to community and technical college budgets since 2009. To help offset these cuts, the Governor's proposal authorizes a 10% tuition increase.

Most of our legislators recognize the critical role that community and technical colleges play in our lives, in our communities, and in our economy, and we ask that they band together to minimize additional cuts while giving individual colleges the flexibility to determine where to make them. We appreciate the funding included in the Governor's budget to support successful programs like the Student Achievement Initiative, which rewards colleges for achieving higher completion rates for students. And we hope the legislature will find a way to restore funding for the Worker Retraining program, which has been instrumental in getting unemployed individuals back into the workforce.

Insufficient investment in our state's higher education system will have enormous and long-lasting negative impacts on our economy and on our people. We encourage all Washingtonians to write or email their state legislators to let them know how important it is to maintain the community and technical college bridge (1-800-562-6000 and [www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx](http://www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx)).

Eric Murray, President, Cascadia Community College

Jean Hernandez, President, Edmonds Community College

David Beyer, President, Everett Community College

David Woodall, President, Lake Washington Technical College

Lee Lambert, President, Shoreline Community College