



Interview with Governor Chris Gregoire

What are the top reasons why you, as Governor of the State of Washington, support Career and Technical Education in public schools?

You know, all too often we think of education as the way in which we grew up, which typically is, I've got a book and I've got a teacher and I'm going to sit in a lecture and listen.

Today students learn, oftentimes, a whole lot differently. With a hands-on approach, it's thrilling, it's exciting. Learning math and science skills in particular, which I think is the language of international competition, is much better with a hands-on approach.

The hands-on approach inspires them to go on to get an associate's degree or even a bachelor's degree.

I give my example where if you told me how to change a flat tire, and then six months from now I had a flat tire, I bet I'll struggle. If, on the other hand, you helped me actually change a flat tire, six months from now I bet I can change that flat tire.

That's the concept here! And so that hands-on approach is really what's getting these students involved in 21st century kinds of jobs with the skills that they need, in a way that is fun and exciting, so they don't say, "I don't need this. I'm droppin' out."

The difference, by the way, between dropping out and getting, for example, an AA degree is about \$20,000 a year to these students. It makes a world of difference.

The high-demand fields — healthcare, building, green building in particular — are part of our economic future. These are the kind of jobs that are out there for the future for these students.

I think many of our students do much better when we invite them into the educational system through skill-setting.

Career and Technical Education survived dramatic budget cuts for the next biennium. Why do you think CTE was protected by the 2009 Legislature?

If you look over the last four years, we have increased investment in skill centers for this kind of educational opportunity dramatically.

I think we now have a legislative body that gets it. They understand that this is the future for the students and our economic future as a state. What's going to give these students the ability to compete in what is a highly competitive marketplace on the globe.

If we want to aspire to be one of the greenest states in America, with green technology and green jobs, school is where it starts. We set a goal of 20,000 green jobs by 2020. We already have 47,000! Because now we understand that it's the electrician who is learning new skills. It's that tradesperson who is learning new skills. So that all starts here and now.

We now have a commitment from the Legislature. In the worst of times we will maintain our investment, and in the best of times, we're going to do even greater.

If money for Career and Technical Education were plentiful, what improvements or expansions would you recommend for the Career and Technical Education program, and why?

I would invest in many more skill centers. To expose many more students, to offer that to every student who wanted it. Many of our students would flourish with that educational opportunity.

They may go well beyond an AA. They may go on to a BA, to a Master's or a Ph.D., but it's because they got so excited at that level and they saw how to learn.

What role should Career and Technical Education have in the economic recovery of our state? What role should Career and Technical Education play in the development of a green technology economy in our state?

We're the most trade-dependent state in the nation. As a result, our imports and exports are critical. We've got the capacity in this state to export green technology. All we need is the capacity inside the state to create it.

Let me give you an example. A couple of years ago we said, we need to invest in wind, and so we gave an economic incentive. We weren't producing any wind power back then.

Today, we are the fifth-largest producer of wind power in America. That's thousands of jobs! It's jobs at our ports, where some of the materials come in. It's linesmen, it's those who are constructing, those who are maintaining. It's all of that.

So I believe that's what starts in Career and Technical Education — the ability for us to look at 21st century, new-economy jobs, *and* at the old economy. There is a huge demand out there now in the healthcare arena. We have to import some people because we don't have the resources in our state.

Here's an opportunity for us to give those good jobs to our own students. To give them 21st century jobs so they can compete anywhere. And so that we can have an economy that will be much stronger than any other state, and competitive globally. A green economy, in my opinion, is where it's at.

How can parents and the labor, business and elected leaders in our communities help to build up and ensure the success of CTE programs?

I don't think we would have the success that we have if we didn't have business and labor involved in helping us in the educational arena.

And parents! Parents need to see the excitement that's created in a student. They need to see what a hands-on educational approach can do. Once exposed to it, I can't imagine a parent, like myself with two daughters, that wouldn't encourage my student, my daughter, to get involved and get engaged.

So, it's about business being supportive. It's about labor offering a track, which they do now. Those students who graduate and are involved in the skill centers can go into an apprenticeship program and graduate with an AA degree and have a good family wage job the moment they get out of that apprenticeship program.

That's the support that we need from labor, from parents. Obviously if they could just see it I know they'd be as thrilled or even more-so than the students.

And then there's the educational system as a whole. Seeing that there are different styles of teaching and there are different styles of learning. Let's key into that child. Let's give that child what he or she needs, rather than what we thought we needed when we were students.

If our educational system is supportive of that learner-focused kind of education, our skill centers are going to flourish.

Do you have other messages about Career and Technical Education that you would like to deliver to middle and high school students and their parents?

The only thing I would say is, take a look. Go visit! I've done it. It's really exciting to see the students engaged and involved, and how passionate they feel about the education they're getting. When you talk with some of them, they will tell you that they were struggling in, maybe, math. But here they were learning it in an applied way, and they saw the value of it.

Many of our businesses today are giving rudimentary math tests for entry-level jobs. And students can't pass them. They can't pass them because it's not about rote memory, it's about relationships and understanding and context. Math competency is important no matter what you do!

Career and Technical Education offers the opportunity for us to have every single one of our students skilled in math and science. Skilled and passionate about what they want to do and about the opportunities that are available to them.

So, go take a look for yourself. If you do, I'll bet you'll be as big a cheerleader as I am for this kind of education.