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Higher Education Coordinating Board voices alarm at continued state funding cuts

OLYMPIA – The 10 citizen members of the Higher Education Coordinating Board, which provides coordination and oversight for the state's higher education system, say they are 'deeply troubled' by the state's inability to deliver on its central planning goal of raising educational attainment.

In forwarding the 2012 update of the state's Strategic Master Plan to the Governor, board members emphasized the state is losing ground in efforts to increase the percentage of citizens who have completed postsecondary education: apprenticeships, certificates, or degrees.

Washington is 9,000 degrees short of being on track to raise annual bachelor's degree production to 39,000 — one of the principal strategies approved in the 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington, board members noted.

Progress to increase the number of mid-level and advanced degrees and certificates has been equally stymied by deep budget cuts over the last four years.

In a letter sent with the 2012 Plan Update to the Governor, legislators, education stakeholders, and the media, board members stated they could no longer sit by quietly watching the erosion of 'our excellent higher education system... and not raise our collective voice in alarm.'

The grave possibility of continued deep budget cuts this year, continued reductions in student financial aid, and unprecedented tuition increases are creating a firestorm that is reducing academic options, limiting access, and eroding affordability for thousands of students, board members stated.

"When we cut higher education funding, we disinvest in a critical economic priority and we abdicate our responsibility to offer and incent educational opportunity to all our citizens," the letter said.

The citizen board is charged by statute to represent the broad public interest in higher education above the interests of the individual institutions. In existence since 1985, the board will complete its work later this spring, when it is replaced by a new council composed of institutional representatives and citizen members under legislation currently being considered.

[Strategic Master Plan Update 2012](#)

[Board's Letter to Governor and Legislators](#)