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## Editorials / Opinion

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### **Editorial: Legislature needs to fund more seats in high-demand fields**

Washington state must unblock the pipeline of workers for future computer, engineering and medical jobs.

Seattle Times Editorial

WASHINGTON state's economic recovery is running into a training problem. It is urgent that the Legislature tackle this.

In February, almost four years into what's officially an economic recovery, 259,000 people in Washington were looking for work. That's 7.5 percent of the workforce. At the same time, according to a survey done for the Washington Roundtable by the Boston Consulting Group, about 25,000 jobs in Washington were unfilled for at least three months because employers could not find people with the right skills.

That's only part of it. There is an invisible part, not measured. Forty percent of the employers surveyed said they had moved work out of the state because of the skills gap.

"There's no fanfare when this happens," one tech executive told the surveyors. "There's no media, no outcry. It just goes."

In the next four years, the survey found, the state's large employers expect to create thousands more jobs in health sciences, engineering and computer science.

The survey also found there would not be enough people to take those jobs. Yet in 2012, the study says, the University of Washington, Washington State University and Western Washington University denied 1,200 qualified students admission into engineering and computer science because there were not enough seats.

Hundreds of other students were sidelined from health-sciences careers because there were not enough clinical placements.

This is penny-wise and pound-foolish. It limits the future. The Legislature needs to awaken itself and fund as many seats in these disciplines as the youth of Washington can ably fill.

That solves only part of the problem.

K-12 schools and the community colleges need to encourage more students in math and the sciences, so that more will be knocking on the universities' doors and will be ready. That means recruiting high-quality teachers.

And — what will be painful to some — the community-college system needs to discourage, through its funding decisions, programs in fields where there is no work.

The alternative is to be stuck with tens of thousands of unnecessarily unemployed.