

What is I-BEST?

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) pairs adult education or English as a Second Language (ESL) with workforce training. Students learn literacy and workplace skills at the same time. Ten colleges piloted I-BEST for three years. The programs are now rolling out at community and technical colleges across the state.

There are 70 I-BEST programs at 32 community and technical colleges. More than half of the students enrolled in all these programs are ESL students:

Healthcare and Office Support/Technology — more than half of all I-BEST programs

Additional career tracks include:

- Manufacturing/Trades
- Commercial Driver's License/Transportation
- Early Childhood Education/Childcare
- Architecture/Engineering
- Automotive/Engine Repair
- Corrections/Law Enforcement

I-BEST students meet the same rigorous academic standards and pass the same industry certifications as traditional workforce students.

Why I-BEST?

The influx of non-English speakers, combined with the number of adults that lack a high school diploma, creates a higher demand for adult literacy and job skills training. The goal is to get students to the first economic tipping point – 45 college-level credits and a vocational certificate. This allows people to get on a path to earn a living wage for themselves and their families.

What's different about I-BEST?

Adult literacy and vocational instructors work together to develop and deliver instruction. Students spend less time in school, demonstrate more skills gains and have clear pathways from entry-level jobs to higher skilled and better paying careers in demand fields. Colleges provide higher levels of support and student services to address the needs of non-traditional students.

What were early I-BEST results?

Students in I-BEST pilots earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete a workforce education program than other ESL students with the same goals. In I-BEST programs created since system-wide implementation of the model, some I-BEST students report higher rates of retention and completion, and earn higher grades than both other ESL students and traditional workforce students.

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)

Student Success

Wood Ming Tam and Shan Tam, recent immigrants from China, learned about Pierce College and the I-BEST program on base at Fort Lewis while Wood Tam was serving in the military.

“I wanted to improve my English and train for a job that helps people,” said Shan Tam who chose the Certified Nursing Assistant I-BEST program. “My ESL teacher really helped me with my pronunciation, as well as with the medical terminology, which she knew well since she had been working in the field,” Shan said. “I learned during my internship that seeing patients smile is really satisfying.”

Wood Tam enjoyed his military career and wanted to find a career that provided similar training. He decided to take classes in the I-BEST Corrections/Protection Officers program and is currently employed as a corrections officer at McNeil Island Correctional Facility. His goal is a career in law enforcement.



Wood Ming
Tam and
Shan Tam

“The most important thing that helped me succeed was the support from my ESL instructor,” said Wood. “I could ask as many questions as I wanted. By the end of the quarter I was able to write a report with less errors,” he said. In addition, Wood cited the help he received from his criminal justice instructor who helped him prepare for the interview and online job application.

Early success indicators

Renton Technical College

Licensed Practical Nurse – combining ESL, ABE and traditional students

ESL students:

- Earned more credits than their traditional counterparts (288 credits for I-BEST students compared to 190 for traditional workforce students)
- Completed at a higher rate (98% compared to 88%)
- Had higher GPAs (3.45 compared to 2.74)

Tacoma Community College

Data Accounting Program – combining ESL, ABE and traditional students

ESL students in college-level Accounting 110 course:

- 100% passed the course, compared to 47% of traditional workforce students
- Had higher GPAs (3.5 compared to 1.7)

Pierce College, Fort Steilacoom

Roofers’ Apprenticeship Program – all ESL students, mostly at the lowest level

- 60% gained one or more federal reading levels (a federal level equals approximately two grade levels)
- 40% gained one or more federal listening level (a federal level equals approximately two grade levels)
- 100% of the participants progressed in the apprenticeship program
- By the end of the quarter, students were earning \$15 per hour in the workforce. Upon completion of the two-year program, students are journey union roofers who earn \$25 per hour.