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I-BEST named a *Bright Idea* by Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government

OLYMPIA, Wash. – The Washington Community and Technical College system's I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) program recently received a 2011 Bright Ideas award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard.

I-BEST was [one of 36 initiatives recognized nationwide](#) for addressing a host of pertinent issues, including health care, education, performance management, civic engagement, and service delivery. The programs were selected by an evaluation team of policy experts comprised of both academics and practitioners.

"This is a tremendous honor," said Charlie Earl, executive director of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. "Hats off to our colleges and to the dedicated faculty members who design and co-teach these programs."

I-BEST began as a pilot program in 2006 as a way to help basic skills students realize their goals faster. While more than half of all community and technical college students cite 'getting to work' as their reason for attending college, the college system was finding that only a small portion of those who started in Adult Basic Education (ABE) or English as a second language (ESL) were actually continuing on to college-level courses. I-BEST aimed to change that by challenging the traditional notion that students must complete all basic education before they can even start a vocational program. Instead, I-BEST pairs basic skills instruction with a vocational program so students can learn a skill while they are learning the basics.

"We want students to get excited about where their education will take them," Earl said. "I-BEST helps do that by providing pre-college education in tandem with occupational training. This way, students don't have to wait to prepare for a great job. They get to do that while they are also learning the basics."

In just five years, I-BEST has expanded to all 34 community and technical colleges and now serves more than 3,200 students.

Tina Bloomer, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges' lead on I-BEST since its inception, said she was delighted that I-BEST was named a 2011 Bright Idea.

"I-BEST creates opportunities for students to learn skills quickly and, therefore, enter the workforce quickly, which is what students want and what employers need," Bloomer said. "We know it's a good model, but it's an added bonus for the colleges and our system to be recognized by such a prestigious school."

Now in its second cycle, the Bright Ideas program is part of a broader initiative of the Innovations in American Government Awards program, which spotlights exemplary models of government innovation and advances efforts to address the nation's most pressing public concerns.

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