



# COUNCIL CONVERSATIONS

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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## **LETTER FROM WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL MEMBER**

*By Scott Brittain, District Projects Director for the Ferndale School District*

Oftentimes, before we begin an endeavor, we are asked to describe or define the work to be done. In the case of Washington's K-12 schools and of the Washington Student Achievement Council, the work itself is the work. In July of 2012, the Legislature put the Student Achievement Council in place to increase student success and provide support and advocacy for higher levels of educational attainment in Washington. Teachers at all levels in schools across our state come to work every day with that same purpose.

The Ferndale School District has taken this charge to heart and is working to make a difference every day. Students in our high schools begin with the expectation of graduating and also work toward completing college credit before they ever step across the stage at commencement. Students can leave high school having earned credits from the University of Washington and Central Washington University in pre-calculus, calculus, physics, biology, English, and Spanish. In addition, they have a choice of 17 Advanced Placement courses offered on our campuses.

In the next ten years, one goal of the Student Achievement Council is that all adults in Washington, ages 25–44, will have a high school diploma. For us to realize such an ambitious milestone, the high schools in our state need to have the same success criteria. The work of the Ferndale School District began this year with our Graduation Task Force. The group formed, urged on by both our superintendent and local school board, to make a difference in the lives of students. If even one student does not graduate from our high schools, we believe that is one too many.

So, like the Washington Student Achievement Council, over the course of the next ten years, the Ferndale School District plans to ensure that **all** students leave our schools with a high school diploma. After all, both in our district and for the Council, the work really is the work.

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*By Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.*

Washington Student Achievement Council staff continue to visit colleges and universities to view firsthand how policy and legislative recommendations impact access, affordability, and success. These campus visits are an essential part of our work to increase postsecondary student support and attainment.

Central Washington University hosted a productive, highly engaging, and mutually beneficial visit in May. Provost Dr. Marilyn Levine and her team provided Council staff with a comprehensive look at many aspects of CWU's programs and initiatives to increase access and attainment. CWU staff and leadership expressed a sincere commitment to increase access and support for students while also acknowledging the challenges inherent in reduced state investment.

Ongoing institutional outreach activities will inform the Council's 2014 Strategic Action Plan and 2015 legislative priorities. The 2014 Strategic Action Plan will build on the Council's [2013 Roadmap](#) report. The Council will adopt the action plan this fall in anticipation of a December delivery to the Legislature and the Governor.

## COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES ADVANCE ROADMAP TARGETS

*An Update from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges*

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) remains focused on advancing Roadmap targets. Recent achievements include:

- **Basic Education for Adults:** Population growth in the next two decades will occur mostly in regions with the lowest educational attainment. A new Adult Education Plan creates pathways to college and careers for this emerging workforce. Unlike traditional plans—which tend to view a high school credential as the finish line—the new plan moves students faster and more purposefully toward degrees and certificates that lead to higher education and family-wage jobs. Programs set clear goal lines from the very beginning and provide instruction in job- and college-related contexts. Programs serve adults with below-high-school-level academic skills or who need English language skills.
- **Workforce training:** SBCTC recently announced funding for 21 colleges to increase student capacity in high-demand aerospace programs. An important element of the Legislature's package to guarantee the Boeing 777X would be built in Washington, the \$8 million will create positions for more than 1,000 students.
- **Academic transfer:** In January 2015, 14 colleges will launch an online, competency-based business transfer degree—the first of its kind in our state's community and technical college system. Students will be taught by full-time, highly qualified instructors and will receive guidance from advisors. For working adults with knowledge under their belts, the program can offer a fast track to a bachelor's degree in business administration and the flexibility of studying from home.
- **Common Core:** Community and technical college presidents recently agreed to a policy with K-12 schools on how to use the 11th grade *Smarter Balanced Assessment* results as part of the placement process for students entering college directly from high school. The assessment measures students' progress toward achieving Common Core State Standards—rigorous math and English language arts standards adopted by most states.

## **GET PROGRAM CELEBRATES 529 COLLEGE SAVINGS DAY**

May 29 marked national *529 College Savings Day*, which aims to raise awareness of the need for families to begin saving for college when children are young in order to reduce reliance on costly student loans in the future. Why 529? This number represents the chapter of the IRS tax code that created 529 prepaid tuition plans and 529 college savings plans, which provide tax-advantaged ways for families to save for college.

To celebrate this special day, Washington's prepaid program—Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET)—secured a proclamation from Governor Inslee and hosted events at the Spokane YMCA, Olympia's Hands on Children's Museum, and the Imagine Children's Museum in Everett. The events, with fun activities for families and children, were an opportunity to learn more about GET and college savings, and to take advantage of a special GET enrollment incentive.

*529 College Savings Day* was an exciting wrap-up to another great year of helping Washington families save for future college expenses.

## **GEAR UP ANNUAL REPORT**

Washington State GEAR UP submitted its annual report to the U.S. Department of Education in April, documenting the successes of the program and its 28 partner school districts over the past year. With support from many strategic partners, including the University of Washington, College Success Foundation, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, GEAR UP served over 8,900 students.

The program aims to achieve three goals:

1. Increase academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education.
2. Increase high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates.
3. Increase student and family knowledge of the academic, social, financial, and metacognitive skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education, including financial and scholarship information.

During the federal reporting period:

- 3,880 students participated in tutoring or homework assistance for an average of 63.1 hours each.
- 2,124 students participated in comprehensive mentoring services for an average of 25.8 hours each.
- 2,929 students participated in one or more financial aid counseling or advising sessions.
- 2,726 students visited a college campus.

Washington State GEAR UP provides at least four professional development opportunities for school-based GEAR UP staff, administrators, teachers, and counselors each year. In May, staff met with schools to develop plans for the 2014-15 school year, focusing particularly on math completion and success. The program's goals include supporting students to complete algebra by the end of 9th grade and two additional years of advanced math by graduation. Staff will help school teams develop comprehensive plans that address GEAR UP goals and ensure students are prepared for postsecondary success.

## **COLLEGE BOUND UPDATE**

With the June 30 College Bound Scholarship deadline fast approaching for 8th grade students, this year's application numbers are strong. Of 36,200 eligible students, approximately 96 percent have applied to date.

To facilitate the sign-up process and help K-12 staff accurately monitor their students' status, IT staff at the Washington Student Achievement Council developed the Middle School Toolbox. The toolbox is practical and easy to navigate, making it a welcome and useful resource for all involved in the sign-up process. With the number of eligible students growing each year, the electronic toolbox is a valuable alternative to the cumbersome paper application process.

The College Bound Scholarship continues to be a very successful program. Approximately 76% of College Bound students in the Class of 2013 graduated from high school, compared to only 60% of other low-income students who did not sign up for the program.

## **GOOD NEWS ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES**

*By Jim Hull, Center for Public Education*

With 80 percent of students graduating within four years of entering high school, the class of 2012 achieved the highest on-time graduation rate in U.S. history, according to the 2014 [Building a Grad Nation](#) report.

After graduation rates languished in the low 70s for nearly four decades, rates have accelerated dramatically since 2006, improving by eight percentage points in just six years. According to the report, if this rate of improvement continues the national graduation rate will reach 90 percent by 2020, a goal of the authors of Grad Nation.

While attainment gaps remain, the gap is narrowing between traditionally disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. This is particularly true for the fastest growing group of students in our nation's schools, Hispanics, whose graduation rate jumped from 61 percent to 76 percent between 2006 and 2012. Black students made significant gains during this period as well, improving their graduation rate from 59 percent to 68 percent. During this same time period, white students saw their graduation rate improve from 80 percent to 85 percent. At these rates the attainment gap between Hispanic and white students will disappear within five years, and it would take another decade for the attainment gap between black and white students to close completely.

While this is certainly good news, it actually doesn't provide a complete picture of the success in raising high school graduation rates. This is because these are only on-time graduation rates and do not include those students who take longer than four years to earn a standard high school diploma. As The Center for Public Education found in our report about late high school graduates, [Better Late Than Never](#), our national high school graduation rate is likely about 5 percentage points higher if we include students who graduate within six years. This means that our public schools are likely graduating at least 85 percent of students. And since black and Hispanic students are more likely to graduate late than their white classmates, the attainment gap is likely to be narrower as well.