



COUNCIL CONVERSATIONS

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO FOSTER YOUTH PURSUING COLLEGE EDUCATION

Foster youth in Washington may not be aware of unique financial support available to them as they pursue their education. For example, the [Passport to College Promise Scholarship](#) assists with higher education costs such as tuition, books, housing, transportation, and some personal expenses. Passport students are eligible for specialized support services.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the College Success Foundation are developing an information campaign for Washington's students from foster care. This new communications campaign will provide students with information on education planning, financial aid programs for foster youth, and other resources. The information will reside on WSAC's www.ReadySetGrad.org website and will be introduced to college administrators, students, and supporters at the annual Passport to College State Conference in April 2016.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGE "FIT"

Submitted by the Independent Colleges of Washington

For the past five years, [the Independent Colleges of Washington](#) (ICW), education partners in Washington, and education leaders in the Legislature have been working diligently to help create a college-going culture among high school graduates. To be successful in this effort, it is critical that all partners develop a better understanding about the dynamics of student and college "fit." ICW secured a grant from the Council of Independent Colleges and recently completed a project that has helped inform middle and high school counselors about this topic.

The goal of the *Fit Matters* project was to research, document, and develop a more complete understanding of fit dynamics. ICW worked with the [College Success Foundation](#) (CSF) to create a training program for middle and high school counselors and college admissions staff. Workshops were well attended, and participants reported the training was immediately useful and increased their understanding of college fit. Project research and surveys led to development of a [training module tool kit](#) for middle and high school guidance counselors to help students, particularly underrepresented students, with fit dynamics ([Fit Factors](#)) and decisions.

One interesting finding was that college pennants are a highly valued commodity to inspire students and show the diversity of colleges. With this in mind, ICW sent a set of its pennants to nearly every high school and middle school in the state. As the pictures and appreciative testimonials received in return reiterated, the pennants were very well appreciated.

DREAMERS CAN APPLY FOR STATE FINANCIAL AID USING WASFA

Students who are ineligible for federal financial aid due to immigration status are encouraged to apply for state financial aid, including the Washington [State Need Grant](#) and [College Bound Scholarship](#). These programs are open to low-income, non-citizen students who meet state residency and program requirements.

Students who may qualify should complete the [Washington Application for State Financial Aid](#) (WASFA). Resources available on the WASFA website include parent and student worksheets, an application guide, and fliers in English and Spanish.

Families may also want to attend a [College Goal Washington](#) event. These events help students and families complete the forms required to apply for financial aid, including the WASFA and the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#).

PLACEMENT AGREEMENT ILLUSTRATES HISTORY OF COLLABORATION

By Marty Brown, Council Member and Executive Director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

It didn't hit the cover of the New York Times, but our nation's educational community is poring over a [recent report](#) that recommends ways to propel more high school students into college—and Washington State was an example.

The report credits Washington's use of Smarter Balanced Assessment results to place students into college-level classes. Under an agreement reached by two- and four-year colleges, high school juniors who score at the college-ready level on the Smarter Balanced Assessment will automatically place into college-level math and English classes when they enroll, without having to take a college placement test. The placement provision will effectively start in fall 2016.

Students benefit from the assessment and placement agreement in several ways. Rather than enrolling in college only to discover that they need remedial courses, students get an early "heads up" on whether they will be ready for college-level courses upon graduation. Juniors who score at the college-ready level will have one less placement test to take when they enroll in college. Those who don't can use their senior year to catch up and avoid remediation altogether. Community and technical college faculty and high school teachers have collaborated to design and implement "bridge" courses to help students do just that.

The report was published by the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Community College Trustees, and a coalition called *Higher Ed for Higher Standards*.

On a related note, [two independent reviews](#) gave the Smarter Balanced Assessment high ratings for measuring students' academic skills and knowledge along the path toward college.

Washington's Smarter Balanced placement agreement required heavy lifting and collaboration, but we are a state that consistently rolls up its shirt sleeves. While other states are still struggling with piecemeal transfer agreements between two- and four-year colleges, Washington's transfer agreement creates a smooth process for students.

This history of collaboration bodes well for the work of the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). As WSAC continues to set goals and advocate for educational attainment at all levels, this report reaffirms what we already know: we are building on a solid foundation.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT A PRIORITY DURING LEGISLATIVE SESSION

By Gene Sharratt, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Washington Student Achievement Council

Higher education brings robust benefits to Washington State. Our colleges and universities educate our teachers, nurses, electricians, and software engineers. They find cures for life-threatening disease and develop technologies that make our lives easier. Our colleges inspire, educate, and equip our students to be their best, encouraging them to be more civic-minded, helping them interact in diverse communities, and giving them a passion for lifelong learning. They retrain our adult population, including veterans, helping them find meaningful careers. They enrich us through the arts and new ideas.

The impact of higher education in Washington is profound. Higher education improves lives.

Because of the importance of higher education, Washingtonians united around the legislatively approved [2013 Roadmap attainment goals](#), that by 2023: (1) all adults, ages 25-44, will have a high school diploma or equivalent, and (2) at least 70 percent of Washington adults, ages 25-44, will have a postsecondary credential.

As the 2016 Legislative Session draws to a close, a number of bills focused on increasing educational attainment continue to progress. These bills include proposals to increase the K-12 teacher workforce, improve transitions in postsecondary education for students with disabilities, implement recommendations of the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee, and create a traditional 529 college savings program in Washington.

We continue to work closely with the Legislature to ensure passage of policies that advance education's vital role in Washington State. Quality education is the best investment we can make for our future.