

2019-21

Strategic Action Plan



Dear Governor Inslee and Members of the State Legislature,

We are pleased to submit our Strategic Action Plan for 2019–21, highlighting programs, policies, and investments that will increase educational attainment for Washington students.

The plan provides a system-wide approach to make progress toward the state’s educational attainment goals. To meet those goals, adults ages 25–44 in Washington will hold a high school diploma, and at least 70 percent will earn a postsecondary credential.

Increasing educational attainment is critical to Washington’s future. An educated populace reduces the strain on social services while increasing civic engagement and economic prosperity. And the demand for an educated workforce is high, as more than three-quarters of job openings require education beyond high school, with two-thirds requiring an associate degree or higher. Our state must develop its own talent pipeline to fill these critical openings.

Washington boasts innovative programs, policies, and leadership that provide a framework ready to address the challenges ahead. We must build on these successes and ensure our educational system is equipped to increase the number of graduates and to meet the needs of our economy, all while improving opportunities for individuals and families. This plan provides critical strategies to make significant strides in the next two years to support students, strengthen policies and programs, and bolster partnerships for Washington’s future.

This plan addresses four key challenge areas and identifies system-wide strategies to make progress toward the state attainment goals.

Create Affordable, High-Quality Pathways

Affordability constraints impede students’ abilities to select from multiple options, regardless of their economic circumstances.

- Fully fund and forecast the State Need Grant program
- Ample fund public institutions
- Target aid to students from middle-income families
- Pilot a savings matching incentive program

Close Opportunity Gaps

The complexity of issues affecting the opportunity gap necessitates a systemic approach to improve equity.

- Increase the number of counselors
- Expand support for College Bound Scholars
- Increase financial aid applications through training and events
- Improve dual credit opportunities for low-income students
- Expand student supports on college campuses

Support Regional Leaders

Sustainable momentum in improving educational attainment relies on regional efforts.

- Build a pipeline to meet regional workforce shortages
- Engage regional leaders and support local efforts
- Expand career-connected learning opportunities

Reengage Adult Learners

Adults without accessible and affordable options to complete postsecondary education will not have access living-wage jobs.

- Offer enrollment navigation to returning adults
- Use Guided Pathways to ensure efficient completion
- Expand childcare funding
- Target outreach to working-aged adults
- Offer technical assistance for campuses to serve adult learners

We look forward to working with you and with leaders from K-12, higher education, businesses, nonprofits, and communities to take action on these recommendations. Thank you for your continued efforts to ensure Washington’s prosperity, and for recognizing that education is the critical foundation for our future success.

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The Imperative to Reach Washington's Educational Attainment Goals

The Washington Student Achievement Council's 2019–21 Strategic Action Plan highlights policy and funding recommendations to make significant progress toward Washington's educational attainment goals. To meet those goals, adults ages 25–44 in Washington will hold a high school diploma, and at least 70 percent will have a postsecondary credential.

Significant progress will require systemic improvements. Indicators of progress include:

- More middle and high school students leaving high school prepared for their next educational endeavor.
- A robust postsecondary system, amply funded to support traditionally underserved students and adult students who are facing unique challenges.
- The opportunity for every student to pursue affordable higher education options.
- Regional leaders committed to the development of educational supports and the increase of educational attainment at all levels.

Building that system hinges on the state's commitment to address four critical challenge areas:

1. Address affordability
2. Close opportunity gaps
3. Support regional leaders
4. Reengage adult learners

Effectively meeting these challenges is dependent upon partnerships and the collective and aligned efforts of state and regional leaders, businesses and nonprofits, and other key stakeholders.

To identify approaches that will enable the system to make meaningful progress toward the attainment goals, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and its partners view strategies through six strategic lenses.

Equity. Creating equitable opportunities for student success, regardless of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, or geographic differences.

Four challenge areas

Address affordability

Offer multiple pathways that are accessible to students regardless of financial means.

Support regional leaders

Address regional workforce shortages and support efforts to accelerate attainment.

Close opportunity gaps

Confront barriers with support for students underrepresented in educational success.

Reengage adult learners

Build a framework to help adults complete postsecondary credentials.

Student Experience. Focusing on the student educational experience—inclusive of multiple, divergent, and promising P-20 pathways—with continual attention to improved outcomes.

Partnerships. Building and expanding networks of partners—schools, colleges, businesses, and nonprofits—who create and sustain promising programs and initiatives.

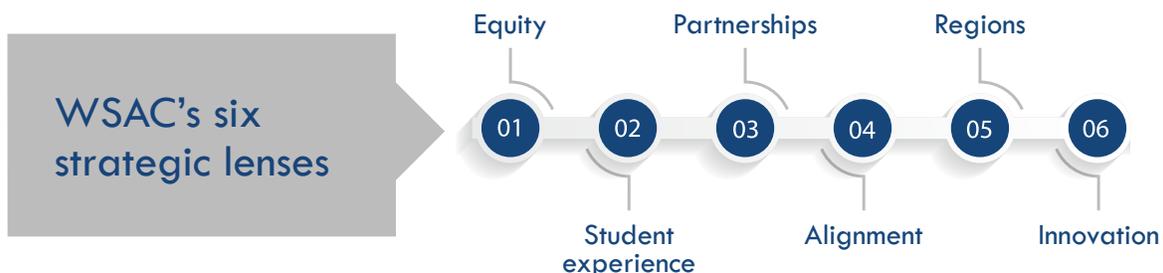
Alignment. Coordinating efforts to compound results for high-impact services.

Regions. Addressing unique educational and workforce opportunities and challenges using local solutions and adaptations.

Innovation. Fostering experimentation and creative problem-solving to build a culture of innovation.

The Strategic Action Plan includes policy and funding recommendations that address the key challenges in our educational system, including proposals submitted by public institutions, educational agencies, partner state agencies, and WSAC.

Nonprofit partners are requesting expanded services to address several of the key challenges. For example, the College Success Foundation is requesting expansion of high school programming and campus partnerships to target service gaps. Treehouse is requesting expansion of graduation success coaches for foster youth. Washington STEM recommends strengthened STEM education and statewide data systems to evaluate progress.



2019–21 Policy and Funding Recommendations

Address affordability

WSAC Proposals

- Fully fund and forecast State Need Grant
- Expand State Need Grant income-threshold
- Pilot a savings matching incentive program

Partner Proposals

- Ample funding for higher education institutions

Close opportunity gaps

WSAC Proposals

- Support College Bound Scholars
- Expand FAFSA training
- Expand the Teacher Shortage Conditional Grant program
- Support Passport to College expansion

Partner Proposals

- Family engagement and middle school counselors (OSPI)
- Target high-demand endorsement and expansion of alternative routes to certification (CWU & WWU)
- Bilingual teacher bonus (OSPI)
- Eagle Care Network and student success initiative (EWU)
- Mental health support (CWU)
- Student success and retention (TESC)
- Career-connected learning (WWU)
- Dual Credit (CCW, SBCTC)
- Game On! STEM Pipeline (CWU)

Support regional and workforce needs

WSAC Proposals

- Develop regional innovation grant
- Expand State Work Study

Partner Proposals

- High-demand programs
- Flight training (CWU)
- Civil engineering (EWU, UWT)
- Computer engineering (EWU)
- Electrical engineering (WWU)
- Medical education (WSU)
- Engineering, math, science (UW, WWU)
- Registered youth apprenticeships and career launch programs (CCW)

Reengage adults

WSAC Proposals

- Provide enrollment navigation
- Provide childcare assistance
- Provide campus technical assistance

Partner Proposals

- Outreach to adult learners (SBCTC)
- Guided Pathways for completion (SBCTC)
- Childcare subsidies (DCYF)
- Career Bridge upgrades (WTB)

CCW = Career Connect Washington

CWU = Central Washington University

DCYF = Department of Children, Youth, and Families

EWU = Eastern Washington University

OSPI = Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

SBCTC = State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

TESC = The Evergreen State College

UW = University of Washington

UWT= University of Washington - Tacoma

WSU = Washington State University

WTB = Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

WWU = Western Washington University

Key Challenge #1: Address Affordability

Many Washington students face significant affordability challenges, including paying for tuition. Though tuition has only increased by two percent in the past few years, it is up 60 percent since the great recession for research institutions.¹ Students bear much of the cost, despite state investments in higher education and state financial aid. For example, the average amount of student loan debt carried by Washington borrowers increased 61 percent in less than a decade (see Figure 1).

While Washington has been nationally recognized for its commitment to need-based aid for students from low-income families, there is much more work to be done.² For example, after accounting for recent State Need Grant allocations, funding shortages left 18,000 grant-eligible students without assistance. Middle-income students also face economic challenges, resulting in increased undergraduate student debt and reduced higher education completion rates.³

Call to action for a systems approach

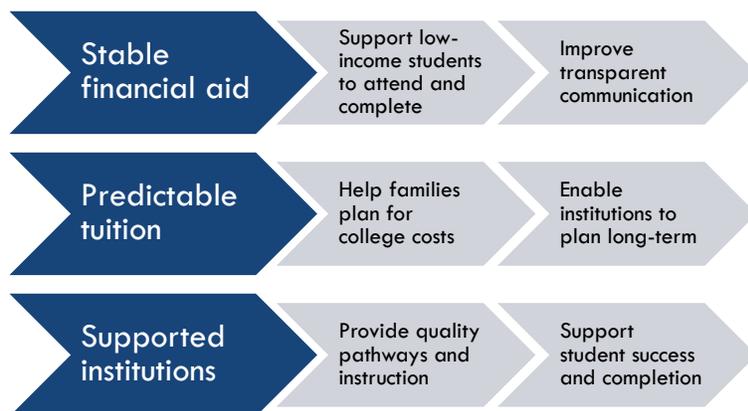
Affordability constraints reduce the number of students realizing their educational aspirations and oppress the state's educational attainment rate. Washington students and families deserve an affordable system. And an affordable system must be in place if we are going to reach our educational attainment goals.

Building an affordable system starts with a commitment to invest in opportunities for low-income students. Removing cost barriers to attendance lowers the opportunity cost for working adults, and levels the playing field for low-income high school students. We must also develop affordable pathways to a credential, rather than a single pipeline. This will result in a system better-equipped to serve students and to adapt to a changing economy.

Institutional investments, expanded student supports, and a robust and predictable system of state aid will increase access to, and success in, the state's higher education system. The Council supports the following strategies to improve affordable access to quality pathways for all students.

Fully fund and forecast the State Need Grant program.

To create a more affordable and predictable system, policymakers must ensure that the State Need Grant program—the largest affordability program in Washington—serves more students. Fully funding the program and forecasting student enrollments will result in reliable and predictable funding, resulting in increased enrollment by low-income students of all ages.



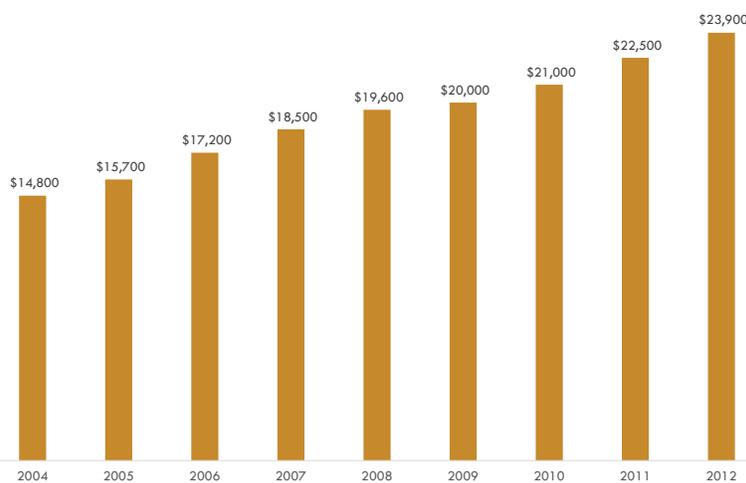
Maintain support for high-quality pathways. Sufficient support for institutions will augment critical support services, expand enrollments in high-demand programs, and keep Washington's public institutions competitive with peers across the country.

Expand the income-threshold for the State Need Grant.

The program's current eligibility cap leaves out many middle-income students, and unmet need (costs minus grant aid) is the same for middle- and low-income students.⁴ Serving students from families with incomes at the state's median will lower debt burden and improve educational outcomes.

Pilot a savings matching program. Offering an incentive for students to save will help them overcome small financial shocks that often result in their dropping out. Asset-building can build resilience and improve academic outcomes.

Figure 1: Average student loan balance for Washington borrowers, 2004–2012



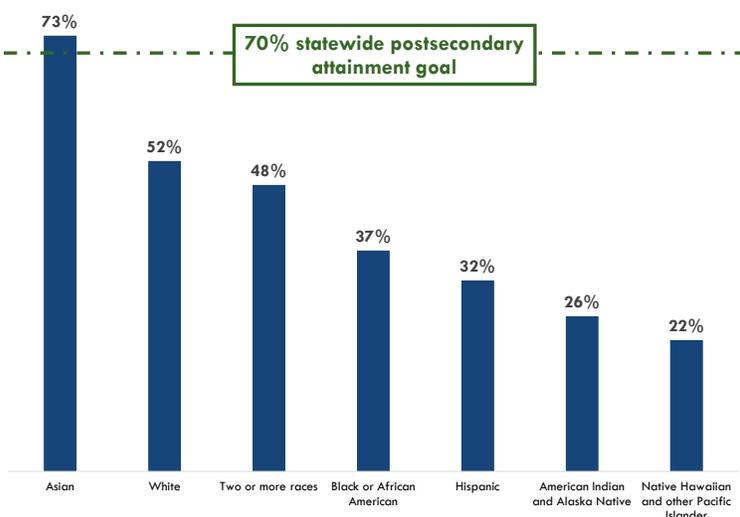
Source: Federal Reserve Bank of New York Consumer Credit Panel/Equifax, Center For Microeconomic Data, <https://www.newyorkfed.org/microeconomics/databank.html>

Key Challenge #2: Close Educational Opportunity Gaps

While education decreases economic and social inequality, stark gaps in academic success exist among many demographic groups: students whose parents did not complete college, those from lower-income backgrounds, English Language Learners, veterans, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. foster care, homelessness, formerly incarcerated). The attainment gaps based on race and ethnicity are profound. For example, the Hispanic/Latino population is Washington's second largest racial/ethnic group, and this demographic has one of the largest gaps in educational attainment at the postsecondary levels (see Figure 2).

A high school diploma or equivalent is the foundation for a student's future educational success and career progression. Yet Washington's high school graduation rate is below the national average by four percentage points, 80 versus 84 percent.⁵ At a time when all of the anticipated growth in K-12 will be among populations of color, we have graduation rate gaps up to 27 percentage points.⁶ And although about three-quarters of Washington's jobs require credentials beyond high school, only 64 percent of seniors enroll in postsecondary education or training directly after high school, with only 31 percent ultimately completing a credential.^{7,8,9} While conferring of postsecondary credentials increased five percentage points in a five-year period, Washington is experiencing decreasing overall enrollments, and the total credentials awarded are expected to decline unless advances are made.^{10, 11, 12} Without a concerted effort to improve educational success for all students, the state risks exacerbating the workforce talent pipeline shortage.

Figure 2: Rate of postsecondary attainment among Washington adults ages 25–44 by race/ethnicity



Source: Source: WSAC Analysis of American Community Survey 2012-2016, U.S. Census (August 2018).

Call to action for a systems approach

Washington must increase high school completion, readiness for postsecondary education, and postsecondary credential completion. Our progress in recent years has been slight, and opportunity gaps persist. Still, individual schools and support programs have proven that gaps can indeed be closed. To make the many benefits of higher education available to students of color and others from underrepresented groups, we must amplify our efforts to provide all students with college and career readiness opportunities and completion supports.

Given the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues that impact the opportunity gap, a system-wide approach addressing the whole student is necessary. Closing opportunity gaps requires the collective efforts of K-12, higher education, and community-based organizations.

The Council supports the following strategies to advance college- and career-readiness activities throughout middle and high school. Such activities increase high school graduation rates and prepare students for postsecondary success.

Provide additional school counselors. Currently, there are nearly 500 students assigned to each counselor.¹³ To better serve and support students, we must expand access to family engagement counselors and middle school counselors. Providing additional counselors will keep students engaged in school and improve high school graduation rates for underserved populations.

Address the teacher shortage issue. We must build a strong pipeline of teachers. Each segment of the educational system can address a piece of this multifaceted problem. Together they can target subject shortages, diversify the teacher workforce, expand capacity at teacher-training institutions, improve affordability for student-teachers, and provide incentives to increase the number of skilled teachers.

Support College Bound Scholars. The majority of low-income middle school students aspire to postsecondary education. To harness this potential, we must do more than send students periodic email messages. Instead, we should provide robust communications and support to students as they work toward college readiness. Engaging students through the College Bound Scholarship (CBS)—a successful statewide program in which students of color are overrepresented—is critical. Enhanced communication and support using innovative digital tools will support students from CBS sign-up through college enrollment. The commitment of financial aid, combined with supports, makes College Bound an essential tool to close opportunity gaps in Washington.

Expand FAFSA and WASFA training and events. With only half of Washington’s seniors applying for financial aid, we must expand capacity to hold more application events, serve more regions, and support more schools and partners with data, training, and resources. Additional sites will include partnerships with libraries, immigrant-serving organizations, and schools. Washington must move from being one of the lowest-ranking states in FAFSA completion to one of the strongest.

Ensure dual credit programs are equitably accessible. The majority of students accessing dual credit come from families with financial means.¹⁴ We must make dual credit accessible for more students, especially students of color and low-income students. All students who are ready to participate in and receive college credit for coursework completed in high school should have the opportunity to do so. We need to evaluate and improve options in each district, for every student, regardless of family income or geographic location.

Strengthen support for youth from foster care and homeless youth. Foster and homeless youth experience the lowest overall educational outcomes. We must provide a streamlined and coordinated system of care that addresses systemic barriers. State agencies and nonprofit partners have jointly developed recommendations that will help optimize service delivery for our most vulnerable students.

Bolster student supports on campus. With an increase of just two percent in credentials awarded, we must improve student success and completion.¹⁵ To encourage academic success and increase completion rates, campuses need resources to provide individualized student support, address mental health needs, and augment career-connected learning activities.

Key Challenge #3: Support Regional Leaders and Workforce Needs

Washington's diverse regions show large differences in educational attainment, as well as economic and workforce conditions. As an example, Cowlitz County has a high school graduation rate on par with the statewide average, with a comparatively low gap between the rates for low-income students and the overall rate (see Figure 3). And Thurston County has a very high opportunity gap, with low-income students lagging behind the overall graduation rate by 15 percentage points. Yet, among students who graduate, Thurston County sees a significantly higher proportion enroll in college (see Figure 4). These are very different problems, and local leaders are best positioned to identify and pursue possible solutions.

Systemic and statewide progress toward our goals requires sustained progress in each region. But one-size-fits-all, statewide solutions to increasing educational attainment may not best serve Washington's unique regional economies.

Call to action for a systems approach

Sustainable momentum in improving educational attainment relies on regional efforts. The state is still a critical partner, providing investments, data, and technical expertise. With state support, regional initiatives related to increasing high school graduation, college enrollment and completion, and postsecondary capacity can lead to improved educational outcomes. The solutions to these challenges can differ by county and metropolitan area. It is possible to identify and

implement these solutions through the regional support and leadership of K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions, local businesses, and philanthropic and nonprofit organizations.

The Council supports engaging with regional leaders to develop sustainable solutions that increase educational attainment and meet regional workforce needs.

Build a talent pipeline that meets Washington's regional workforce needs. At every level of higher education, Washington is experiencing a gap between the annual supply of credentials and projected workforce demand. Some of the largest gaps are in the STEM fields, particularly in the areas of computer science and information technology, engineering, and health. Education is also facing recruitment and retention challenges in high-need fields and hard-to-staff schools and districts.¹⁶

Develop a regional innovation grant. With state support, regional leaders can develop and implement evidence-based strategies to address the needs of specific subpopulations. Collaborative efforts with the Career Connect Washington Initiative can help address inequities by focusing on underserved populations.

Expand career-connected learning opportunities. Students can get valuable experience and skills in the workplace through career-connected learning opportunities, including State Work Study. Through providing training and career-exploration activities, employers can gain access to prospective employees.

Figure 3: Five-year high school graduation rate for class of 2016, by county

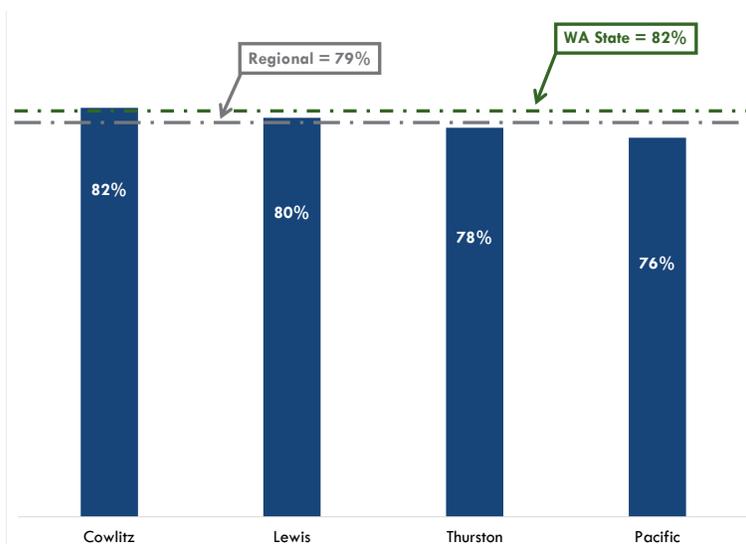
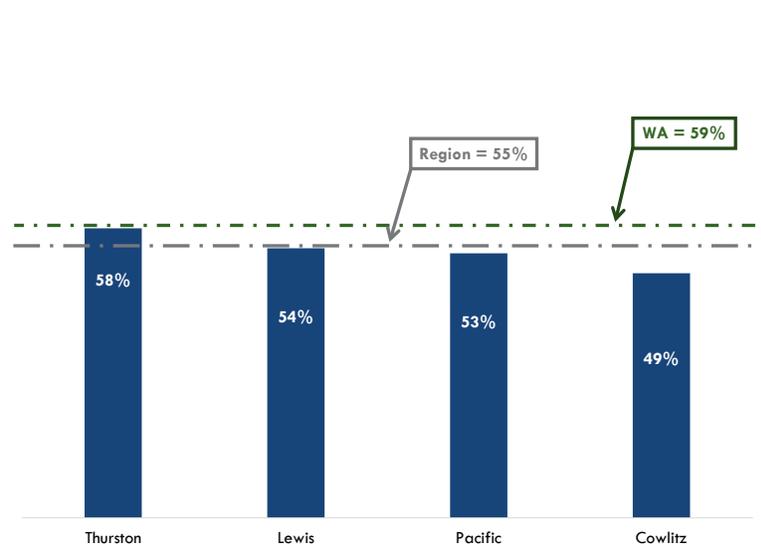


Figure 4: High school graduates' rate of direct postsecondary enrollment for class of 2016, by county



Source: WSAC staff analysis of high school graduation rate data from the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and High School Feedback Report data from the Education Data Research Center at the Washington State Office of Financial Management (April 2018).

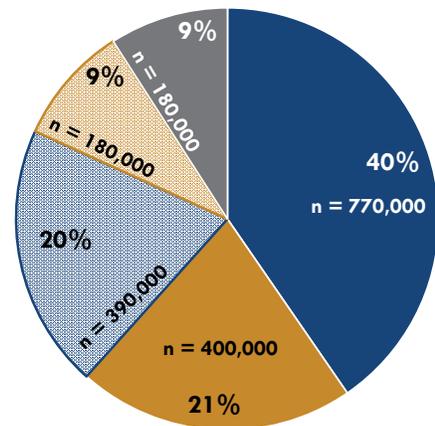
Key Challenge #4: Reengage Adult Learners

Although the majority of jobs require a postsecondary credential, nearly one million Washingtonians have not earned a postsecondary credential and are not currently enrolled. Of these, 18 percent are without a high school diploma. Of those who do have a high school diploma, 40 percent are without a postsecondary credential. Furthermore, one in five working-aged adults, or nearly 400,000 former students, have earned college credits without completing a credential (see Figure 5). Completion of a credential is critical for participation and success in the economy. Adults without accessible and affordable options to complete postsecondary education will have significantly limited access to living-wage jobs.

Adults looking to return to the classroom face several challenges. Unlike high school students, adults do not have easy access to system supports and trusted counselors or sources of information. They also must balance the pressures of work and school, and many are dealing with the demands of caring for family. One-third of undergraduate students are parents, making access to affordable childcare a critical concern.¹⁷

Financial constraints and family obligations often lead college students to withdraw from or postpone their education.¹⁸ Washington adults with less education are more likely to experience periods of unemployment and have lower wages, leaving companies to recruit talent from elsewhere. Finishing a college credential will improve career earnings and employment outcomes.

Figure 5: Education levels of adults ages 25–44



■ Credential ■ HS diploma ■ Some college ■ No HS diploma ■ Enrolled

Source: WSAC Analysis of American Community Survey 2012-2016, U.S. Census (August 2018).

Call to action for a systems approach

Washington must create an adult-friendly system to address unique barriers of time, place, and money through the availability of career-focused, affordable, and responsive programs. Prospective returning adult students, who face unique challenges to academic enrollment and completion, often lack access to higher education advising and support. Concerns related to the transferability of credits, past academic debt, placement tests, academic progress policies, program selection, and more can quickly become impediments to enrollment and completion.

WSAC is working with many partners to develop a statewide framework to help former students achieve their academic and career goals, earn a living wage, and contribute to Washington's vital economy. The framework builds on existing policies and programs and develops three main components for a statewide system to reengage adults: communication, cost, and completion (see Figure 6.)

The framework focuses on regional partnerships between employers, nonprofit organizations, and higher education institutions. A Lumina grant supports the development of an interactive online tool and the initial marketing and outreach efforts.

The Council supports the following strategies to address the unique needs of adult learners.

Provide technical assistance to campuses. To serve returning adult students, campuses must offer adult-friendly policies, programs, and supports. Statewide learning

Figure 6: Adult Reengagement Framework Components



Communication

Student identification, outreach, program and career match, enrollment navigator



Cost

Microgrant, financial aid, childcare financial assistance



Completion

Technical assistance to campuses, employer and regional partners, student support

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opportunities and campus technical assistance will provide training and support so institutions can assess their services to returning adults.

Offer enrollment navigation. Enrollment navigation services are critical to assist returning adult students with career exploration, admissions requirements, program prerequisites, and financial barriers. Knowledgeable professionals will provide centralized services, with flexibility to support regions with aligned interests and established infrastructure.

Fund childcare assistance. The costs of childcare can exceed tuition. Any student-parent who is pursuing their first credential can benefit from financial support, including flexible policies and coordinated benefits.

Target outreach efforts. Adults who lack a high school credential should be encouraged to complete a diploma, leading to better opportunities for living-wage employment. Those with some college and no credential should be supported and encouraged to achieve their goals.

Use Guided Pathways. We must move returning adults efficiently through to completion and into careers. Guided Pathways is a research-based approach to accomplish that goal. It involves a fundamental redesign of course sequencing and advising throughout the college experience, rather than piecemeal programs for specific segments of the student population.



Opportunity Gaps

Close opportunity gaps

- Remove barriers for underserved students.
- Support underrepresented students.

Regional Networks

Support regional leaders

- Address regional workforce shortages.
- Engage and support local communities.

Adult Learners

Reconnect adult learners

- Recruit and support adult learners.
- Target outreach and support to former students with credits.

Affordability

Improve affordability for more pathways

- Provide multiple pathways to a wider variety of careers.
- Address financial barriers associated with different pathways.



Fully fund the State Need Grant program

Increase student success and reduce student debt

Recommendation

Ensure all eligible students receive the State Need Grant (\$80 million/year)

Provide approximately \$80 million each fiscal year to serve an additional 18,000 students who are currently eligible for the State Need Grant (SNG) but unserved due to a lack of funding. Task the Caseload Forecast Council with preparing a forecast for the program so the budget will rise and fall with the number of eligible students, making the program predictable for students and families.

The Imperative

Fully funding State Need Grant can help Washington address persistent opportunity gaps in our educational system

Grant assistance provides students from low-income families with access to postsecondary education. As Washington's K-12 graduates become more diverse and less affluent, SNG is a key component of any strategy to increase educational attainment. Yet 18,000 SNG-eligible students are without funding. This undermines the message of the program: that cost should not be a barrier to enrollment and attainment for any student. SNG is most effective when fully funded—students are more likely to enroll and persist if funding is consistent and predictable. A fully funded and forecasted SNG program would provide stability for students and families; help close opportunity gaps in attainment, enrollment, and completion; and spur progress toward reaching the state's educational attainment goals.

Context

Predictable SNG funding would reflect Washington's commitment to affordability

Washington is nationally recognized for its commitment to affordability for low-income students through strong need-based financial aid. The state's largest affordability program, SNG serves nearly 70,000 low-income students, helping both recent high school graduates and older non-traditional students plot a course to a credential. It can be used for vocational certificates, as well as bachelor's and associate degrees. And it is flexible, in that recipients can attend part-time while working. SNG is vital to reaching the state's attainment goals, but its effectiveness is muted when tens of thousands of eligible students do not receive it due to lack of funding. The program should be forecasted to plan for predicted eligible students in the budget process.

Outcomes and Measures

More students will experience the positive educational outcomes associated with need-based aid

- Increased re-enrollment and completion rates among students with the lowest family incomes.¹⁹
- Increased attendance, retention, and campus engagement.²⁰
- Lower annual borrowing and decreased debt loads at graduation.
- An additional 5,000 students will receive SNG.

Quick Facts:

Average unmet need is virtually the same for students from 0-70 percent MFI as it is for those from 71-125 percent MFI.

SNG awards are prorated, with lowest-income students receiving the maximum amount, while students above 65 percent of MFI receive 50 percent of the maximum.

Because SNG is well-established, a significant expansion of eligibility comes without large increases in staffing and programming.



Expand State Need Grant income eligibility

Make college affordable for students from lower-middle-income families

Recommendation

Expand State Need Grant eligibility to serve students up to the state's median family income (\$47 million/year)

Help more students from low- and lower-middle-income households pursue postsecondary education and training. State Need Grant (SNG) serves nearly 70,000 low-income students. But as college costs have risen, students just above the eligibility cutoff increasingly struggle to pay for tuition. Now is the time to expand SNG eligibility for the first time in over a decade.

The Imperative

Eligibility has not kept pace with increasing college costs

The current SNG program works, putting college within reach for tens of thousands of students per year. But the eligibility criteria prevent many lower-middle-income students from qualifying. This undermines the message of the program: that cost should not be a barrier to enrollment and attainment for any student. Even after tuition reductions, tuition costs have risen faster than personal income and median wages since the last time SNG eligibility was expanded. The result is predictable: unmet need (defined as cost of attendance minus any grant aid) is now the same for the lowest-income students as it is for students from middle-income families. Expanding State Need Grant eligibility will reduce student debt and encourage persistence and completion.

Context

Lower-middle-income families are being priced out of college

State Need Grant eligibility was last increased in 2007, and has been frozen ever since at 70 percent of the state's median family income (MFI). Students just above this threshold have faced rising costs without state grant aid. Since 2007, tuition increased by 45 percent for regional institutions and 64 percent for research institutions. Meanwhile, the state's per-capita personal income has grown by only 30 percent. Families just above the income cutoffs for both the federal Pell Grant and the State Need Grant program get squeezed. WSAC's affordability model illustrates that costs for middle-income families often outpace their ability to save for college, even under very optimistic assumptions about how much and how long they save. As grant aid falls away above the income cutoffs, students and parents often take out more loans. Expanding eligibility to serve students from 0–100 percent of MFI would support 15,000 more students.

Outcomes and Measures

Students from lower-middle-income families will be able to afford college, while minimizing loan debt

- Increased annual attainment of degrees and certificates.
- Increased persistence and graduation of students from low- and lower-middle-income households.
- Lower annual borrowing and decreased debt loads at graduation.
- Funding of \$47 million per year would serve approximately 15,000 additional students with need-based aid.

Quick Facts:

Average unmet need (cost minus aid) is virtually the same for students from 0–70 percent MFI as it is for those from 71–125 percent MFI.

SNG awards are prorated, with lowest-income students receiving the maximum amount, while students above 65 percent of MFI receive 50 percent of the maximum.

Because SNG is well-established, a significant expansion of eligibility comes without large increases in staffing and programming.



Expand career-connected learning opportunities

Invest in Washington's workforce

Recommendation

Expand career-connected learning opportunities through the State Work Study program (\$5 million/year)

Reinvest in State Work Study (SWS) to give Washington students the skills they need to succeed in today's economy. Target a portion of funds to employers in high-demand sectors. State funding of \$5 million will produce \$7 million in wages while serving an additional 2,500 students.

The Imperative

Work Study grows the workforce Washington employers need

Employers increasingly point to challenges finding prospective employees with the skills necessary to fill jobs required for economic growth. And students are too often working long hours in jobs disconnected from their career interests.²¹ Reinvestment in SWS helps counter both trends by providing career-focused, flexible, part-time work opportunities that improve persistence and post-graduation employment outcomes. The program's budget has been frozen for years while minimum wage rises. This has led to a steady decrease in the number of students served and depresses the total amount of hours worked. It's time to expand the program to serve more students and employers.

Context

SWS leverages private funding to increase economic opportunity

SWS matches students in need of relevant work experience with employers in need of skilled workers. This helps close the state's skills gaps and allows students to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive job market. Due to recessionary funding cuts, the number of SWS recipients and participating employers has decreased significantly over the last decade. Rebuilding the program now offers an opportunity to focus on career-connected learning in high-demand industries to maximize economic impact. State funding for SWS combines with employer contributions to pay student wages. A state investment of \$5 million (including a \$2 million incentive pool for high-demand fields) would be matched by \$2 million in employer funds to produce \$7 million in total wages and serve 2,500 additional students.

Outcomes and Measures

Students graduate from college with less debt, more work experience, and skills to succeed in today's economy

- Better post-graduation outcomes for students, higher retention rates, and lower debt at graduation.
- State funding of \$5 million per year will subsidize work experiences for 2,500 students and provide 100 percent of student wages for targeted jobs.

Quick Facts:

As a program with eligibility stretching into the middle class, as well as to graduate students, SWS is available to more students than most other forms of aid. But current funding cannot meet student demand.

Over 90 percent of surveyed students believed SWS improved their satisfaction with college and helped them gain skills that would translate to their future career.

About 95 percent of surveyed employers noted SWS students made their organization more productive.²²



Create a savings match pilot program

Help students build a financial safety net

Recommendation

Create a savings match pilot program to incentivize savings and reduce student debt (\$500,000/year of pilot)

Provide state funds to match student savings. This incentive program can build economic resiliency for at-risk students, helping students overcome financial hurdles that might otherwise lead them to drop out.

The Imperative

Savings can give students the stability to overcome financial hurdles and afford college costs

Many disadvantaged students enroll in college to increase earning power and ensure their family's financial future—but are immediately confronted with a series of barriers. They must afford the high cost of attendance, often while reducing work hours to accommodate school schedules. Financial aid programs can help cover tuition, but non-tuition costs are substantial, leaving low-income families struggling to make ends meet. Many families are hesitant to incur debt, and the high cost of college contributes to the gap in participation from lower-income families.²³ Students without significant savings are at risk of dropping out due to the inability to overcome even small financial barriers. State matching programs can motivate families to save for higher education expenses by contributing state dollars to individual savings accounts.

Context

Savings match programs offer an innovative solution to a long-standing problem

For years, colleges have known that small, unplanned expenses (e.g. car repairs, unexpected fees or fines, medical bills) can result in a student deciding to drop out. As a result, some institutions offer limited forms of emergency financial aid, like interest-free loans, or grants for specific types of common expenses like childcare and transportation. Another response has been to offer asset-building options, incentivizing students to save. Starting with very small dollar amounts each month, which are then matched by outside funding, students can build savings quickly. Several models for state matching programs are available. Such programs can address a gap left by a successful federal program that was eliminated in 2017.²⁴

Outcomes and Measures

Students will be better equipped to face challenges and complete their education

- Reduced debt loads for students from low- and middle-income households.
- Increased participation and persistence rates for students from low- and middle-income households.
- Increased annual attainment of degrees and certificates.
- Improved financial literacy and ability to withstand unforeseen expenses.

Quick Facts:

Asset-building models have been shown to be effective at changing behavior and increasing participants' liquid assets.^{25, 26}

Washington State University's Invest in Success program has helped 850 students save \$1,000 each, which is then matched 4:1 by private, federal, and institutional dollars.²⁷

Federal funding for individual development accounts was eliminated in 2017.



Help more high school seniors apply for financial aid

Make higher education affordable and accessible to all eligible students

Recommendation

Enhance tools and training to help students complete financial aid applications (\$580,000 in fiscal year 2020 | \$575,000 in fiscal year 2021)

Expand training opportunities, events, resources, and support for educators who assist students with FAFSA and WASFA completion. These educators include high school counselors and college access providers.



The Imperative

Washington must expand capacity to support FAFSA and WASFA completion

Completing a financial aid application is necessary for any high school senior interested in receiving financial assistance for postsecondary education. Yet just over 50 percent of Washington’s public high school graduates do so, making Washington one of the states with the lowest completion rates in the nation.²⁸ Increasing the number of aid applications hinges on the training and support of school counselors and college access providers, as well as providing additional application assistance events statewide. Washington must expand capacity to support FAFSA/WASFA completion and to increase application completion events, include more regions, support schools with monitoring application completion, and provide additional training and resources to counselors and college access partners. Washington is also one of a handful of states offering aid to undocumented individuals; information regarding the WASFA needs to be shared broadly across the state, as applications have been decreasing.

Context

Washington can build on the 12th Year Campaign

This proposal will enable more connections and learning opportunities for schools, nonprofits, immigrant-serving organizations, and others in promoting financial aid application completion and supporting local efforts. The recommendation will build upon the work of the Washington Student Achievement Council’s 12th Year Campaign. The 12th Year Campaign boosts college and financial aid application rates in Washington by helping those working with high school seniors and their families complete applications for college admissions and financial aid. 12th Year Campaign sites receive free training, printed materials, and other resources to support their students.

Quick Facts:

Applying for financial assistance is correlated with postsecondary attendance.²⁹

53 percent of Washington’s public high school seniors in the class of 2018 completed a FAFSA.³⁰

During the 2017–18 academic year, 12th Year Campaign sites had a ten percent higher FAFSA completion rate than non-sites and a six percent higher completion rate than the state average.³¹

Outcomes and Measures

Enhanced training, events, and resources will increase Washington’s FAFSA and WASFA completions

- Increased FAFSA and WASFA completion for seniors by ten percent each biennium.
- Double the number of 12th Year Campaign sites to more than 300 events.
- Expand training opportunities and partnership recruitment by 100 percent.
- An increase of 30 percent in the number of sites using the FAFSA completion portal to monitor seniors’ applications.



Modernize communications to College Bound Scholars

Use innovative communications tools to get vital program info to students and families

Recommendation

Provide consistent, reliable, and timely information to College Bound students (\$400,000/year)

Provide timely information and guidance to College Bound Scholarship (CBS) students and their families—throughout middle and high school—using innovative electronic tools and communications support.

The Imperative

Washington must increase the number of College Bound students who pursue and succeed in postsecondary education

The College Bound program offers an early promise of financial aid, yet only half of College Bound Seniors complete the FAFSA and 60 percent enroll in college directly after high school. The promise of the scholarship must be packaged with critical information and reminders to ease students' transitions into higher education. WSAC can provide greater support to the 300,000 College Bound students throughout their K-12 years and at critical transition points, helping students prepare, enroll, and persist through their educational journey.

Context

Digital tools will help College Bound students succeed

In WSAC's 2017 CBS study, the number one recommendation from students to improve their college-going behavior was to "provide more support and information."³² WSAC proposes to connect CBS students with trusted, timely, and personalized information, providing guidance at the critical junctures in education. Using digital engagement tools will help students plan and prepare for postsecondary education. Using these platforms will enhance staff capabilities to efficiently and effectively provide timely and personalized support to College Bound students. A variety of third-party platforms offer research-based messaging using innovative tools—from interactive customized texting to gamification—to nudge student behavior and urge actions at critical stages of decision-making. A variety of technological platforms, developed for the field of college access, provide scalable solutions for students, increasing the likelihood they will take the necessary steps to prepare for postsecondary education.

Outcomes and Measures

Targeted support will improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates

- Increased engagement among CBS students.
- Increased understanding of CBS program requirements and general college-going information.
- Increased high school graduation by five percent each biennium.
- Increased first-year college enrollment by five percent each biennium.

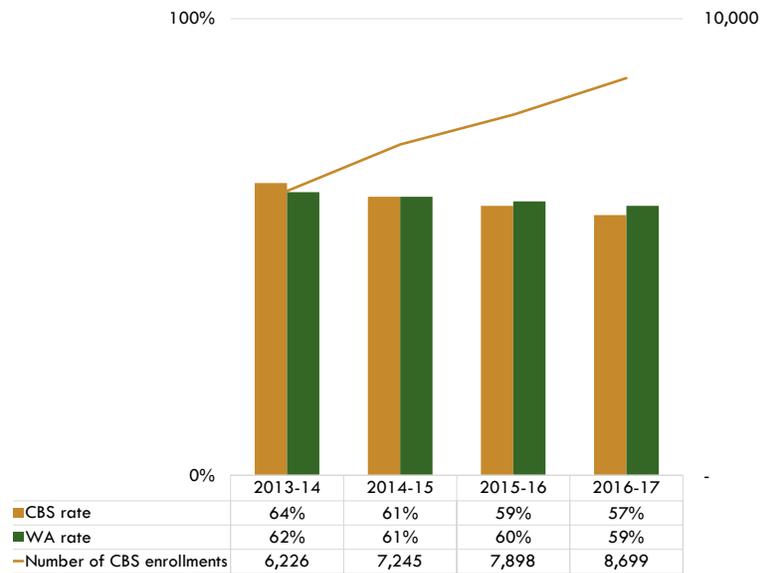
Quick Facts:

57 percent of CBS students from the class of 2017 enrolled in postsecondary education directly after high school (the state average was 59 percent).³³

Targeted digital interventions can improve postsecondary enrollment.³⁴

The commitment of financial aid, combined with relevant supports, makes College Bound an essential tool to address opportunity gaps in Washington.

Direct postsecondary and CBS enrollment rates



Source: Weiss, Sarah. "College Bound Scholarship Annual Update." May 2018. Accessed October 5, 2018. <https://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2018.CBS.Report.pdf>.



Expand the educator workforce

Reduce teacher shortages in high-need areas

Recommendation

Expand the educator workforce by funding the Teacher Shortage Conditional Grant (\$1 million/year)

Provide \$1 million to support approximately 120 aspiring teachers. The Teacher Shortage Conditional Grant (TSCG) reduces affordability barriers and invests in teacher recruitment early in the pipeline. TCSG also incentivizes teaching service in shortage areas after certification.

The Imperative

Teacher shortages exacerbate the lack of diversity among educators, which hurts students and worsens opportunity gaps

Washington is experiencing a shortage of teachers in particular geographic and subject areas. Cost barriers affect a broad range of potential teacher candidates, especially those from traditionally underrepresented groups. Educator diversity does not reflect student diversity; people of color account for only 11 percent of the educator workforce, compared with 45 percent of the student population.³⁵ TSCG is a financial aid vehicle that has the benefit of addressing two different policy goals on the teacher shortage pipeline: recruiting students to the teaching profession and retaining them as teachers in Washington, while incentivizing teaching in shortage areas. For 2017–18, program demand far exceeded available funding, with awards provided to only seven percent of qualified applicants. TSCG offers an affordable, targeted approach, developed based on research and stakeholder input, with high unmet demand and strong initial results.

Context

Washington faces a teacher shortage, and TSCG helps address it

TSCG provides need-based conditional grants to teacher preparation candidates and prioritizes support for individuals from groups traditionally underrepresented in the teaching workforce. In exchange for receiving the grant, recipients must teach at a Washington preK-12 public school for two school years, or fulfill the obligation in half the time by serving in a shortage area. The long-standing Future Teachers program had received \$1 million in annual funding prior to the recession; a recommitment of \$1 million would fund about 120 TSCG awards annually. The existing framework can be easily scaled to manage an expanded program.

Outcomes and Measures

More teachers will meet critical education needs

- Reduced educator shortages in geographic areas and by subject area.
- Increased numbers of teachers from groups underrepresented in the teaching workforce.
- Increased retention of teachers due to lower education debt.
- Approximately 120 teacher preparation program candidates will receive up to \$10,000 per year and commit to service in Washington's public schools.

Quick Facts:

In 2017-18, just seven percent of qualified applicants received the award: out of 885 total applicants, 826 met minimum qualifications and 56 were awarded.

Awardees are diverse.

- 89% first-generation college students.
- 95% multilingual.
- 98% future teachers of color.

One hundred percent of awardees were pursuing an endorsement in a shortage area, including endorsements in bilingual, English Language Learner (ELL), and elementary education.

As of summer 2018, one hundred percent of awardees had completed or were still enrolled and making satisfactory academic progress toward on-time completion.



Fund the newly expanded Passport to Careers program

Improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care

Recommendation

Expand supports for youth in foster care or who have experienced homelessness (\$1.9 million/year)

Provide scholarships and services to help youth from foster care or who have experienced homelessness prepare for careers. The Passport program serves about 400 former foster youth each year with scholarships, campus support services, and service coordination. Recent legislation expanded the program to include homeless youth and support for apprenticeship programs.



The Imperative

Washington must reduce the educational inequities facing former foster and homeless youth

Less than fifty percent of foster youth graduate from high school, far below statewide averages.³⁶ Unaccompanied homeless youth face similar challenges. Unless financial barriers are addressed, significant educational inequities for both of these populations will continue. The newly expanded Passport to Careers program will begin serving unaccompanied homeless youth in 2019, and the number of Passport-eligible students will double at that time. Additional funding will not only provide student scholarships, but also will ensure the newly eligible population receives the same support services that have helped previous Passport students succeed.

Context

Washington is a recognized leader when it comes to supporting foster youth in postsecondary education

The Passport to College program has a unique design, different from typical financial aid programs. It is a model looked to by other states and national foster youth advocates. Since 2007, Passport has offered a student scholarship for former foster youth; incentive funding to campuses to recruit and retain former foster youth; and contracted support services from College Success Foundation to provide direct student services, as well as training and technical assistance to campus staff. The 2018 expansion created an umbrella program called Passport to Careers that also provides financial assistance and support services for students in pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship programs.

Quick Facts:

Youth who have been in foster care or experienced homelessness have educational outcomes well below the state average.³⁷

With support from the Passport program, students persist at the rates of students from low-income families, overcoming significant challenges to their success.³⁸

The Passport expansion will double the number of eligible students with the addition of unaccompanied homeless youth.

Outcomes and Measures

More students will benefit from Passport's established record of success

- More scholarships and support services for youth who have been in foster care or experienced homelessness.
- Increased funding for the SETuP program to assist foster youth in transitioning from high school to postsecondary enrollment, career, or service.
- Strong persistence rates for the expanded eligible population.
- Expansion to pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, in keeping with the Legislature's intent to support additional pathways.



Establish regional innovation grants

State and regional partnerships are critical to improving educational attainment

Recommendation

Foster innovative and promising regional programs and initiatives (\$5 million/year)

Establish a competitive grant supporting regional efforts to create or expand educational pathways and increase educational attainment.

The Imperative

Regional networks can ensure more residents are competitive for today's jobs

Robust economic growth and accelerated educational attainment rely on regional efforts, responsive to regional needs and competitive advantages. The challenge is to engage broad leadership within regions to join educational leaders in developing a robust career-launch infrastructure, culture, and programming to support current and prospective students. Schools and colleges alone cannot bear the responsibility for the development and promotion of educational pathways. As students look to a broad array of community and workplace resources for information about planning, preparing, and paying for postsecondary programs, fostering collaborative regional environments for policy and program improvements is critical. Profound results are possible when communities collectively organize to increase educational attainment while addressing the unique characteristics and culture of their region.

Context

The regional grant will improve our understanding of how policies and practice work at the regional level

The innovation grants will be an investment in advancing Washington's social and economic development by allowing counties or regions to increase educational attainment aligned with workforce needs. Research demonstrates educational outcomes improve when highly effective communities work together to develop strategies to improve high school graduation, prevent dropouts, and increase postsecondary enrollment.³⁹ While some regions of the state have established partnerships to improve educational services, others have leveraged business and employer involvement to focus on the educational needs for emerging jobs. Across the state, local leadership is poised to collectively address regional challenges. State-level programs, policy development, and data collection and analyses can support these efforts. Together, these networks present partnership opportunities to expand efforts and apply innovative solutions to succeed at scale.

Outcomes and Measures

Grant funds will address equity goals by focusing on underserved populations

- Creation of a statewide coalition of engaged regional leaders and collaborative networks.
- Expanded awareness of regional needs, and active and promising regional efforts to address those needs.
- Identification of areas for improvement in state and regional policies and practices.
- Identification of programs and policies that could have a potential impact statewide or on other regions.
- Development of a statewide action agenda that includes advocating for regional and statewide programs, policies, and practices to bolster progress toward the attainment goals.

Quick Facts:

Regional innovation strategies will help reduce geographic disparities, such as the following variations between counties:

- The highest graduation rate is 96 percent and the lowest is 56 percent.⁴⁰
- The highest rate for high school graduates directly enrolling in postsecondary education is 78 percent and the lowest is 36 percent.⁴¹
- The highest postsecondary educational attainment is 69 percent and the lowest is 18 percent.⁴²



Expand, coordinate campus support for adult learners

Improve recruitment, retention, and completion for returning adult students

Recommendation

Support campuses and offer students pre-enrollment assistance (\$1 million/year)

Help institutions assess the effectiveness of their current supports and expand those critical to student success. Ensure returning adult students have access to knowledgeable professionals who can assist with career exploration, program requirements, and financial barriers.

The Imperative

Reengaging adult learners is critical to preparing more Washingtonians for today's jobs

Financial constraints and family obligations often lead college students to withdraw from or postpone their education, a contributing factor to the 400,000 Washington adults who have accumulated college credit but have not completed a credential. Without that credential, career earnings and employment outcomes are often suppressed. Further, when Washington adults have less education, they are more likely to experience periods of unemployment and have lower wages. Completion of a postsecondary credential is critical for participation and success in the 21st century economy. This request addresses the unique needs of adult learners by offering enrollment navigation and providing technical assistance to improve supports on campuses.

Quick Facts:

Nearly 300,000 Washington adults have attended at least a year of college but have not completed a credential.

Adult learners have characteristics that correlate with increased risk to academic success. These include attending part-time, working full-time, and supporting families.

Washington does not currently offer a system of supports or information for prospective returning adult students.

Context

Technical assistance and enrollment navigation can help campuses increase completion rates for adult learners

Centralized enrollment navigation will ensure returning adult students have access to knowledgeable professionals able to assist with career exploration, program prerequisites, admissions requirements, and financial barriers (e.g. defaults, repayments, tuition, fees, former fees, equipment, childcare). Individualized, high-quality advising and counseling can provide relevant and timely information to help prospective students address their admissions, enrollment, and affordability concerns. Technical assistance will allow institutions to collaborate with national experts and peer institutions to learn best practices and engage in assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of services supporting adult learners (e.g. enrollment processes, course schedules, academic policies, financial aid, childcare). The results will help campuses scale promising practices wherever possible. All participating campuses will be eligible to receive training, and ten institutions will receive robust assessment services.

Outcomes and Measures

Enrollments and completions will increase for returning adult students

- Engagement of ten campuses in self-evaluation of adult-serving policies and programs.
- Development of programs and supports to alleviate barriers for returning adult students.
- Retention and completion rates anticipated to exceed the averages experienced by first-time continuing students for each campus by five percentage points.
- A centralized, campus-neutral resource for prospective returning adult students.
- Enhanced capacity and infrastructure of local navigation supports.



Expand childcare funding for students with children

Remove a critical financial barrier for adult learners

Recommendation

Help 1,200 student parents achieve a postsecondary credential (\$3 million/year)

Provide childcare assistance to support an additional 1,200 student parents and include additional sectors (community and technical colleges and private nonprofit institutions).

The Imperative

Limited and unaffordable childcare options can derail aspiring students with children

Access to affordable childcare is a critical concern for student parents. Childcare centers may not be available when needed. And even if childcare is available, the cost can be prohibitive when combined with educational costs. The average annual cost of childcare exceeds public tuition and fees. For example, median childcare costs total between \$9,600 for infants and \$12,600 for preschool-aged children, while public tuition ranges from \$4,000 to \$10,000 annually.^{43, 44} These financial constraints and family obligations can lead college students to withdraw from their education. And the continued demands of childcare, coupled with limited access or unaffordable options, often squelch the opportunity to return.

Context

Over one-quarter of Washington's undergraduate students are parents

To serve student parents, 40 campuses offer on-site childcare.⁴⁵ Other campuses have relationships with centers in their local community. The childcare matching grant is designed to offset some of the cost for attending student parents. The current childcare matching grant program of \$75,000 per year is limited to the public baccalaureate institutions, as funding for the two-year system was eliminated during the recession. This proposal would prioritize institutions that participate in the adult reengagement framework and match scholarship funding.

Outcomes and Measures

Enhanced funding will increase educational opportunities for students with children

- Funding to provide childcare assistance to 1,200 students annually, beginning in 2019–20.
- Better understanding of childcare needs across campuses

Quick Facts:

About one-quarter of undergraduates in Washington's community and technical colleges have children.⁴⁶

Childcare costs are greater than tuition expenses.

Private and institutional sources of funding and complex requirements for state subsidies do not cover the childcare needs for student parents.

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