



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.

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.

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.



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.

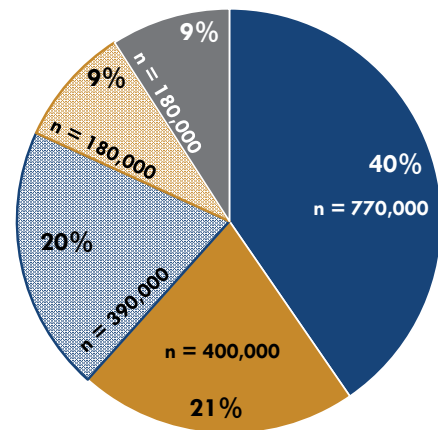
Key Challenge #4: Reengage Adult Learners

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