

2021 Strategic Action Plan



Key Takeaways

Education and training beyond high school is essential.

Some credential beyond a high school diploma is increasingly essential to earn a living wage and avoid the worst impacts of an economic downturn. Lifetime earnings, for instance, are almost double for those with a bachelor's degree than those with only a high school diploma.

All sectors of society shape public attitudes on educational pathways.

Washington's high school graduates are less likely to continue their education than students across the country and in California, Virginia and Mississippi. We cannot rely on high schools and colleges alone to increase participation in higher education. College going choices are shaped by many other societal factors and messages.

Student success is shaped by factors outside the classroom.

Students face many different types of costs beyond tuition and fees. Earnings loss due to class and study time comes on top of the costs of housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other needs. These financial burdens can derail students even when financial aid covers their full tuition and fees.

Racial and ethnic disparities appear throughout educational pathways.

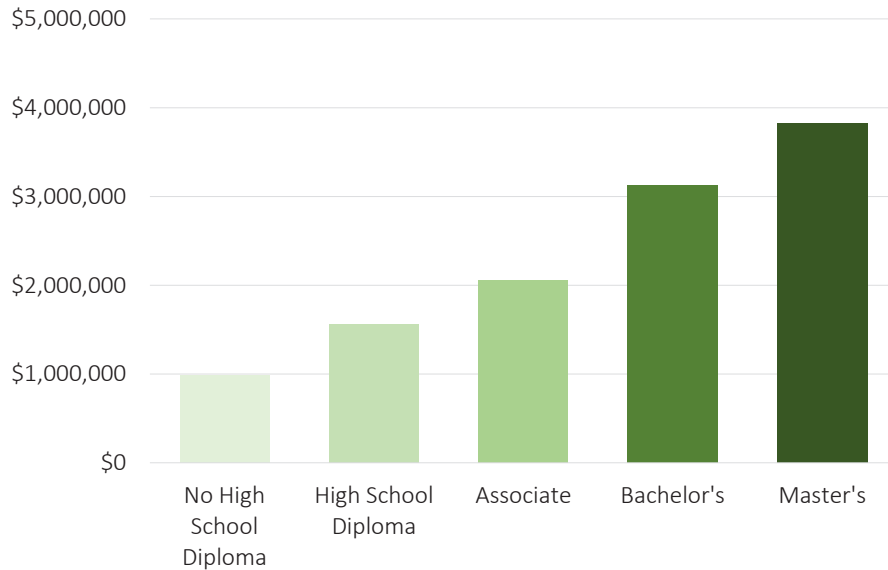
WSAC is prioritizing racial equity as a necessary part of our goal to increase student postsecondary credential attainment to 70 percent for Washington state residents who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status. Today, only 50 percent or less currently have a postsecondary credential. Enrollment patterns differ by race and ethnicity across institutions and programs.

Strategic Action Plan

Washington's State Goal for Educational Attainment

Some credential beyond a high school diploma is increasingly essential to earn a living wage and avoid the worst impacts of an economic downturn. Lifetime earnings, for instance, are almost double for those with a bachelor's degree than those with only a high school diploma (figure 1). And those with a postsecondary credential have a lower risk of unemployment than those without. Postsecondary credentials include traditional college degrees, certificates, apprenticeship, and other career-based programs. These credentials are provided by a wide range of public and private universities, 2-year colleges and training programs.

Figure 1. Average Lifetime Earnings by Educational Attainment in the U.S.

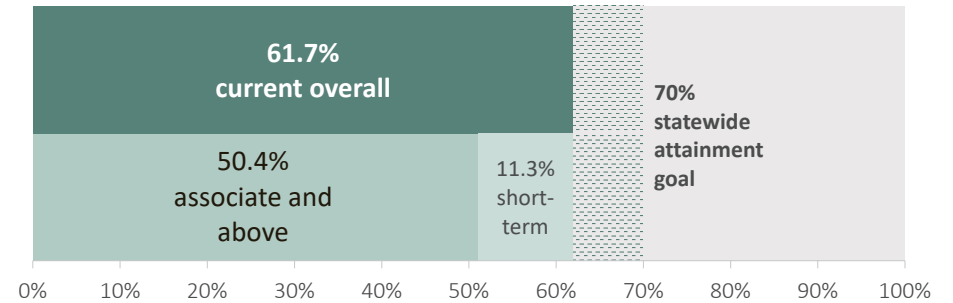


Source: Dr. Mike Preiner and WSAC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Community Population Survey (2014-2018)

The benefits of higher education provide a strong rationale to increase educational attainment in our state. In 2013, the Washington Student Achievement Council proposed a statewide goal for educational attainment that called for 70 percent of the state's 25-44 year olds (i.e., our early and mid-career residents) to have a postsecondary credential. The goal was adopted by the state legislature and signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee.

When the goal was adopted, 55.4 percent of 25-44 year olds had a postsecondary credential¹. By the end of 2019 our educational attainment rate has increased to 61.7 percent (figure 2). This pace of improvement will not be enough to meet the plan's time frame to achieve 70 percent by 2023.

Figure 2. Current Attainment Rate and Statewide Goal



Source: Associate and higher data retrieved from American Community Survey, 2019 PUMS 1-Year Data, Washington postsecondary attainment, ages 25-44. Short-term credential data retrieved from Lumina Foundation, A Stronger Nation, Washington residents ages 25-64.

The 70 percent goal was based on analysis of the skill demands in the Washington job market but, more importantly, it serves as an aspirational vision that we now know cannot be achieved by incremental improvement over time. The growth in Americans' participation in postsecondary education that surged in the latter half of the 20th century has slowed in recent decades. Washington needs an aggressive change agenda and sustained financial investment to reach the 70 percent goal in a time frame that makes a difference.

Higher Education Policy in Washington State

State and federal higher education policy focused for many years on the supply and affordability of postsecondary education. Capital budgets for new facilities, appropriations to subsidize the cost of education, tuition policy, and funding for financial aid programs dominated the policy landscape.

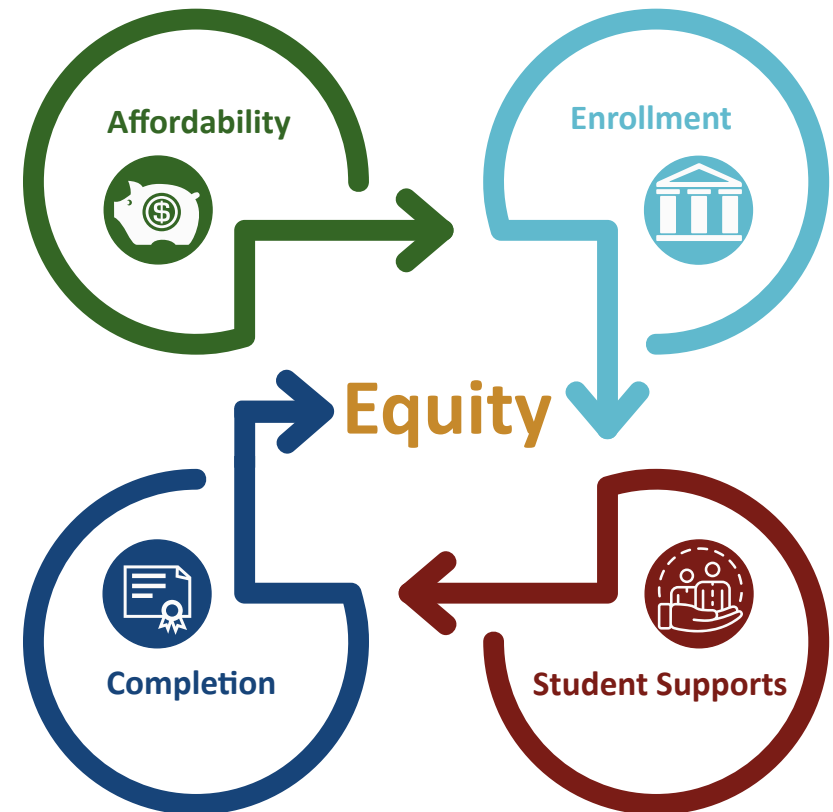
“Higher education equips individuals with the tools they need to succeed in the labor market with higher-paying jobs that lead to improved living standards and more secure and fulfilling lives. Ensuring access to higher education is critical for our state as we build a future of opportunity and economic stability for all.”

During the past dozen years at the federal level and in many states, higher education policy became more focused on educational attainment. This gave rise to new issues of access and success with an increasing awareness of opportunity gaps between racial and ethnic groups that continued to define student success. Many policymakers came to believe that their educational attainment goals could not be achieved without improvement at scale across this wider range of challenges.

In 2019, the Washington Student Achievement Council adopted a Strategic Framework to better understand how state higher education policy contributes to campus and student success. The framework organizes the policy work into four areas deemed essential to achieve our 70 percent goal (figure 3). These are:

- » Affordability
- » Enrollment
- » Completion
- » Student Supports

Figure 3. WSAC Strategic Framework



“If we build an affordable and supportive educational environment, more Washingtonians will enroll in programs and complete credentials.”

The framework is an expression of our belief that if we build an affordable and supportive educational environment, more Washingtonians will enroll in

programs and complete credentials. Ensuring equitable access and success for all students is central to the strategic framework.

The Council also adopted six lenses, or values, to guide our work. The equity lens is foundational to our work and shapes everything we do. The other lenses we strive to apply to both policy and practice commit us to focus on the student experience, work at the regional level, mobilize networks of partners, promote alignment of all public investments to support student success, and encourage innovation across the spectrum.

The WSAC Strategic Action Plan

The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) is built on our educational attainment goal and the strategic framework that organize the work to increase the likelihood of achieving our goal. The SAP is not an agency-specific document that addresses only our programs and initiatives. It is meant to be the state's policy built through the Council's work to engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders to forge a consensus for state action.

“WSAC engages a wide range of partners and stakeholders to shape our state’s higher education policy.”

The SAP includes a summary of our current state policy environment and a work plan for the Council, partners, and stakeholders to take on over a two-year cycle.

Washington’s Existing Higher Education Policy

Discussion of public policy and legislation understandably focuses on new ideas. Rarely does one see all existing state higher education policy explained in plain language in one document. This section is the Council's effort to capture that policy as a baseline to inform our change agenda and to enable community leaders to see the state's approach in full.

We define “state higher education policy” broadly to include statutes, budget investments, and agency rules, as well as more informal, recurring

state practices or actions that can define a meaningful commitment to a policy approach. A good example of the latter shows up in the informal yet persistent connection between financial aid, tuition policy, and state appropriations to colleges and universities. The Council can help support valuable informal policy through identification, recognition of value, and commitment to preserving the policy.

“State higher education policy includes statutes, budget investments, agency rules, and recurring state practices and actions.”

The Council strives to describe state policy based on broad consensus, not just WSAC's perspective. Aspirational statements are grounded in statutory language or other context based on existing law, programs, or appropriations. We hope that by memorializing all of this in one document, engaging a broad range of stakeholders and partners in the development of this document, and sharing with policymakers, we will strengthen the state's commitment to these important policies.

This statement is organized around the 70 percent educational attainment goal and WSAC's four strategic framework clusters: Affordability, Enrollment, Completion and Student Supports and our commitment to the Equity Lens. It explains the purpose of each cluster. Some specific issues could be placed under more than one cluster, so we make choices and avoid repetition in the interest of clarity and understanding.

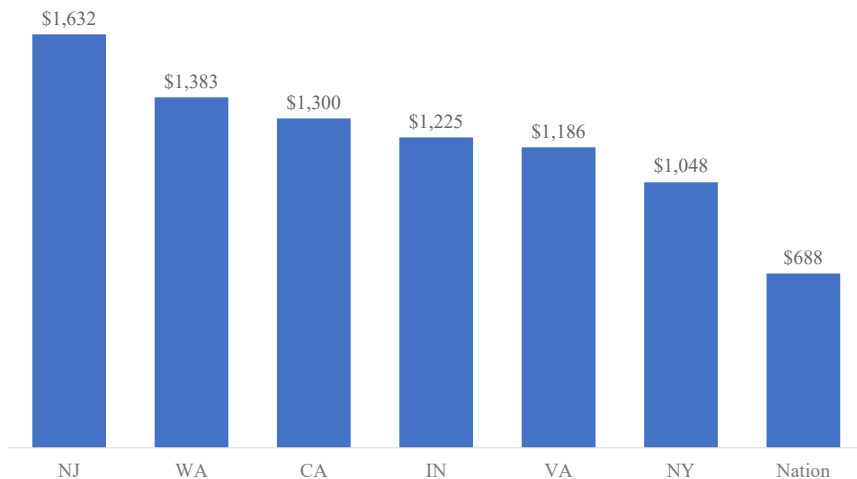
This statement reveals highly developed policy clusters (e.g. Affordability), as well as emerging policy clusters (e.g. Student Supports). Thus, it reveals gaps in our state's higher education policy and motivates work to fill these gaps in the future.

Affordability

Affordability is the most cited barrier to enrolling and continuing in education beyond high school. The financial barriers go beyond the cost of the education itself, expressed as tuition and fees. Many students must support, or contribute to the support, of their household. Because these other costs are so significant and often overlooked, the Council addresses those barriers as a separate cluster entitled Student Supports.

The affordability cluster focuses on the tuition and fee costs in higher education. Washington may have the most comprehensive state policy on affordability in the nation. For instance, Washington awards the second-highest amount of grant aid per undergraduate full-time equivalent student in the nation (figure 4).

Figure 4. Need-based Grant Aid per Undergraduate Full-Time Equivalent Enrollment, by State, 2018-2019



Source: National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, 50th Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid 2018-2019

“Washington’s higher education policy on affordability is among the most comprehensive in the nation.”

Financial aid programs are designed to make postsecondary education affordable for students who face financial barriers. Many students in Washington are eligible for state aid to help cover the costs of college, in addition to the federal Pell grant. As expected, most students who receive state financial aid have incomes below 55 percent of the state median level. The same is true for students receiving federal aid.

Washington’s affordability policy is based on the logic that an affordable higher education system will allow more students to enroll and complete postsecondary programs, leading to an increased count of credentials towards the state attainment goal.

Higher education should be affordable for all Washington residents.

- » Higher education should be affordable without imposing limits by age, to include both adults and recent graduates from high school.
- » Higher education should be affordable to State residents, regardless of citizenship status.
- » Washington’s effort to ensure affordability for students should encompass all forms of postsecondary programs, including traditional degrees, career-technical education certificates, apprenticeships and more.
- » Policies to ensure affordability should also enable student options across all types of institutions, both public and private.
- » Students need support with financial literacy and planning to maximize the affordability of higher education.

Washington makes higher education affordable through three major policies.

- » State financial aid programs based on income eligibility (need-based).
- » State subsidy and tuition policy for public institutions.

Affordability

- » State investment programs to help families save.

State financial aid programs offer flexibility and reach beyond the lowest income households.

- » All Washington residents who meet the income eligibility standards are guaranteed financial aid.
- » State financial aid pays tuition and fees for students from the bottom third of households by income – currently \$50,000 for a household of four.
- » The state contributes part of tuition and fees for students from households above the bottom third and up to the statewide middle income (MFI) level – currently \$97,000 for a household of four.
- » Income-eligible students who receive federal financial aid grants can keep their combined state and federal grant that can help cover costs beyond tuition and fees.
- » Students can use state financial aid regardless of consecutive or full-time enrollment.

“All Washington residents who meet income eligibility are guaranteed financial aid for higher education.”

The state subsidizes public colleges and universities for all students.

- » The amount of state subsidy directly affects the level of tuition and fees.
- » The state law ensures that tuition increases are not greater than the rate of inflation.
- » Consistent state investments combined with tuition funding meets the cost of delivery of education for students.
- » State support helps colleges and universities provide higher quality academic and student support programs that otherwise might not be affordable within campus budgets alone.

- » State policy directs all Washington public postsecondary institutions to commit a portion of their tuition revenue to prioritize financial aid for low-income students.

Some state financial aid programs are designed to increase college and career readiness and are intended to support specific populations.

- » Set an early vision for college: Students from our lowest income households see in middle school that there is a path to an affordable higher education for them.
- » High demand STEM and technical jobs: Financial aid is tied to increase access to high demand education pathways for lower income students.
- » Specific populations: Some financial aid programs support populations beyond income eligibility to include foster youth, homeless youth, Native American students, etc.
- » Work-based learning: Financial aid supports work-based learning by partnering with employers to fund jobs for students.
- » Public needs in the job market: Financial aid programs can be used to attract Washington residents to jobs with high public need such as teaching, healthcare in underserved communities, etc.

“Washington helps families save for college.”

The state supports households with the ability to save for college.

- » The state offers a guarantee to account owners in a prepaid tuition plan (GET), that their investment will keep pace with tuition increases at the state’s highest-priced public university.
- » State legislation directed and supported the launch of a traditional college savings plan (DreamAhead).

Washington mostly relies on the federal model for students to apply for and receive financial aid.

- » State financial aid is awarded and distributed by the college or university that the student attends and is sector neutral.
- » All colleges and universities must meet certain state eligibility requirements and standards in order to participate in state financial aid programs.
- » The federal application form (FAFSA) is used for most students to apply for and receive state financial aid, which prevents students from having to fill out two separate applications.
- » Washington offers financial aid to students who are ineligible for federal aid because their citizenship status through the WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid).
- » Costs of attending college beyond tuition and fees are considered using the federal definition of “total cost of attendance.”
- » Students must maintain and demonstrate academic progress towards their postsecondary credential.

The state has provided some programs to address student debt.

- » The office of the student loan advocate that WSAC administers provides current students information around taking on student debt and offers current students with loans resources for managing debt.
- » Some state loan programs, and loan refinancing programs have been established in statute.

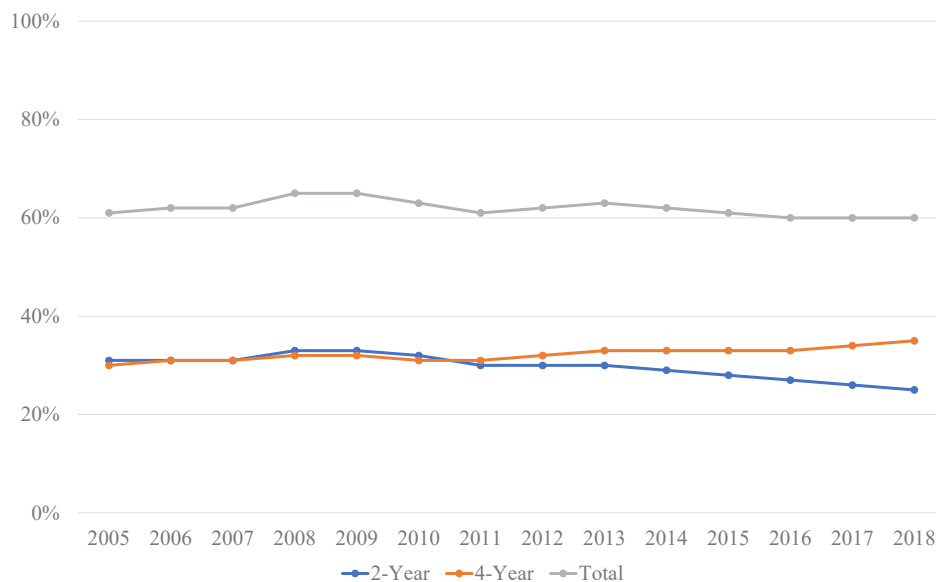
Enrollment

Enrollment

Washington residents enrolled in higher education in increasing numbers and as a percentage of the state population during the second half of the 20th century. Along with most other states, the rate of growth slowed over the past 25 years.

Washington has a surprisingly low rate of enrollment by high school seniors within a year of graduation (figure 6). Our state average of 60 percent is around 9 percentage points below the national average² and far behind states with competitive economies such as Massachusetts (75%) and Virginia (67%)³. Among the west coast states, Washington's direct enrollment rate falls behind Oregon (62%) and California (64%)⁴.

Figure 6. Direct Postsecondary Enrollment Rate from High School



Source: Education Research and Data Center (ERDC), Washington postsecondary enrollment during first year after graduation, 2005-2018 graduates, by sector.

Enrollment is often seen more as a matter of practice than policy. However, the Council believes that there is a significant role for state policy to play in this effort. We have some elements in place, but like most other states, we don't have a comprehensive enrollment policy in place.

“Washington must work to increase enrollment for K-12 students as well as working-age adults.”

All Washington residents should have a clear and accessible path to enroll in postsecondary education.

- » All Washington residents should be aware of the benefits of continuing their education past high school, including the economic, social and health returns of earning a credential.
- » Washington must increase postsecondary enrollment for both traditional K-12 students as well as working-age adults.
- » Washington's effort to increase enrollment should encompass all forms of postsecondary programs, including traditional degrees, career-technical education certificates, apprenticeships and more.
- » Policies to ensure ease of enrollment should also enable student choice across all types of institutions, including private colleges.
- » Washington's effort to increase enrollment should be particularly focused on supporting students of color, especially Black, Indigenous and Latino students, who have been historically and institutionally marginalized from accessing higher education.
- » All state agencies, including DSHS and ESD, should make recently unemployed and lower income residents aware of the availability of education pathways and financial aid.

The state's K-12 system provides some funding, infrastructure and programming to motivate and support college pathways for traditional K-12 students.

Enrollment

- » High school counselors and other K-12 staff offer college and career readiness, and financial aid advising to students in school
- » Washington's K-12 system has worked to integrate college and career readiness through the high school and beyond plan.
- » A range of dual credit programs are available; students can receive college credit in high school by completing a college course, passing a standardized exam, or participating in technical programs that have articulation agreements.
- » Some dual credit programs have no or low cost to low-income students.
- » Students can graduate high school by demonstrating readiness through multiple pathways, including dual credit.
- » State policies require K-12 schools implement academic acceleration and provide a financial aid advising day to help students be college and career ready and gain financial literacy.

“Washington must support enrollment among students of color in particular.”

The state provides some additional infrastructure outside of the K-12 system to support Washington K-12 students' pathways to postsecondary education.

- » Washington makes some investments in college-going programs provided by WSAC and nonprofit groups that provide resources and information to students and families about how to enroll in college.
- » State agencies offer web-based information and digital tools to support high school students increase access to financial aid and college planning.
- » Career Connect Washington is increasing options for students to participate in work-based and academic programs that provide college and career readiness, while earning college credit and/or earning wages.

- » Washington has a network of federal programs that support low-income, first generation, and underrepresented students in their preparation and pursuit of postsecondary education.
- » The state subsidy to postsecondary institutions may also provide support for campus operations including admissions, outreach, and enrollment activities.

“Work-based and academic programs offered through Career Connect Washington prepare students for college and career while earning college credit or wages.”

Washington has some resources to support working-age adults' ability to pay for and access college and career programs.

- » Some financial aid programs are available to increase postsecondary attainment for non-traditional, income-eligible students.
- » State agencies offer web-based information and digital tools to support working-age adults navigate college enrollment, various programs, and basic needs resources.
- » Federal programs and funds support student's postsecondary enrollment in regional workforce development Councils (WDC's) to increase the number of adults in education and training programs.

Student Supports

Student Supports

Students face many different types of costs beyond tuition and fees. Earnings loss due to class and study time comes on top of the costs of housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other needs. These financial burdens can derail students even when financial aid covers their full tuition and fees.

“Financial burdens like housing, food, childcare, and transportation can derail students even when financial aid covers their tuition and fees.”

National data shows that a majority of college students face some basic needs insecurity.⁵ In Washington, a survey of community and technical college students revealed that more than 60 percent face housing or food insecurity or are experiencing homelessness (figure 8).

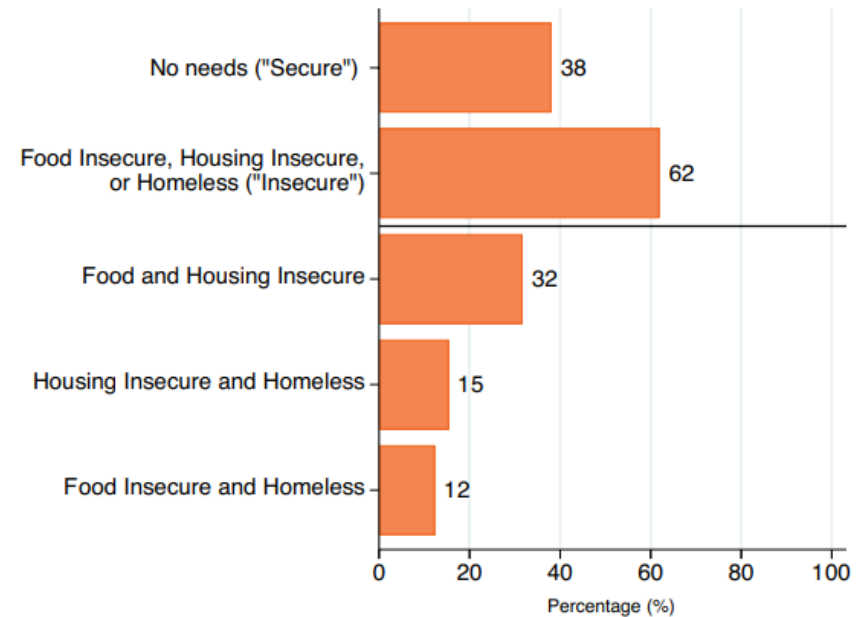
These needs can vary based on different types of students. Less than one in five undergraduates working towards a degree in Washington (19.3%) are traditional students attending college directly out of high school.⁶ Large numbers are working adults, many with children. Increasing workforce demands for “lifelong learning” will make these students a growing portion of our postsecondary enrollment.

This is an emerging issue in Washington and makes us one of the few states to expressly identify and begin work on these challenges. There may be many opportunities to better align existing programs in the social services realm to help students succeed.

Access to basic needs should not be a barrier for Washington residents seeking a postsecondary degree.

- » Basic needs encompass access to affordable housing, sufficient food, quality childcare, mental healthcare, and affordable transportation.
- » Access could be provided through higher education institutions, existing federal or state public benefits, and/or local resources.

Figure 8. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among Washington State Community and Technical College Survey Respondents



Source: Washington State Community and Technical Colleges #RealCollege Survey. The Hope Center (2019).

Some of Washington’s financial aid programs may cover costs beyond tuition and fees.

- » Costs of attending college beyond tuition and fees are considered using the federal definition of “total cost of attendance”.
- » If a student receives more total aid across all sources, these additional funds help support the cost of housing, food, etc.

Many Washington postsecondary students may be eligible for federal and/or state public assistance programs to address food, housing and childcare

- » The state administers and builds off federal programs to provide

Student Supports

programming and support to some income eligible postsecondary students to support childcare, access food and other emergency funds.

- » The state has encouraged state partnerships to expand postsecondary student access to food.

The state has made modest investments in the 4-year and 2-year public institutions to address costs beyond tuition and fees.

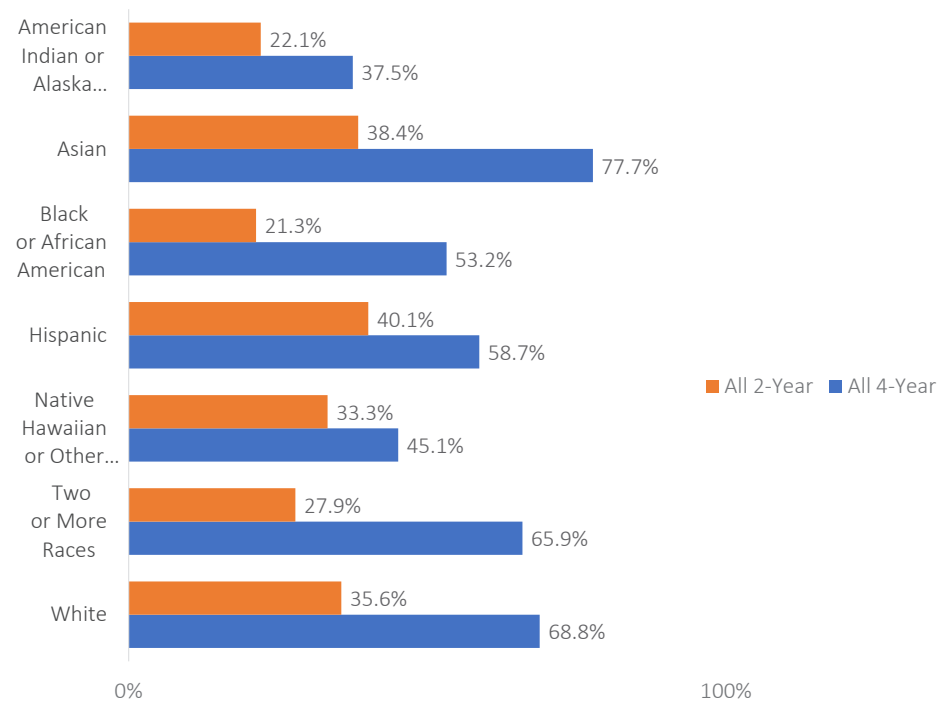
- » The Student Emergency Assistance Grant Program, distributes funding to two-year Community Technical Colleges to help students cover emergency expenses
- » The state has supported pilot programs to address the suicide prevention and needs of college students experiencing homelessness, across 4-year public and 2-year public institutions.
- » Most public and private institutions provide some form of access to basic needs for students, including:
 - Emergency grants to cover one time needs like rental assistance.
 - On campus food pantry or partnership with local food bank.
 - Innovative partnerships between local housing authorities and/or developers with institutions.
 - Case management and integrated teams provide navigation for basic needs and mental/behavioral health.
 - Childcare centers for enrolled postsecondary students.

Completion

Completion

Reaching our goal of dramatically expanding the postsecondary education level of Washington residents requires higher enrollment and a greater rate of student success. While not the only measure, successful completion of a postsecondary program is now a widely accepted indicator of student success. Completing a program is necessary to earn a credential that can help students achieve their life and career goals.

Figure 9. Washington Graduation Rates within 150 percent of Normal Time, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Washington graduation rates within 150 percent of normal time (within 3 years for 2-year institutions, within 6 years for 4-year institutions), Fall 2012 cohort for 4-year and Fall 2015 cohort for 2-year, by race.

Currently, Washington’s overall completion rate at public 4-year institutions is 68.1 percent and 35.1 percent at public 2- years.⁷ This is measured over time periods that begin at first enrollment but continue for 6 years for a bachelor’s degree and 3 years for an associate degree. There are also glaring racial inequities in graduation rates in our state (figure 9).

“We need better measures of completion and student success to align with our state’s attainment goals.”

Completion rates as measured today are an imperfect metric. We need to improve the completion indicator to align with our state’s definition of student success. There are important considerations about the range of programs included, the inclusion of returning adult students, how part-time status affects the indicator, and more, that impact how we measure student success. Washington needs to develop a consensus on what are the key indicators of student success and how to best calculate those indicators to create a valuable measure for policy makers.

Postsecondary students should persist and earn a postsecondary credential.

- » Higher education should guide and support student academic pathways through postsecondary education into the workforce.
- » If Washington provides the necessary resources and establishes a supportive learning environment, then all students who want to, can and should be able to succeed at earning a postsecondary credential.
- » The time it takes students to complete a credential may range depending on students’ academic or career interests (short-term workforce credential vs. doctoral degree), and enrollment (part-time or full-time).
- » Washington’s effort to increase completion rates should be particularly focused on supporting students of color, especially Black, Indigenous and Latino students, who have been historically and institutionally marginalized from accessing higher education.

Completion

Washington has made significant investments to support implementation of Guided Pathways at Community and Technical Colleges.

- » Guided Pathways can be an effective approach to increasing persistence and completion for low-income students.
- » Washington implementation of the Guided Pathways model has a focus on closing racial equity gaps.
- » Colleges receive technical and leadership support to clarify pathways for students, help students' access and pursue that pathway, help students stay on course, and ensure students successfully learn and complete pathway.

Washington has a statewide system that supports students' seamless transfer from one institution to another.

- » Colleges have statewide agreements that give students flexibility to transfer between sectors.
- » Students can earn a transfer associates degree aligned to 4-year degree program at universities.
- » Students can receive academic credit for prior learning that took place in the military, formal and informal education, and/or industry training.

“Higher education should guide and support student pathways from postsecondary education into the workforce.”

The state investment in public colleges and universities supports student persistence.

- » The amount of state subsidy directly affects the degree to which advising and academic support is available to students.
- » Washington's funding model for the community and technical colleges has some connection to student completion
- » The state has an allocation formula that includes a factor measuring

student performance at two-year institutions.

- » The funding model acknowledges the achievement gaps of historically underserved students and provides a focus on these populations.

Equity

Equity

The Council has committed to equity as the defining priority for our work in developing state higher education policy. WSAC, the state agency, is similarly committed to that goal in its work in support of the Council and across all of its program activities.

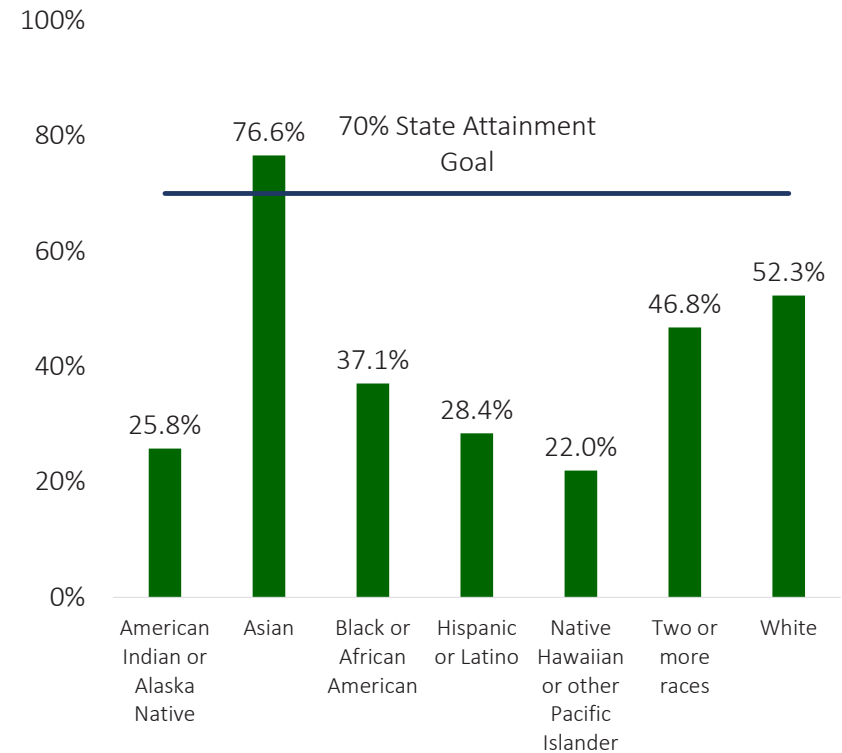
Equity is an outcome in which justice is realized within our society through a continuous, intentional process of identifying and abolishing racism and all forms of oppression designed to marginalize students, communities, and families who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status, and all oppressed groups.

“WSAC recognizes historic and current institutional and structural racism in Washington and in our country.”

WSAC is prioritizing racial equity as a necessary part of our goal to increase student postsecondary credential attainment to 70 percent, especially because, for Washington State residents who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status, only 50 percent or less currently have a postsecondary credential (figure 10).

Further, the racial demographic makeup of public high schools in Washington is different than public postsecondary institutions in the state (figure 10). For instance, Hispanic/Latino students make up almost a quarter of the public high school population, but only about one-tenth of the public higher education population. Ensuring racial equity in our state requires that our higher education system reflects the diversity of our population.

Figure 10. The Proportion of Washington Residents Age 25-44 With Postsecondary Credentials by Race/Ethnicity



Source: 2019 American Community Survey PUMS 1-Year Data, Washington State

Equity

Figure 11. Racial distribution at public high schools and postsecondary institutions in Washington

Race	High School	Public 2-Year	Public 4-Year
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.3%	1.0%	0.5%
Asian	8.2%	11.1%	10.4%
Black or African American	4.5%	5.5%	2.3%
Hispanic or Latino	23.0%	10.4%	12.2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1.2%	0.6%	0.6%
Two or more races	7.5%	11.9%	10.0%
White	54.3%	43.9%	49.4%
Not Reported	N/A	15.7%	14.5%

Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Washington high school enrollment headcount by race, academic year 2019-2020; State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), Washington public 2-year institutions unduplicated fall headcount by race, academic year 2019-2020; Education Research & Data Center (ERDC) Washington public 4-year institutions unduplicated fall headcount by race, academic year 2019-2020.

As a Council, we recognize the historic and current institutional and structural racism in Washington State and in our country and acknowledge our complicity in maintaining this reality by upholding policies, processes, and practices that have created barriers on the path to this goal for Black students, Indigenous students, Latino students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status, and their families and communities. We hold ourselves accountable as Council members and as individual leaders to eliminate these barriers by:

- » Building authentic, long-term relationships with Black students,

Indigenous students, Latino students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status, in service of co-creating new and equitable policies, practices, and processes informed by those who have been most impacted.

- » Strongly advocating for funding and clearly prioritizing resources for systems change in support of Black students, Indigenous students, Latino students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students.
- » Collecting and sharing racially disaggregated data and bringing awareness of the opportunity gaps and progress made with organizational partners to invoke advocacy and action.
- » Ensuring the Council and WSAC executive leadership reflect the racial diversity of the students and communities they serve.
- » Engaging in continuous and long-term assessment of target intervention programs and the Council's progress against its postsecondary attainment goal and the associated Strategic Action Plans.

Policy and Data Development Agenda

WSAC's policy and development agenda

The opportunities for change in higher education are broad and evolving. The Council views its role as helping the state and its elected leadership commit to state higher education policy based on broad engagement across all sectors.

“WSAC seeks to include in our policy and data development all stakeholders who support educational success as essential to our state’s future.”

WSAC works regularly with its education partners across higher education and K-12 schools. We seek to broaden the conversation to include all stakeholders who see increasing educational success as essential to the future of our state, our communities, and our people. The Council is making a special commitment to work with students, community-based organizations, equity-focused groups, local K-12 leaders, employers and others who share this goal.

The Council, the agency, and our partners and stakeholders have only so much capacity for a change agenda across all potential issues. This two-year agenda for 2021-2022 represents the Council’s balancing of priorities and resources to identify the work that we will undertake.

“Our data agenda focuses on key indicators that help identify challenges and opportunities in higher education.”

Our agenda is divided into “policy development” and “data development.” Both areas must be strategic in nature and aligned in advancing the larger state policy change. In terms of data, our agenda focuses on key indicators that help identify challenges and opportunities, galvanize the support of state and community leaders, and measure progress over time. Sometimes data development work may be necessary before the policy change conversation; other times the order may be reversed.

This is intended to be a “living and breathing” document to guide our work. The Council may revisit it as warranted over the next two years to adjust the agenda in response to both our capacity to drive the initial agenda and the external developments that affect our work. Ultimately, this agenda is a “road map” for Council meetings over the next two years, informing Council discussions and ensuring Council action remains focused on achieving the desired results.

Affordability: What should the Council prioritize to maintain and enhance Washington’s affordability policy?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Preserve Washington College Grant (WCG) and other 2158 investments, and restore parity in updating award amounts across sectors.
2. Advocate to increase ease of access to College Bound Scholarship by enabling automatic sign-up for income-eligible students in middle school.
3. Outreach to recently unemployed workers without a college credential, focused on Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), to increase access to financial aid.
4. Increase Washington’s FAFSA/WASFA completion rate for K-12 students, specifically for BIPOC K-12 students.

Data Development Agenda

1. Develop adult-specific financial aid metrics with equity disaggregation.
2. Develop financial aid utilization rate with equity disaggregation.

Policy and Data Development Agenda

Enrollment: What should the Council prioritize to increase enrollment for K-12 and adult learners?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Build a state dual-credit strategy, inclusive of CTE, that increases access and success for BIPOC students AND increases college-going after high school.
2. Outreach to recently unemployed workers without a college credential, focused on BIPOC communities, by building partnerships with employers, community organizations, state agencies, local government, and others outside of higher education.

Data Development Agenda

1. Measure impact of COVID-19 and recession on enrollment, especially for BIPOC students, lower income, adults and other sub-populations suffering disparate health and economic impacts.
2. Measure enrollment and success in dual credit courses, especially for BIPOC students and lower income families. Success includes the use of DC credits in later postsecondary pathways.

Student Supports: What should the Council prioritize to ensure postsecondary students have access to food, housing, childcare and mental healthcare?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Build a statewide coalition- with higher education leaders across sectors, student leaders, community-based organizations, and state partners- to develop a comprehensive vision and multi year agenda (inclusive of a messaging/communications strategy) for future consideration by the Council.
2. Coordinate institutional assessment of postsecondary students' unmet basic needs to inform the State's policy and investments.
3. Facilitate sharing of best practices and research with higher education sectors and partners to learn from what IHE's are already doing that is successfully meeting students' basic needs.
4. Advocate for federal and state policy changes to remove work requirements and degree limitations, for postsecondary student in job training and education programs who are otherwise eligible for public benefits (i.e. SNAP and Working Connections Childcare).

Data Development Agenda

1. Establish baseline data to identify postsecondary students' participation in public benefits across postsecondary sectors throughout the state.

Policy and Data Development Agenda

Completion: What should the Council prioritize to ensure postsecondary students can easily persist and earn a credential?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Establish completion goals and determine resources needed to meet goal(s).
2. Explore opportunities to increase alignment between quantitative academic coursework and skills/competencies from high school to postsecondary to the workforce.

Data Development Agenda

1. Measure transfer and other completion metrics, especially for BIPOC students and lower income families.
2. Develop a clear definition of transfer data for Career Launch credentials.

Endnotes

1 Associate and higher data retrieved from American Community Survey, 2013 PUMS 1-Year Data, Washington postsecondary attainment, ages 25-44. Proportion with certificates as highest level of education retrieved from “Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees” by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University (2012).

2 Source: Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., and Dilig, R. (2020). The Condition of Education 2020 (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved February 22, 2021 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144>. Note: National Immediate college enrollment rate is defined as the annual percentage of high school completers who are enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions in the October immediately following high school completion. High school completers include those who graduated with a high school diploma as well as those who completed a GED or other high school equivalency credential.

3 Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Virginia Department of Education.

4 Source: Oregon Department of Education and California Department of Education.

5 Source: #RealCollege During the Pandemic—New Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity and Student Well-Being. The Hope Center (2020).

6 Source: WSAC analysis of IPEDS 2018 Fall Enrollment Survey. Data retrieved on 2/22/2021.

7 WSAC analysis of National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Washington graduation rates within 150% of normal time (within 3 years for 2-year institutions, within 6 years for 4-year institutions), Fall 2012 cohort for 4-year and Fall 2015 cohort for 2-year.