



2014

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL

EDUCATION · OPPORTUNITY · RESULTS

December 1, 2014

Dear Governor Inslee and Members of the State Legislature,

Washington's economy runs on ingenuity and expertise, both products of a sound education. Commitment to a prosperous Washington demands an investment in the education of Washington students. Increased educational attainment in Washington can only result from more students succeeding—each student, each school, each community, each college and university, each year—until we reach the state's goals.

The Washington Student Achievement Council, together with our many partners, is committed to improving educational outcomes for Washington students. In 2014, the Legislature adopted ten-year educational attainment goals for Washington State (ESHB 2626). By 2023:

- All adults in Washington, ages 25-44, will have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- At least 70 percent of Washington adults, ages 25-44, will have a postsecondary credential.

The attached report, our 2014 Strategic Action Plan, includes specific policy and investment recommendations to make significant progress toward the state's goals. Through an iterative, deliberate process of monitoring progress, encouraging innovation, and highlighting future investments, we can improve Washington. We will have a more highly skilled workforce. Civic engagement will increase, and the demands on social services will diminish. In short, increasing educational outcomes for our students will increase prosperity for all.

Significant progress demands both secondary and postsecondary investments. Proposals to increase funding for public schools by decreasing funding in other state programs should be viewed not merely through the lens of Court compliance, but also in view of the ultimate impact on students and their families. Scaling back early learning and higher education programs may help narrowly satisfy requirements but will compromise progress toward the goals of the program of basic education.

We have done much in this state to ensure students are graduating high school ready for college and careers. We need to ensure that these high school graduates have affordable postsecondary options. Funding improvements in K-12 by cutting early learning and postsecondary education—resulting in either a smaller system or an unaffordable one—would be a disservice to students, their families, and the state.

Maud Daudon, Chair
Marty Brown
Dr. Gil Mendoza

Karen Lee, Vice Chair
Jeff Charbonneau
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Ray Lawton, Secretary
Paul Francis
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2015-17 State Investment and Policy Recommendations

Policy	Maintenance Level Request	FY Cost (millions)		
		2016	2017	Total
Fulfill caseload requirements for the College Bound Scholarship.	Maintain the commitment to College Bound Scholarship students. The early indicators of success for the College Bound Scholarship are promising. The program could be a key component of Washington's efforts to increase high school graduation rates and college participation and completion, but only if we maintain our commitment to the students who signed up in middle school.	\$10	\$15	\$25
Protect maintenance-level funding for public two- and four-year institutions.	Continue to invest in public higher education. Adequately funded institutions provide greater support and opportunities to our students. Protecting higher education funding allows the state to get more out of its investment in K-12 and helps us reach our postsecondary attainment goals.	n/a	n/a	n/a

Policy	Policy Recommendations	FY Cost (millions)		
		2016	2017	Total
Serve more State Need Grant-eligible students.	Commit to fully fund the State Need Grant program. Strategic investment of an additional \$16 million each year through 2023 will close the State Need Grant funding gap and fulfill our commitment to Washington's lowest-income students. Each annual increase would serve an additional 4,000 students who depend on financial assistance to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education.	\$16	\$32	\$48
Expand the reach of dual-credit opportunities.	Build bridges from high school to college and careers through dual-credit programs. Students who earn college credit in high school are more likely to complete high school, enroll in college, and earn a college degree. Expanding dual-enrollment options for all Washington high school students by reducing costs and other barriers will improve student participation and increase educational attainment.	\$12	\$17	\$29
Support underrepresented students.	Leverage the state's investment through student support services. Students from low-income families, who are the first generation in their family to attend college, or who are from backgrounds underrepresented in degree attainment, are more likely to succeed with focused support services. The coordination of targeted support services for College Bound K-12 students, expansion of support services on campuses, and creation of collective impact coalitions will improve educational attainment.	\$5	\$5	\$10
Reinvest in State Work Study.	Provide greater access to work-based learning opportunities. Expanding work-based learning and earning opportunities through strategic reinvestments in the State Work Study program will provide jobs for an additional 3,000 low- and middle-income students. By adding \$5 million, we can begin restoring the program to pre-recession service levels.	\$5	\$5	\$10
Develop an affordability framework.	Pursue policy-driven investments to improve affordability of higher education. An affordability framework will help our Legislature coordinate funding (state, federal, institutional, tuition, and financial aid), understand the impact of funding policies on all students, support decisions that reduce volatility in tuition increases, minimize student debt, and increase investments in postsecondary education.	n/a	n/a	n/a

INTRODUCTION

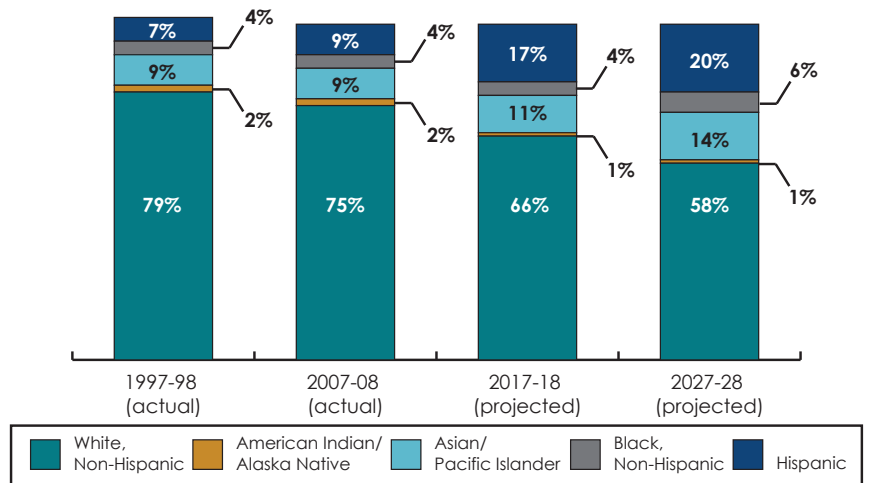
The Roadmap outlined ambitious ten-year educational attainment goals for Washington. These goals—that all adults, ages 25-44, will hold a high school diploma or equivalent, and 70 percent would complete a postsecondary certificate or degree—are among the highest in the nation and reflect Washington’s position as a leading innovation state and a key player in the 21st century economy. By adopting these goals, Washington has committed to increasing overall attainment at a time when demographic trends suggest a leveling off or decline in postsecondary participation and completion. Now it is incumbent on all of us to translate that vision into tangible benefits for all Washingtonians.

The challenges this state faces over the next ten years are daunting, and we cannot wish our way to broader, more equitable attainment. Instead, we need to commit to aligning our K-12 and postsecondary education systems to make them work for all students, regardless of racial or ethnic background or economic circumstances. In addition, our system should be responsive to the needs of returning adults who need new or enhanced skills to compete in the global economy.

For many Washington families, the cost of higher education is a significant obstacle. The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to improving affordability through increased financial aid for low-income students, improved funding for our



Washington Public High School Graduates



Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
 Source: Longanecker, D. (2012). Knocking at the college door.
 Retrieved from <http://www.wiche.edu/info/knocking-8th/profile/wa.pdf>

postsecondary institutions to curb tuition increases, and the development of an affordability framework to inform system growth. In addition, the Council has identified investments in strategies that will support increased student attainment. These include improved support services for underrepresented students and options to reduce barriers for students participating in dual-credit programs.

The 2014 Strategic Action Plan outlines the critical immediate steps to meet Washington’s educational attainment goals. We cannot rely on population growth alone to reach these goals. The number of high school graduates will rise slowly over the next ten years, and those graduates will be more diverse than ever. If the opportunity gap remains as wide as it is today, we will fail. Other factors, like location, also impact access to postsecondary education and careers. Thus, Washington needs solutions that work for rural communities as well as urban ones, and we need to provide consistent messaging so students and their families know how to navigate the system.

The Strategic Action Plan advances programs and policies that are making a difference. Several communities have leveraged the College Bound Scholarship to help historically underserved students get to high school graduation. The State Need Grant provides need-based aid to low-income students in every community, from high school graduates to working adults. Dual-credit programs enable students to earn college credit in high school.

What these tools have in common is that their utility stretches beyond any one sector of our education system. A financial aid program isn't just for postsecondary affordability; it's a commitment that helps low-income middle and high school students envision a pathway to college. Dual credit isn't just about high-achieving high school students; it reduces the total cost of a postsecondary credential. Work study isn't just financial aid; it helps students gain real-world work experience in their field of study.

Our challenge is in making Washington's effective programs accessible to all students. Some students may receive a State Need Grant award and therefore take on less student loan debt. Other students, who may have the same income and even attend the same institution, may not receive State Need Grant because there isn't enough funding available. Some students in a high school course receive college credit, while other students in the same course (with identical grades) do not, only because their families were unable to pay the course fees. It's time to make the system work for all students.



The proposals in this plan can help move the needle on educational attainment. They were developed with input from stakeholders across the sectors, including K-12, community and technical colleges, and public and private baccalaureate institutions. More importantly, they are designed to complement and build off the state's investments in K-12 as part of the *McCleary* settlement. As districts have more resources, they can help students identify a path and begin preparing for college. They can point students to an array of programs that can help, from dual credit to College Bound. These recommendations can help the state maximize the return on its investment in K-12, and use that investment to help students navigate a more seamless, more affordable, and more effective postsecondary education system.

The recommendations in this plan prioritize affordability and student success and lay the groundwork for further work between now and 2023. These strategies must be coupled with continuing efforts to implement the complete package of Roadmap action items. From bringing returning adults back to the postsecondary education system to leveraging technology for student retention and success, more work will be needed in the future. But we need to start now. The 2015 legislative session is critical for Washington's future.



College Bound Scholarship

Ensure cost is not a barrier for low-income students.

"My parents didn't get the chance to go to college, and I hope that with the College Bound Scholarship I can show them that I can make my dream of becoming a nurse come true."

- Middle school student from Mt. Vernon, WA

2014 Strategic Action Plan Recommendation

Maintain the commitment to College Bound Scholarship students.

Washington made a commitment to thousands of low-income middle school students by offering an early promise of financial aid to promote academic aspirations and preparation. The program shows early indicators of success with increased high school graduation and college-enrollment rates. The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) has become more than just a scholarship—it is a key component of Washington's efforts to increase high school graduation rates, college participation, and completion.

The Imperative

A vital step to sustainable funding.

Eligible students receive tuition (at public rates) and a small book stipend. While the State Need Grant covers most of the award, College Bound covers the balance. As two more cohorts enter college, the state must fulfill its commitment. The promise of aid appears to be a key factor in improving high school graduation rates and college enrollment among participants.

Context

College Bound is a key strategy to increase attainment.

Participants are low-income and are more diverse than the overall K-12 population. The first two cohorts of CBS students have high school graduation rates at or above the statewide average, narrowing the educational opportunity gap. While the graduation rate for other low-income students was 60 percent in 2012 and 2013, CBS students' four-year graduation rate was at or above the statewide average of 76 percent. These results are due to a number of factors, including the efforts of local communities, nonprofits, and schools that have made the program a focal point for their work with historically underserved students.

We must keep our promise to these students. As this program continues to narrow the opportunity gap, and more CBS students attend college, this will be an incredibly important investment in Washington's future. The 2015-16 school year (FY 16) will be the first year that four cohorts are in the postsecondary pipeline at the same time. This means the funding increases will level off for future years.

Outcomes and Measures

College Bound supports access and persistence.

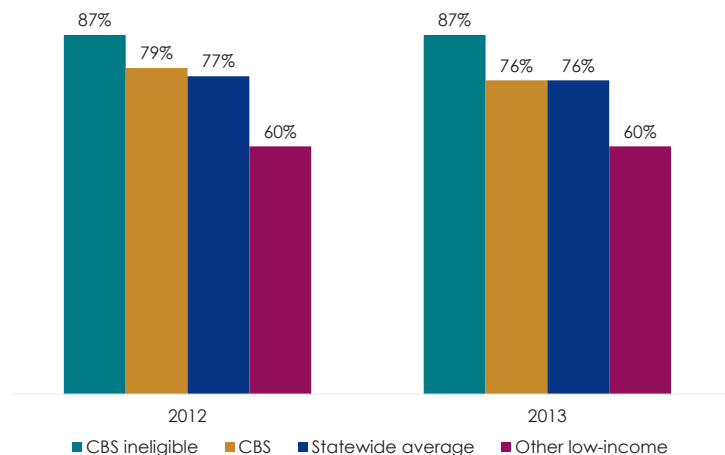
Fulfilling our commitment to students will allow an additional 4,000 students to attend college in fiscal year (FY) 2016. The scholarship funding will support improved persistence and re-enrollment rates.

- In 2013-14, College Bound Scholarship students had a four-year high school graduation rate of 76 percent, while other low-income students had a 60 percent graduation rate.
- 69 percent of CBS students are attending college, above the rate for all students in the high school class of 2012. Only 50 percent of other low-income students attended college.
- CBS students are more likely to attend a four-year school than other low-income students.

Quick Facts:

- Over 185,000 students have signed up for College Bound.
- In 2015-16, four cohorts of College Bound students will have entered the postsecondary pipeline. Over 13,000 students are projected to receive the scholarship in that year.
- The Caseload Forecast Council projects College Bound applicants and postsecondary enrollments eligible for the scholarship for budgeting purposes.

Four-Year High School Graduation Rates



Source: OSPI staff analysis of WSAC CBS Applicant Data.



State Need Grant

Ensure cost is not a barrier for low-income students.

"I always work hard for my grades, but it was really hard to keep those up due to the increase in stress and tiredness I had of working long hours. The State Need Grant is a huge help for students. We depend on the help to finish school and get a degree. I am a sole provider for myself. My family is not able to help in any way, so getting grants is very important."

- Student eligible for State Need Grant, but not served

2014 Strategic Action Plan Recommendation

Commit to fully fund the State Need Grant Program.

Strategic investments of an additional \$16 million each year through 2023 will close the State Need Grant (SNG) funding gap and fulfill the state's commitment to our lowest-income students. Each annual increase would serve an additional 4,000 students who depend on financial assistance to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education.

The Imperative

Eligible students without funding face additional barriers.

Despite the state's long-standing commitment to providing need-based aid to low-income students, roughly one out of every three SNG-eligible students currently does not receive a grant due to lack of funds. This trend has continued even as the economy has improved, with over 33,500 eligible students not receiving funding in 2013-14. Students not receiving SNG have higher student loan debt, are more likely to attend part-time, and are more likely to work full-time, which can adversely affect academic progress and success. They are also less likely to enroll and more likely to drop out if they cannot pay for their expenses.

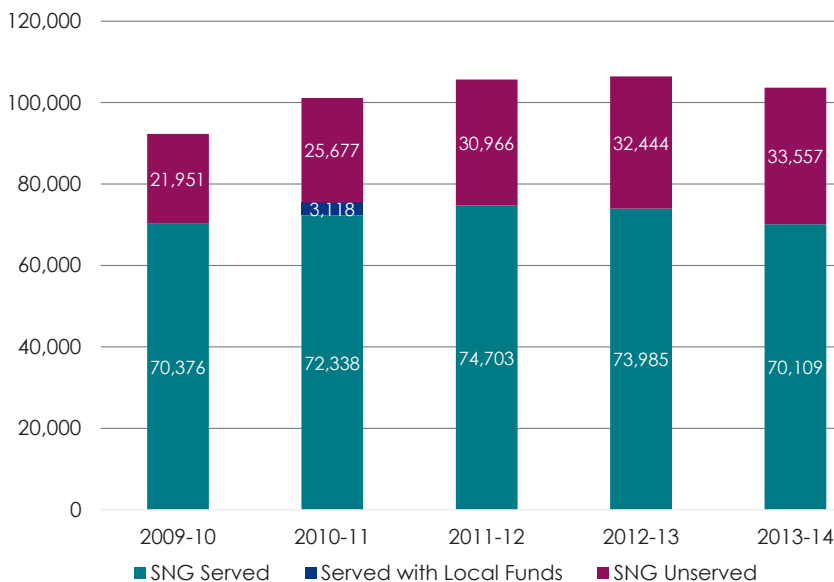
Context

Aid supports student access.

The State Need Grant program has provided tuition assistance to students from low-income families for 43 years. Washington's history of providing funding increases tied to tuition levels has led the state to be nationally recognized for its commitment to providing opportunities for low-income students, even during periods of economic downturn.

While tuition costs can be a barrier for many students, those from low-income families are the most vulnerable. In 2014, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) evaluated student outcomes and found that, for students with the lowest family incomes, receipt of an SNG award was directly associated with higher re-enrollment and completion rates. National studies have shown that need-based grants increase the likelihood of enrollment, support campus engagement and full-time attendance, and improve retention and completion.

SNG-Eligible Students Over Five Years



Quick Facts:

- In 2013-14, over 70,100 students received approximately \$303 million in State Need Grant funding; however, over 33,500 additional eligible students were unserved due to lack of funds.
- Over 60 percent of SNG recipients were financially independent, with an average income of \$14,000 in 2013.
- Currently, 68 public and private higher education institutions participate in SNG.

Outcomes and Measures

Increased access to postsecondary education.

The investment of SNG funds will increase the percentage of eligible students served from 68 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2014, to 71 percent in FY 16, and 75 percent in FY 17. Fully funding SNG reduces the participation gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers. Restoring award parity for students at private institutions would cost an additional \$5 million annually. Average student debt levels for eligible students would decline, while persistence and completion rates for all students, including returning adults, would increase.



Dual Credit

Streamline and expand dual-credit programs.

"This work will help even the playing field for rural students and greatly advance our work to prepare each student for a good future."

- Rural Alliance for College Success

2014 Strategic Action Plan Recommendation

Build bridges from high school to college and careers through dual-credit programs.

The Council's recommended policy changes will provide funding to eliminate tuition in the College in the High School program, expand eligibility for College in the High School to academically prepared 9th and 10th grade students, provide opportunities for both academic and technical education courses, and provide flexibility in the Academic Acceleration Incentive program to assist students with transportation and book expenses associated with the Running Start program.

Quick Facts:

- Low-income students and students of color are underrepresented in dual-credit programs.
- 19,000 students enrolled in College in the High School courses in 2014.
- Students pay between \$200 and \$350 to receive credit for College in the High School courses.

The Imperative

Barriers prevent full participation by all students.

Through the development and implementation of the 2013 Roadmap, the Council has identified key barriers that limit access to dual-credit programs, particularly for low-income students. College in the High School is a good option for students in rural schools but often requires tuition to enroll or receive credit. Removing these barriers is a critical step toward achieving the state's educational attainment goals. Washington must increase opportunities for academically prepared high school students to earn college credits during high school and reduce disparities in access to dual-credit programs.

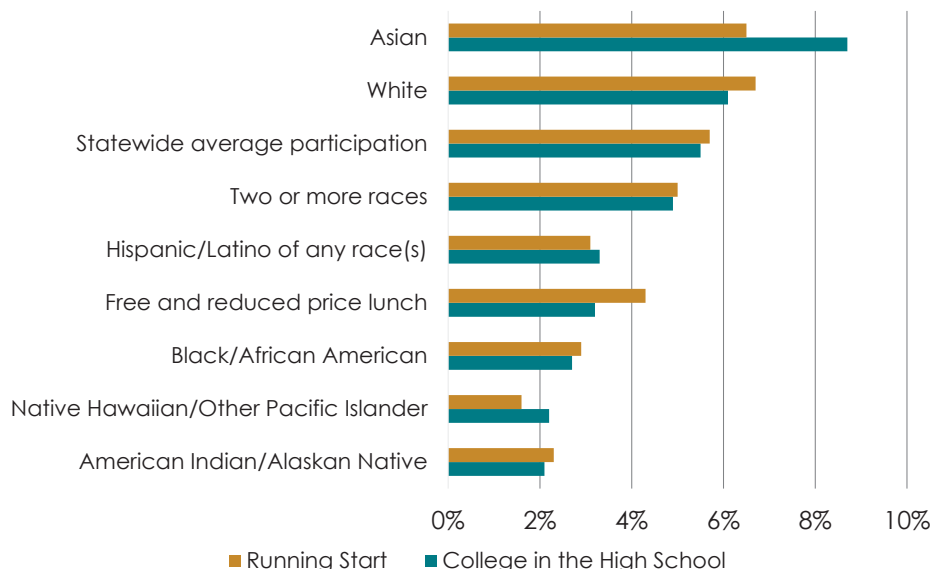
Context

Washington must continue to innovate if we are to continue to lead.

Running Start, College in the High School, and Tech Prep (course completion options), and Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge (standardized exam options) offer academically prepared students the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. The decision to enroll in a dual-credit program should be

made by the student and the student's parents or guardians—in consultation with counselors—based on the academic, cultural, and developmental needs and college and career goals of the student. The decision to pursue dual credit should not be limited by family financial circumstances.

College in the High School and Running Start Participation by Race/Ethnicity and Income



Source: WSAC Analysis of OSPI Enrollment Data for 2013-14 Academic Year.

Outcomes and Measures

An investment of \$30 million over the next biennium would fund College in the High School tuition for more than 75,000 courses and serve 30,000 students per year. Students who participate in these programs are more likely to graduate from high school, continue on to college, and complete a degree. In addition, dual-credit and dual-enrollment programs support students' individual college and career pathways.



Student Support

Increase support for underrepresented students.

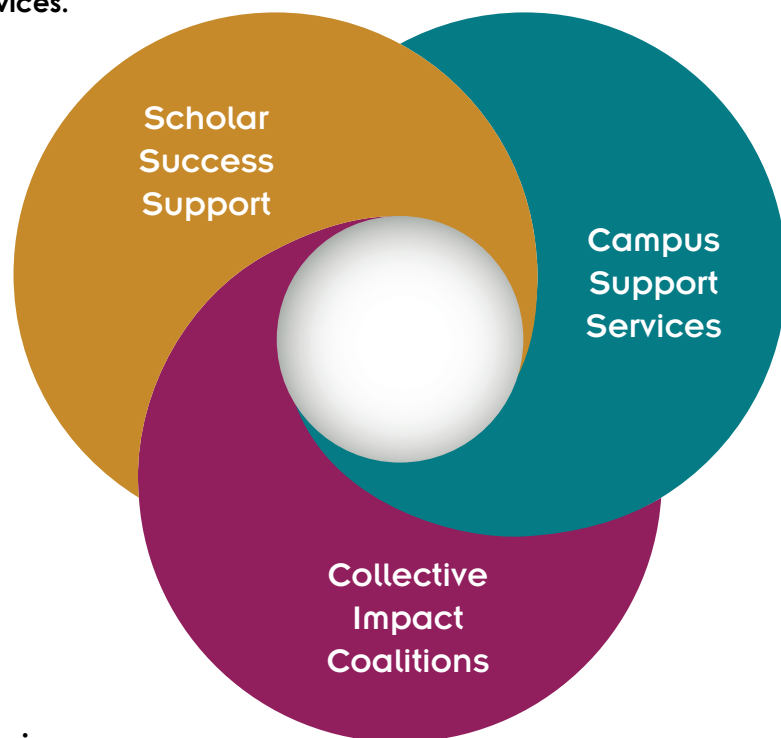
"[Student support] benefits our school by helping students graduate and go to college. [It] does this by helping us with our grades, passing classes, and finding ways to make college a part of our plan for the future."

- Skyview High School student

2014 Strategic Action Plan Recommendation

Leverage the state's investment through student support services.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) should coordinate expanded support services to increase high school graduation and postsecondary completion for underrepresented students. Through partners and service providers, WSAC will facilitate services to support College Bound students in schools, expand the reach of on-campus support services to improve retention and academic success, and develop collective impact coalitions across the state.



The Imperative

Support services are crucial for the success of underrepresented students.

Students who are from low-income families, who are first-generation college students, or who are from backgrounds underrepresented in degree attainment are far more likely to succeed with support services. Students need academic, social, and financial support throughout their education. Reaching the state's attainment goals requires a well-coordinated effort.

Context

Demographic changes prompt the need for coordinated services.

Projected demographic changes in Washington indicate that underrepresented students will be the state's future labor force. Investing now to improve their academic success and educational attainment is critical.

WSAC will expand and coordinate support services to College Bound students in 76 high-poverty districts that do not have college-awareness and prep programs like GEAR UP. A state expansion of campus student-support programs would leverage federal, private, and institutional services; avoid duplication; and ensure more students who are at risk of not achieving postsecondary academic success receive the tutoring, mentoring, and support needed to reach their educational and career goals. The Council will coordinate and establish collective impact coalitions throughout the state, taking into account the unique needs, characteristics, and cultures of geographic regions.

Quick Facts:

- 185,000 low-income students have signed up for the College Bound Scholarship.
- GEAR UP currently serves 34,000 students in 75 school districts statewide.
- 22 campuses have federal student support services programs.

Outcomes and Measures

In support of the state's educational attainment goals, this proposal will:

1. Ensure the state's investment in the College Bound Scholarship yields improved returns.
2. Increase support for all current and prospective underrepresented students on campuses.
3. Expand and coordinate a statewide infrastructure of student support services.



State Work Study

Provide greater access to work-based learning opportunities.

"It's really hard for new graduates to get jobs if they don't have practical experience that sets them apart from all the other applicants vying for limited employment opportunities. Through my State Work Study position in the information technology area, I am developing a range of skills while in school that I believe will give me a lot more choices in my career path once I've graduated."

- State Work Study student, technology assistant

2014 Strategic Action Plan Recommendation

Reinvest in State Work Study.

Expanding work-based learning and earning opportunities through strategic reinvestments in the State Work Study (SWS) program will provide jobs for an additional 3,000 low- and middle-income students. By adding \$5 million, we can begin restoring the program to pre-recession service levels.

The Imperative

Support students and employers.

Employers increasingly point to challenges identifying individuals with the skills necessary to fill jobs required for economic growth. Rising college costs often leave students working long hours in jobs disconnected from their career interests. SWS reinvestment helps counter both trends by providing career-focused, flexible part-time work opportunities that improve persistence and post-graduation employment outcomes.

Context

A long-standing program with proven success.

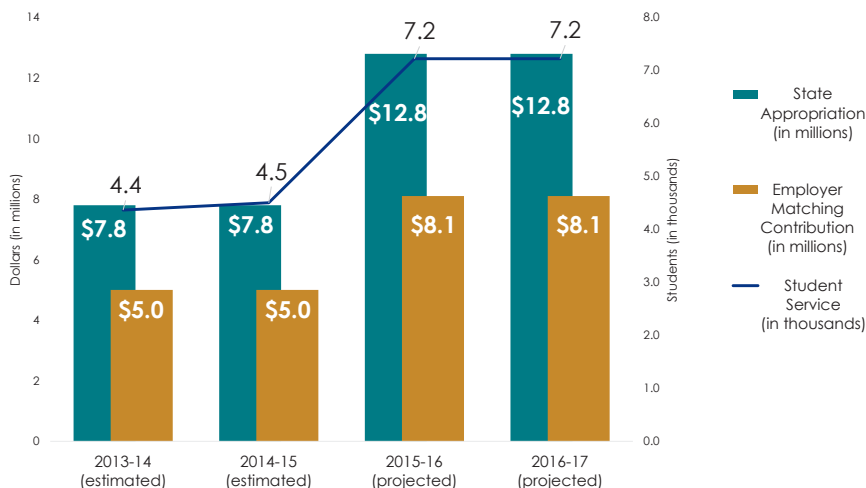
For 40 years, SWS has provided opportunities for low- and middle-income undergraduate and graduate students to earn money for college while gaining valuable work experience in jobs related to their academic and career goals. Students work less than 20 hours per week, earning an average of nearly \$3,000 to offset college costs and reduce debt. Research indicates work-study experiences enhance student engagement and improve academic persistence, completion, and post-graduation employment outcomes.

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. SWS reinvestment will make college more affordable, enhance post-graduation employability, and help lay the foundation for future economic growth.

Quick Facts:

- Research indicates work-study experiences enhance student engagement and improve academic persistence, completion, and post-graduation employment outcomes.
- Through partnerships with nearly 1,000 employers, about 4,800 students at 56 public and private non-profit institutions earned approximately \$13.5 million in 2012-13.
- Employer matching contributions—totaling nearly \$5.4 million in 2012-13 and representing a 40 percent return on program appropriations—help the state leverage limited resources to reach a greater number of eligible students.

Leveraging State Work Study Reinvestment



Outcomes and Measures

More students will be served and employer contributions leveraged.

Sustained incremental reinvestment in SWS—following reductions of 65 percent since 2009—will increase the number of employers participating and students served. Over the 2015-17 biennium, a \$5 million increase in annual SWS funding is projected to provide work opportunities and reduce borrowing for nearly 3,000 additional needy students per year, generate more than \$3 million in additional annual employer matching contributions, and improve the program's student service ratio from 1 in 35 eligible students currently served to about 1 in 20 eligible students served.



Affordability Framework

Make college affordable.

Including financial aid, higher education made up 9.2 percent of the near-General Fund budget in the 2013-15 biennium, compared to 11.6 percent in 2003-05, and 16 percent in 1983-85.

2014 Strategic Action Plan Recommendation

Develop an affordability framework for higher education budgeting.

An affordability framework will help our Legislature coordinate funding (state, federal, institutional, tuition, and financial aid), understand the impact of funding policies on all students, support decisions that reduce volatility in tuition increases, minimize student debt, and increase investments in postsecondary education.

The Imperative

Reinvest in postsecondary education.

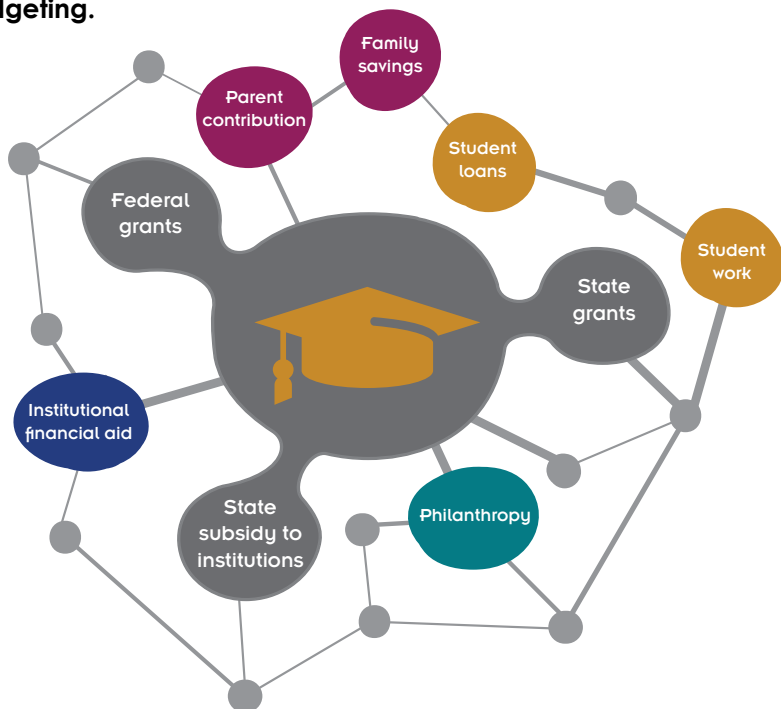
Washington needs a new framework to guide policymakers. Higher education's share of the budget has shrunk over the past two decades, shifting costs to families and increasing student debt. We can do better. We need to define "affordability" and build a funding system focused on that definition. By linking policy and budget changes to affordability, we can make the case for increased funding for higher education.

Context

Policy-driven investment to support all students.

Higher education appropriations in Washington are essentially block grants, largely divorced from enrollment or outputs. While appropriations will always be vulnerable to cuts in recessionary periods, this lack of connection to the tangible benefits they provide the state and students has not served the system well. The disinvestment between 2009 and 2013 was a profound change in how the state paid for its postsecondary education and training system. We still do not fully understand what that change meant to students and families navigating the system.

Without a framework guiding appropriations decisions—and intentionally linking them to need-based aid and tuition policies—Washington will continue to focus on separate pieces of the overall higher education funding puzzle. With a framework, we can clearly delineate responsibilities of the student, the school, and the state, and thus target state appropriations to make the system more affordable.



Outcomes and Measures

Improve affordability through improved coordination.

Clarifying the impact of funding decisions on affordability will help policymakers decide how to reinvest and will provide useful information to policymakers investigating other funding models, such as performance-based funding. The framework helps identify affordability issues for all students regardless of income and provides guidelines or parameters for tuition-setting authority discussions. An affordability framework will help define reasonable levels for student debt, work, and savings to ensure the system is affordable for all students.

Quick Facts:

- State funding per student FTE for the four-year institutions has fallen from \$11,871 in 1991 to \$4,863 in 2013 (in inflation-adjusted dollars).
- A student starting at the University of Washington in 2001 faced a total tuition price of \$18,593 for four years of study. A student starting in 2005 paid \$24,362, and a student who started in 2009 needed \$39,122.
- The average tuition increase from 2007 to 2014 has been 49 percent in the community and technical colleges, 71 percent at the regional universities, and 85 percent at the research institutions.