



COUNCIL CONVERSATIONS

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 2016 PAVE THE WAY CONFERENCE

The Washington Student Achievement Council will host this year's [Pave the Way](#) conference at the Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center on November 1 and 2. Join us to engage with P–12 and postsecondary educators and leaders to help pave the way for educational attainment in Washington. Subscribe to the [conference listserv](#) for more information and registration updates.

WASHINGTON AMONG TOP STATES IN RATE OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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

Now more than ever, earning a postsecondary degree or credential is essential to achieving a stable, middle-class life with the potential for upward mobility. The work of the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) centers around helping individuals and families achieve the dream of higher education and the benefits that greater attainment can provide. Part of that work involves setting goals and enacting policies to increase the number of Washingtonians with diplomas or degrees. Given the tremendous power of postsecondary degrees and credentials to improve lives, the measurement of our progress in this capacity is vitally important.

National organizations such as the [Lumina Foundation](#) include postsecondary certificates and certifications in measures of educational attainment. To be counted, non-degree credentials should be of high quality, which is defined as having clear and transparent learning outcomes leading to further education and employment. In Washington, seven percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 hold a high-quality certificate. This brings our overall postsecondary attainment rate to 51.6 percent, placing Washington among the top five states.

Washington is one of 26 states to set statewide attainment goals and provide strategic metrics that meet the Lumina criteria for rigor and efficacy—i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, and long-term; addresses gaps; and is in statute. Much is left to be done in order to reach Washington's legislatively approved [attainment goals](#), but in the meantime, real progress is being made.

HOT TOPICS IN K-12 EDUCATION

Submitted by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

This past year has been exciting and challenging at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Advocating for students is and always will be our focus, but 2015-16 has brought that into stark relief. The state Supreme Court's [McCleary v. Washington](#) ruling, as well as subsequent court rulings, kept the issue of education funding in the public spotlight and helped State Superintendent Randy Dorn spread the message that funding must be done now. Every year our schools aren't fully funded is a year that some students will be left behind.

Another major issue was charter schools. In early September, [the state Supreme Court ruled](#) that Initiative 1240, authorizing charter schools, was unconstitutional. Randy and his staff worked tirelessly to ensure that the 1,000+ students enrolled in charter schools wouldn't have their education disrupted in 2015-16.

Some other highlights:

- **Grants:** In April, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction received a [New Skills for Youth grant](#). With the grant, OSPI will develop a career readiness action plan. We are also eligible to apply for a second grant to implement the action plan.
- **Data:** OSPI continues to highlight potential educational disparities. In May, we released district-level data on [suspensions and expulsions](#) by racial/ethnic groups. (The data were [expanded in December](#).) In February, we released [attendance data](#); in March, [graduation rate data](#). These are all part of OSPI's [performance indicators](#), which provide a deeper look at overall school performance than has been examined in the past.
- **Federal legislation:** In December, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, a rewrite of the previous No Child Left Behind Act. The legislation, Randy [wrote at the time](#), puts "states back into the driver's seat when it comes to education." Since then, OSPI staff have been engaging with multiple partners on understanding and implementing ESSA.

GOVERNOR APPROVES CREATION OF NEW COLLEGE SAVINGS PLAN

On March 29, Governor Inslee signed [Senate Bill 6601](#) into law. This bill creates the Washington College Savings Program—a traditional [529 college savings plan](#). The bill also requires the state's existing prepaid tuition program, the [GET program](#), to reopen for new enrollments and unit purchases by July 2017.

The new 529 plan will give families another way to save for college. When used to pay for qualified higher education expenses, it will allow the same tax-free savings and withdrawals as GET. The major difference between GET and a traditional 529 savings plan is that a savings plan allows customers to select from a range of investment options with varying degrees of growth potential and risk. These flexible plans can work well for students of all ages and will provide an enhanced set of college savings options for Washington families.

The GET Committee will oversee development and operation of the new savings plan. At their April 20 meeting, the committee authorized GET staff to begin exploring options for creating the new savings plan, including determining investment and program management needs.

WSAC SAYS GOODBYE TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GENE SHARRATT

Gene Sharratt, executive director of the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), has announced his retirement from state service as of June 30, 2016.

Under Dr. Sharratt's leadership, sign-up rates for the College Bound Scholarship increased to 91 percent of eligible students, and additional students are now served through the State Need Grant. He helped establish the statewide STEM Education Innovation Alliance and the statewide postsecondary Disability Task Force. He has promoted programs, policies, and funding to increase access, persistence, and attainment for all students, especially those who may face additional challenges or barriers. WSAC proposed ambitious ten-year goals for secondary and postsecondary educational attainment that were adopted by the Legislature.

A veteran himself, Dr. Sharratt has done much to improve access and success for military service members and their families. During his tenure, WSAC helped ensure all veterans entering the state are afforded resident status for tuition. State-level educational access for veterans and their families was brought into alignment with national standards set by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. WSAC worked with partners to institute prior learning assessment, whereby veterans can receive college credit for their military training and experience.

"Dr. Sharratt leaves not only this agency but every student in the state of Washington in a far better position than when he arrived here three years ago," said Maud Daudon, chair of the Washington Student Achievement Council. WSAC employees couldn't agree more. Gene has imbued his staff with a commitment to high-quality, joyful work. His legacy is one of passionate public service, a benefit both to those who worked for him directly and to the citizens of Washington for whom we all do this important work of helping students succeed.

Dr. Sharratt previously spent 10 years as a college professor and 30 years as a teacher, principal, and superintendent everywhere from Central Washington to Alaska and Norway. After more than 40 years of public service, he has earned a very relaxing, long-overdue retirement—though anyone who knows him doubts there will be much relaxing done at the Sharratt House. There is always more work to be done!