



# COUNCIL CONVERSATIONS

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

## MARCH 2017

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### Q&A WITH WSAC'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MICHAEL P. MEOTTI

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) welcomes Michael P. Meotti as its new executive director. Mr. Meotti comes to us from the Ed Policy Group, where he assisted state governments and regional partners on key issues related to educational attainment, including strategic planning, workforce development, and college readiness and completion initiatives. He previously served as commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education, and president of the United Way of Connecticut.



#### What classes or subjects most influenced you as a student?

In 10th grade I had a class called *Non-Western Civilization*; later, in college, I took *African Literature* and a course called *Development of Civilizations*. As a young person, those were formative experiences that gave me a more global perspective. I learned a lot about many different cultures—but I also came to realize there are core values that tie us together as human beings, no matter where we come from.

#### What key challenges does the Council face in the coming years?

As a society, we have a great track record creating successful educational pathways for traditional students and high academic performers. We haven't done nearly as well at creating or maintaining access and equity for nontraditional students, low-income students, or more diverse populations. WSAC, working with its partners, has the opportunity to help individuals and families build strong communities by achieving their education and career goals.

#### As a newcomer to our state, what are you most enjoying about Washington?

I keep being surprised to turn a corner and suddenly see mountains in front of me! There is so much natural beauty close by, and it really does sneak up on you. My wife and I drove to the ocean this last weekend and saw amazing views along the way. We also love farmers markets, and there is no shortage of wonderful markets to visit in Western Washington.

### STEM ALLIANCE DEVELOPS REPORT CARD, PLAN TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE NEEDS

Washington's robust innovation economy generates many jobs in STEM-related fields—science, technology, engineering, and math. But STEM training and degree production are not keeping pace with employer demand. The Governor's STEM Education Innovation Alliance was created to help align the state's education and career training systems with the workforce needs of our economy.

The Alliance recently completed its [2017 STEM Education Report Card](#). The report, which highlights areas of progress and opportunities for improvement, includes three high-impact recommendations for statewide STEM policy:

1. Increase support for underrepresented populations in STEM fields.
2. Ensure our education system is STEM ready by providing resources to schools and teachers to provide a rich STEM experience for students, including quality computer science instruction.
3. Expand opportunities for career-connected learning.

These policy recommendations align with the STEM Alliance's new five-year statewide strategic action plan, [Vision 2021: Investing in a Future Ready Washington](#). The plan outlines specific actions to meet goals such as improving access to computer science education, increasing attainment of technical credentials and degrees, and providing additional preparation and support for K-12 math and science teachers.

### LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: WORKING TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

During the 2017 Legislative Session, the Washington Student Achievement Council has focused on advancing educational attainment and promoting the goals of the 2017-19 Strategic Action Plan:

- **Make higher education more affordable** by fully funding the State Need Grant, expanding other financial aid programs, and providing sufficient funding to support higher education institutions.
- **Improve college and career readiness** by increasing dual-credit opportunities and investing in high school guidance and completion efforts.
- **Increase college completion** by reengaging adult students and funding successful student support programs.
- **Ensure graduates can meet workforce demands** by expanding investments in high-demand fields and work-based learning.

Higher education-related activity so far this session has hit on several of these themes. Bills currently under consideration would change State Need Grant policies, expand access to the College Bound Scholarship program, and address teacher shortages. Legislators have also shown an interest in protecting education consumers, from limiting unfair business practices to reducing student debt.

### EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL WASHINGTONIANS

By Maud Daudon, Chair of the Washington Student Achievement Council, and President & CEO of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce



As part of our state's business community, it's incredible to see the many ways that our state is an epicenter of innovation. We're pushing the envelope in industries as varied as aerospace, agriculture, high tech, and retail. To sustain this innovation, though, we must ensure that Washington's students and graduates have the skills and knowledge that our state's employers need. Getting local residents prepared for these jobs is also part and parcel of building a more inclusive economy—one with a wider circle of prosperity.

A new report, [Pathways to Great Jobs in Washington State](#), shows the scale of the opportunities ahead: there will be 740,000 job openings in Washington in the next five years. Almost half of these job openings will be for pathway jobs, which offer potential for upward mobility and a route to a career. Another third will be career jobs that offer maximum potential for upward mobility.

A crucial point is that the majority of these jobs will be filled by people with a postsecondary credential or some college. This makes it more important than ever that we make progress on our state's attainment goals for 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.

At the Washington Student Achievement Council, we've identified three key challenges that our state must address to meet these goals:

1. Closing gaps in educational outcomes for historically underrepresented populations.
2. Improving postsecondary recruitment, retention, and completion for working-age adults.
3. Making college affordable for low- and middle-income students.

This legislative session, one concrete step WSAC will advocate for is fully funding the State Need Grant to serve nearly 24,000 students who are eligible but currently unserved. This program—which assists many working-age adults and underrepresented students across all sectors of our higher education system—simultaneously reaches all three key challenge areas. Full funding would increase access and affordability, support returning adults, and help close opportunity gaps. The Council will also encourage legislators to expand access to dual-credit programs and state work study, as well as to provide support tailored to underrepresented students.

Policymaking is just one part of meeting these attainment goals. To those of you in the broader community, I encourage you to think about how we can advance career-connected learning: a continuum of awareness, exploration, and work experiences developed through strong public and private partnerships. As president and CEO of Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, I'm proud that one way that the Chamber is engaging in this work is through a collective effort called the Seattle Region Partnership for Inclusive Growth. Working with the public, private, and philanthropic sectors, our goal is to identify strategies to bridge the gap between supply and demand so that local employers have access to talent while making sure that local residents can gain the skills to access these jobs.

The bottom line is that our state is ripe with opportunity, and we all stand to benefit from teaching and training more Washingtonians to seize the chances ahead. Let's put our shoulders to the wheel and work toward policies, investments, and programs that will pay dividends for years to come.

### Our Mission: We advance educational opportunities and attainment in Washington

In pursuit of our mission, the Washington Student Achievement Council:

- Leads statewide strategic planning to improve educational coordination and transitions.
- Supports Washingtonians through the administration of financial aid, a college savings plan, and support services.
- Advocates for the economic, social, and civic benefits of postsecondary education.

### Next Council Meeting:

April 19, 2017

The Evergreen State College

Olympia