

Agenda item	Strategic Action Plan (SAP)
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council is charged with the development of a strategic plan (<i>RCW 28B.77.020</i>) that will propose priorities and strategies to meet the state's attainment goal. To develop a broad vision for the Council and outline policy priorities for the next 1-2 years that the Council agrees will help reach the State's attainment goal.
Guiding Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do you agree with the depiction of the current landscape of state higher education policy? Is there anything important missing? For maintaining affordability, what policies should the Council prioritize? For increasing enrollment for K12 and adult students, what policies should the Council prioritize? For increasing student access to basic needs, what policies should the Council prioritize? For increasing student persistence and completion, what policies should the Council prioritize? What additional pieces of data will be crucial to the Council to measure the impact of this work?
Process and Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council began discussing the strategic action plan in July Each Council member worked with WSAC staff to discuss and develop preliminary ideas regarding data and priorities WSAC convened students, community-based leaders, higher education partners, K12 partners, and other state agency partners to discuss potential work and policy priorities within each cluster in July WSAC staff have integrated this feedback into the recommendations for Council consideration Policy recommendations were included based on the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High potential to help Black, Indigenous and other students of color who are furthest away from postsecondary attainment goal Students, local community, advocates or regional leaders have indicated value of policy High potential impact if issue is resolved There is research/data that supports the policy will support increasing attainment There is momentum and/or feasibility in pursuing the policy There is a clear value WSAC can add to address "between the seams" of systems or institutions
Possible Council Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreement with the depiction of the current policy landscape (layer 1) Consensus of and approval of policy priorities Council will pursue (layer 2)
Documents and Attachments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Layer 1: current policy landscape (word document) Layer 2: policy priorities for Council consideration (word document)

Layer 1: Washington's Current Policy Landscape

Affordability

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 post-secondary 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.

Washington makes higher education affordable through two major policies

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

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.

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 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

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)

Enrollment

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 K12 students as well as working-age adults.
- Washington's effort to increase enrollment should encompass all forms of post-secondary 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.

The state's K12 system provides some funding, infrastructure and programming to motivate and support college pathways for traditional K12 students

- High school counselors and other K12 staff offer college and career readiness advising to students in school
- Washington's K12 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 cost to low-income students
- Students can graduate high school by demonstrating readiness through multiple pathways, including dual credit
- State policies require K12 schools implement academic acceleration and provide a financial aid advising day to help students with college and career readiness

The state provides some additional infrastructure outside of the K12 system to support Washington K12 students' pathways to postsecondary education

- Washington makes some investments in college going programs provided by WSAC and nonprofit groups

- 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
- State agencies offer web-based information and digital tools to support high school students increase access to financial aid and college planning
- The state subsidy to postsecondary institutions may also provide support for campus operations including admissions, outreach and enrollment activities

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 students postsecondary enrollment regional workforce development Councils (WDC's) to increase the number of adults in education and training programs

Student Supports

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.

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 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

- 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

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.

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.

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

Layer 2: The Policy Action and Data Development Agenda

Affordability

What work should the Council prioritize to maintain and enhance Washington's affordability policy?

Policy Development Agenda

- Preserve Washington College Grant (WCG) and other 2158 investments.
- Advocate to increase ease of access to College Bound Scholarship by enabling automatic sign-up for income-eligible students in middle school.
- Outreach to recently dislocated workers without college credential, focused on Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), to increase access to financial aid.
- Increase Washington's FAFSA/WASFA completion rate for K12 students, specifically for BIPOC K12 students.

Data Development Agenda

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

Additional Considerations

How should Washington's policy address the total cost of attendance?

- The WCG addresses about 40 percent of the full cost of attendance, but depending on the student's income, it may not necessarily cover the cost of housing, books and other expenses that are often a significant barrier for many students.
- Because WCG and other need-based financial aid programs phase out as income rises, some middle-income families are not eligible. Thus, Washington's current financial aid programs, by de facto, assume that the current tuition levels are affordable for some, but not all middle-class families.

Should Washington adopt a state goal to increase financial utilization rates, especially for BIPOC students?

- Roughly only half of Washington high school seniors fill out the FAFSA each year
- FAFSA completion rates are significantly and disproportionately lower for Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian, and American Indian/Indigenous students ([WSAC Equity Landscape Report](#)).
- Washington has only begun to explore data and patterns in WASFA applications.

How do college savings plans contribute to affordability and advance college-going identities for BIPOC students?

- Washington offers two options to families for college savings plans, yet these programs have not been strategically connected to the broader effort to increase college affordability.

Are there barriers to educational attainment in the design of state financial aid, especially as it pertains to time limits?

- Most of Washington's financial aid programs include time limitations that require a student to either enroll in or complete postsecondary education within a certain period.
- Washington does not fully understand the implications of the time limits and the State has not explored establishing consistent time frames across all financial aid programs.

What role does borrowing/taking on debt play in the ability for families and students to afford postsecondary education?

- Current state policy implicitly assumes middle class families can either afford tuition or are willing to borrow, but Washington has not explored this issue at length.
- Black Americans have a higher average education debt amount (\$43,725) than other racial groups; these inequities contribute to the large income and wealth disparities by race and ethnicity in the U.S. (Braga, 2016 as cited in [WSAC Lessons on Recovery Report](#)).

Enrollment

What work should the Council prioritize to increase enrollment for K12 and adult learners?

Policy Development Agenda

- Build a state dual-credit strategy that increases access and success for BIPOC students AND increases college-going after high school.
- Build partnerships with employers, community organizations and others outside of higher education to increase enrollment across all sectors and programs for adults/non-traditional students.

Data Development Agenda

- 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.
- 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 post-secondary pathways.

Additional Considerations

What more should Washington do, beyond addressing dual-credit, to ensure that K12 students, especially BIPOC students, can see and access a clear path to higher education?

- Are current investments, policies and programs working to increase enrollment for BIPOC students?

- What supports are available to help students navigate the transitions between K12 and higher education (including credit transfer, financial aid, value of credentials, etc.)?
- Should college and career readiness efforts begin in middle school or earlier?
- What partners or systems are responsible for increasing K12 enrollment?

Should Washington develop a comprehensive strategy to increase enrollment for non-traditional students/adults, especially Washington BIPOC residents?

- Are current investments, policies and programs working to increase enrollment for adults with some credit but no degree, especially, BIPOC residents?
- What supports are available to help working adults navigate the transitions between employment/unemployment and higher education (including credit transfer, financial aid, value of credentials, etc.)?

Student Supports

What work should the Council prioritize to ensure postsecondary students have access to food, housing, childcare and healthcare?

Policy Development Agenda

- Build a statewide coalition- with higher education leaders across sectors, student leaders, community-based organizations, and state partners- to develop a comprehensive vision and multiyear agenda for future consideration by the Council.
- Coordinate statewide assessment of postsecondary student basic needs.

Data Development Agenda

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

Additional Considerations

Should the State allow postsecondary students full access to public benefits?

- Washington law imposes work requirements and degree limitations, for parents in job training and education programs who wish to receive childcare assistance, preventing postsecondary students from benefiting from the Working Connections Child Care program.
- The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) requires postsecondary students work a minimum of 20 hours a week in order to be eligible for access to food support which may conflict with campus policy.

Should Washington cover the cost of basic needs beyond tuition and fees (food, housing, childcare, etc.) to ensure barriers are removed for postsecondary students?

- Most of Washington's financial aid programs are limited when it comes to covering students' non-academic related costs.

Completion

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

Policy Development Agenda

- TBD

Data Development Agenda

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

Additional Considerations

Should Washington develop a comprehensive state policy agenda to ensure students, especially BIPOC students, persist and earn a postsecondary credential within a reasonable time period?

- Most existing policies and funding for increasing persistence has been limited to CTC system.
- Students, regardless of the type of type of institution, including private colleges, should be well positioned to complete a degree.

Does Washington understand the impact of developmental coursework on students' success, particularly BIPOC students?

- There is a misalignment especially between math courses and expected mathematical competencies from high school to postsecondary to the workforce that can hinder persistence.
- In Washington, students of color enroll in developmental coursework at higher rates than their white peers. Students required to take developmental coursework are less likely to obtain a credential than their peers who do not (Valentine et al., 2017 as cited in [WSAC Equity Landscape Report](#)).

Should Washington ensure that students, especially BIPOC students, have access to clear and accurate information to support a seamless pathway between institutions and the workforce?

- American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students who expressed an intent to transfer were less likely to do so compared to White and Asian students ([WSAC Equity Landscape Report](#))
- What supports exist to ensure students can easily navigate and make informed decisions about the transitions between various colleges/institutions (includes credit transfer, financial aid, and value of credentials in relation to the job market)?
- How is past work experience or prior education counted for academic credit across sectors?
- Does Washington support students' ability to both work and obtain a postsecondary credential?
- How does Career Connected learning support employment and earning a credential?

- Students from the undocumented community face barriers that make it challenging to work (and earn wages) on campus while being enrolled in postsecondary education.