

Increasing Postsecondary Enrollment and Equity: Regional Partnerships and Institutional Strategies

Panel One Summary

In the fall of 2020, postsecondary enrollment dropped 13 percent compared to the previous year, all while Washington's direct postsecondary enrollment rate for K-12 has remained at 60 percent for the past ten years. FAFSA completion rates are also down and are lower for low-income students and students of color. Existing regional partnerships can reverse these trends. Partnership-based approaches show promise to increase postsecondary enrollment and close equity gaps through student-centered and comprehensive interventions. The first panel will highlight three existing partnerships in Washington to better understand their approach, successes, and lessons learned.

Seattle Promise

[Seattle Promise](#) is a college tuition and success program launched by Seattle Colleges, Seattle Public Schools, and the City of Seattle. The program began following the passage of the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) Levy in 2018.

All Seattle Public High Schools graduates are eligible for the Seattle Promise program, regardless of grade point average (GPA), income, ability, or country of birth. The Promise program:

- Guides students on a direct path from high school to college to earn a degree or certificate and enter the workforce or transfer to a four-year college or university.
- Seeks to boost career opportunities for all students, especially first-generation and underserved populations
- Prepares students to participate in the Seattle region's vibrant workforce and economy without taking on overwhelming debt.

Seattle Promise has three core components:

1. Free tuition at any of the Seattle Colleges. Students may attend North Seattle College, Seattle Central College, or South Seattle College for up to two years, 90 credits, or a student's first degree, whichever comes first.
2. Equity scholarships for students with financial need. The scholarships provide flexible funding for books, transportation, housing, and more.
3. Student support and advising. Access to support and advising begins in the junior year of high school and can last through the completion of a degree, certificate, credential, or transfer to a four-year institution.

Panelists for the Seattle Promise partnership program include:

- Andrew O'Connell, Principal, Franklin High School, Seattle Public Schools
- Sarah Bishop, Assistant Director, Seattle Promise, Seattle Colleges

- Melody McMillan, Sr. Executive Director, Seattle Promise, Seattle Colleges
- Terra McFarlin, School Counseling Program Manager, Seattle Public Schools

Graduate Tacoma

[Graduate Tacoma](#) is a collective-action network with the goal that by 2030, 70 percent of Tacoma Public Schools students will earn a degree, technical certificate, or gain a good-earning wage employment opportunity within six years of high school graduation. Targeted efforts focus on students of color and those impacted by poverty. The collective-action approach centers on the fundamental belief that no single organization can solve any major social problem alone. Instead, sectors and support systems must work together to help students and improve outcomes.

The Foundation for Tacoma Students is the backbone nonprofit and staff dedicated to ensuring the continuity, stability, and growth of the Graduate Tacoma community-wide movement. Serving as the only cradle-to-career intermediary in Tacoma, the Foundation plays the unique role of helping align organizations, institutions, and individuals — the collective community partners — around positive outcomes for students. More information can be found [here](#), and [here](#).

Panelists from the Graduate Tacoma partnership include:

- Tafona Ervin, Ed. D, Executive Director, Foundation for Tacoma Students
- Elvin Bucu, Deputy Director, Foundation for Tacoma Students

The Chehalis Student Achievement Initiative

In 2017, the Chehalis Foundation and the Chehalis School District formalized a partnership with Centralia College to support W.F. West High School students. The [Chehalis Student Achievement Initiative](#) aims to get 60 percent of W.F. West students to earn a college or vocational credential past high school.

- The Foundation funded several initiatives at Centralia College (CC), including a robust summer program for graduating seniors, additional support for math, peer mentoring, social engagement, and a staff person at the college dedicated to W.F. West graduates at Centralia College.
- Forty-nine percent of W.F. West's Class of 2017 graduated from Centralia College within two years of finishing high school—a 10 percent increase over W.F. West graduates from 2015 and 2016.
- There has been a 3 percent increase in W.F. West grads going directly to college (55 percent to 63.1 percent)

Panelists for the Chehalis Student Achievement Initiative include:

- Bob Mohrbacher, President of Centralia College
- Robert Cox, Vice President of Student Services, Centralia College
- Dr. Christine Moloney, Superintendent, Chehalis School District
- Dr. Brian Fox, Assistant Superintendent, Chehalis School District

Panel Two Summary

Nearly all of Washington's Public Baccalaureate institutions have adopted some form of a publicly announced ["guaranteed admissions" \(GA\) policy](#), and all Washington public baccalaureate institutions are [permanently SAT and ACT test optional as of this Fall 2021](#). Some private four-year, not-for-profit institutions have also adopted test-optional policies and piloted guaranteed admissions. At the same time many colleges and universities are also ramping up their outreach to students to address declining enrollment. This panel will highlight institutional changes and outreach efforts as another strategy to increase postsecondary enrollment for low-income and BIPOC students who are furthest from the attainment goal.

Sector Partnerships Panelists

- Eastern Washington University, Jana Jaraysi Director of Admissions
- Pacific Lutheran University, Melody Ferguson, Associate Dean of Admission
- Wenatchee Valley College, Dr. Chio Flores, Vice President of Student Services
- State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Dr. Joe Holliday, Director of Student Services