



COUNCIL CONVERSATIONS

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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IMPROVE LIVES. INVEST IN EDUCATION.

By Paul Francis, Washington Student Achievement Council Member and Executive Director for the Council of Presidents

I grew up in a poor immigrant family in Tucson, Arizona. Education changed my life; it not only provided a pathway to economic security but also opened my eyes and mind to a world that I never before knew or imagined existed. That experience makes me all the more proud, as the executive director for the [Council of Presidents](#), to work for six nationally renowned public colleges and universities that provide these same life-changing opportunities—from [expanding partnerships in underserved areas of the state](#) to reaching out to [victims of the Oso landslide](#) and [wildfires in eastern Washington](#) to [increasing opportunities for those who teach our youngest learners](#)—to thousands of students similar to me every single day.

The mission of the Washington Student Achievement Council is to increase student success through increased attainment (i.e. more students with a high school diploma and more with a postsecondary degree or credential). The work of the Council is essential not only in cultivating public and policymaker support for the full spectrum of high-quality postsecondary opportunities—from apprenticeships and certificates to associate, bachelor's, and graduate and professional degree programs—but also in providing a forum in which to address critical issues around student access, affordability, and success. Our challenge as a community of leaders is to understand and harness the power that rapidly changing demographics, a technology-based economy focused around key industry clusters, and changes in teaching and learning and who pays for higher education will have on our children and our entire state.

That work began last year with our ten-year Roadmap and continues with ambitious statewide educational goals that will necessitate reaching out to all populations, including first-generation college students, veterans, working adults, online learners, and more.

In January the Legislature will convene to write a biennial budget. The Council of Presidents will be working alongside the Student Achievement Council and myriad other partners to advocate for a budget and policies that are fair to Washington students and their families and that allow our colleges and universities to continue to be engines of opportunity and incubators for innovation in a globally interdependent 21st Century economy. I hope you will consider lending your voice to this critical conversation.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.

Autumn ushers in the return to school, the smell of freshly baked scones at county fairs, pumpkins, corn stalks, and crisp, cool mornings. Fall also kick-starts the return of legislative committees and staff to Olympia in preparation for the 2015 session. The upcoming session provides an opportunity for the Washington Student Achievement Council to provide recommendations on how we can reach Washington's two attainment goals: by 2023 all Washington adults ages 25-44 will have a high school diploma or equivalent and at least 70 percent will have a postsecondary credential. These policy and budgetary recommendations will be outlined in a report called the Strategic Action Plan, which the Council is expected to adopt at its November 19 meeting in Olympia.

I have two other pieces of good news to share. First, we are excited to welcome a new OSPI and K-12 representative. Dr. Gil Mendoza is currently Deputy Superintendent with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). He will replace Scott Brittain, who has served with distinction representing OSPI and the K-12 sector on the Council for the past two years.

Second, we are making progress on STEM education in Washington. A 2014 National Governors' Association grant will help us identify how we can better align STEM education to meet current and projected workforce demands. The 14 states selected to participate in this national STEM alignment effort held their first meeting in Seattle on October 9-10. The Washington Student Achievement Council, under the direction of the Governor's office, will assist in the statewide facilitation of the grant and ensure outcome measures are developed and accountability sustained.

GET PROGRAM FINANCIALLY HEALTHY – A RELIABLE SAVINGS OPPORTUNITY

The state's [Guaranteed Education Tuition program \(GET\)](#) provides Washington families a secure and affordable way to save for college. On September 4, the GET Committee met to set the new GET unit purchase price. Based on these findings, and the fact that tuition did not increase at Washington universities for the 2014-15 academic year, the GET Committee unanimously agreed to hold the GET unit purchase price steady at \$172/unit for the new enrollment year, which opens November 1.

At this meeting, State Actuary Matt Smith provided an overview of the financial health of the program. Smith's findings showed that, for first time since the beginning of the Great Recession in 2008, the program's [funded status is at or above one hundred percent](#). GET, now 106 percent funded, is expected to meet all of its current and future financial obligations to current enrollees without the need for state intervention. In fact, the program has already surpassed its 2021 projected funded status (seven years earlier than expected).

OFFICE HOURS: THE COUNCIL IS IN

How many Washington families are using GET to save for college? What are the recommendations for increasing student outcomes in Washington? You can get the answers to these questions and more by visiting our blog, [Office Hours: Where educational policy complements practice](#). Stay tuned for posts that highlight educational data and the interplay between policy, administration, and practice.

NEW POLICIES FOR CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS ASSESSMENTS

When high school juniors take the [Smarter Balanced assessments](#) this spring, public colleges and universities in Washington will recognize their scores.

In September, the six public baccalaureate institutions in Washington [approved a policy](#) to use Smarter Balanced grade 11 assessments to help determine college course placement. The Washington community and technical college system approved a similar policy several months ago. This effort was supported by the Core to College project led by the [State Board for Community and Technical Colleges](#).

COLLEGE BOUND STATS ILLUSTRATE TREMENDOUS GROWTH OF PROGRAM

Over 32,000 eighth graders signed up for the College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program by the June 30 deadline. The graduating class of 2018 includes the [largest CBS cohort](#) since students began signing up for the scholarship in 2007, even though the number of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch dropped slightly from last year.

CBS provides financial assistance to low-income students who want to achieve the dream of a college education. Students sign up in middle school, no later than June 30 of their 8th grade year, to receive an early commitment of state funding. The scholarship, in combination with other state aid, covers tuition at public college rates.

The CBS program has come a long way since it began in 2007, growing both in size of cohorts and the rate of eligible students participating in the program. In 2008, 57 percent of eligible students signed up for the scholarship. Fast forward to 2014, and 89 percent of eligible students signed up to receive the scholarship when they graduate from high school.

These increases are the result of strong outreach efforts by school districts and partnering organizations. Notably, 69 school districts saw 100 percent of their eligible students sign up for the scholarship.

NEW INITIATIVES AND GRANT FUNDING SIGNS OF PROGRESS TOWARD STEM EDUCATION GOALS

September 22 marked the first meeting of Governor Inslee's STEM Education Innovation Alliance with staff from the National Governor's Association (NGA) and other interested parties. Topics included overviews of the Alliance and the [recently announced NGA-STEM grant](#), a conversation with Governor Inslee about priorities to address STEM education in Washington, and an update on the work of [Washington STEM](#). This meeting also served as the initial site visit with NGA staff to kick off the start of the NGA-STEM grant project.

On October 9 and 10, members of the STEM Alliance attended a two-day Policy Academy session in Seattle, along with representatives from the other states who received NGA grant awards. The six-member team included Gene Sharratt, WSAC executive director; Maud Daudon, WSAC chair and CEO of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce; Jeff Charbonneau, WSAC member and 2013 National Teacher of the Year; Marcie Maxwell, Governor's senior policy advisor; Caroline King from Washington STEM; and Jeff Estes with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

COUNCIL WELCOMES MADDY THOMPSON, DEIRECTOR OF POLICY & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Student Achievement Council is happy to welcome Maddy Thompson as our new Director of Policy and Government Relations. Maddy came to the Council from the Washington State House of Representatives where she worked as a research analyst with the higher education committee for the past four years. She previously spent nine years as legislative liaison and policy analyst with the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Maddy has a Master's in Public Administration from The Evergreen State College, a bachelor's degree from the University of Sydney, Australia, and her teaching certification from Cambridge University. Her work, teaching, and volunteer service have included time in London, Zimbabwe, and Calcutta. We sat down with Maddy to find out more about her and her thoughts about the upcoming legislative session.

How did you get interested in state-level education policy?

Early in my career I taught at the University of Technology, Sydney, and developed training curricula at the Asia-Pacific headquarters of American Express. Beginning in 1999, I conducted research on education and higher education topics for the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, which gave me insight into state-level policy. I have always valued education and the role it plays in enriching people's lives.

What do you expect the greatest challenges or hot-button topics will be for education during the 2015 session?

How to balance the budget implications of the *McCleary* decision with other important needs is the key challenge this session.

What role has education had in your life?

My education has been the foundation for my career and the way I engage with the world.

What was your favorite class in school and why?

I loved English (language arts). I loved reading, writing, and theater. I also loved economics. I am so grateful for my talented teachers from K-12 to higher education.

You're originally from Australia. What brought you to Washington?

While traveling in Europe, I fell in love with an American from Centralia, Washington—he is now my husband and the father of my children! That's why I left sunny Sydney and came to live here.