

Title	Proposed Strategic Action Plan and 2017-19 Legislative Priorities
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Synopsis:	Council members will determine Strategic Action Plan priorities. These priorities will form the basis of their 2017-19 legislative policy and budget requests.
Guiding questions:	Will strategic action plan priorities address the key challenges to meeting the education attainment goals, identified by the Council in 2016: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address the opportunity gap? - Re-engage adults? - Increase access and affordability?
Possible council action:	<input type="checkbox"/> Information Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve/Adopt <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Documents and attachments:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brief/Report <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint <input type="checkbox"/> Third-party materials <input type="checkbox"/> Other

Strategic Action Plan Priorities for 2017-19

Council action

Action Item: 2017-19 Strategic Action Plan priorities.

Description

Council members will determine Strategic Action Plan priorities for the 2017-19 legislative policy and budget requests.

Overview

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) develops state goals and proposes strategies, policies, and resources to increase educational attainment. The 2013 Roadmap established Washington's education attainment goals and identified key strategies to meet the goals. In 2014, WSAC developed a Strategic Action Plan for the 2015-17 biennium. In 2015, the Roadmap Update included progress metrics and highlighted key challenges.

The 2017-19 Strategic Action Plan is due to the Governor and Legislature in December 2016. It will identify the legislative actions to implement in the next biennium to make progress towards achieving the goals. At the August 17 Council meeting, WSAC staff will present strategies for Council members to consider including in the Strategic Action Plan. The strategies reflect input from educational sectors and key stakeholders at Council meetings and workgroups.

Data-driven strategies

As measured in the 2015 Roadmap Update, our state has only made modest progress toward meeting the attainment goals. Furthermore affordability metrics describe continuing gaps in affordability—especially for low- and middle-income students.¹ This reinforces the need for targeted strategies to accelerate attainment.

Findings from these reports revealed three challenges. To make meaningful progress toward the state's goals, these challenges must be addressed in the two-year Strategic Action Plan.

1. High school completion, as well as postsecondary access and completion for historically underserved and underrepresented populations.
2. Postsecondary recruitment, retention, and completion for working-age adults.
3. Improved access and affordability for students from low-income families.

In the Strategic Action Plan, the Council will recommend a collective set of actions to increase educational attainment. These actions would be implemented in the next two years.

To develop strategies for the 2017-19 plan, the Council has held several forums. These include Council meetings as well as Council committee meetings.^a In 2015, the committees reviewed successful programs, evaluated data, and developed strategies. In 2016, the committees continued to focus on actions that could make the most significant impact on overcoming key challenges:

- Addressing the opportunity gap.
- Reengaging working-age adults to complete a postsecondary credential.
- Addressing gaps in affordability.

To develop a menu of strategies, the committees:

^a The Committee for Student Success and the Committee for Funding and Affordability

- Identified successful interventions that provide system-wide support approaches.
- Ensured proposals support underrepresented students.
- Offered recommendations that support students at critical stages.
- Developed approaches that engage cross-sector and community partners.

At the Council’s June meeting, students, legislators, non-profit organizations, education sector partners, faculty, and other state agencies engaged in conversations with Council members to discuss and refine strategies. At the July committee meetings, Council members and other partners continued to develop and shape strategies, and heard a presentation from a representative from Indiana about their state’s experiences with adult reengagement programs. As a result, the Council will review five proposed strategies designed to meet the objectives of addressing the opportunity gap, targeting adults with educational experience, and improving access and affordability.

Strategic Action Plan for 2017-19

The Council will determine priorities for the Strategic Action Plan to inform its 2017-19 budget requests. At the October 12 meeting, the Council will review the draft Strategic Action Plan report and discuss broad strategies across the educational system that aim to increase educational attainment.

Proposals for the 2017-2019 Strategic Action Plan

Five proposals address the areas of access and affordability, the opportunity gap, and adult student success.

1. Opportunity gap innovation incentive grants.
2. Adult reengagement information clearinghouse and support framework.
3. Child care assistance.
4. Expand State Work Study service.
5. Expand State Need Grant.

1. Opportunity gap innovation incentive grants

The 2015 Roadmap Update findings demonstrated that achievement gaps exist by socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity in:

- High school graduation rates.
- Attainment of high school or equivalent among the adult population.
- Participation in higher education.
- Postsecondary completion.

The high school graduation rate is 77 percent, compared to 66 percent for students from low-income families. The demographics of our residents who have not completed high school do not mirror the make-up of our state. Further, Hispanic and American Indian students are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education after high school, and students of color are underrepresented among college completions. To achieve the state’s attainment goals, it will be critical to ensure our educational system will support the academic success of low-income and students of color throughout the educational pipeline.

Actions need to be taken to address opportunity gaps and raise the attainment rates of underserved and underrepresented populations. These populations represent a growing student body that require innovative and creative efforts to navigate the progression of high school and postsecondary success. Challenges must be addressed systematically and strategically. Strategies should build on the innovation and creativity of Washington’s education systems and institutions while also addressing business and future workforce needs to build a pipeline of talent.

Recommendation

Incentivize innovations to close the opportunity gap in K-12 and postsecondary education through a competitive grant program.

- **\$1.5 million** per year to provide grants to institutions or non-profit organizations (\$3 million total for the 17-19 biennium).

Opportunity gap innovation incentive grants would encourage innovation and customize efforts to regional K-12 and postsecondary institution needs. Grants would expand existing programs with proven success or develop new programs that encourage testing best practices and improved collaboration across the system.

A cross-sector review panel would evaluate grant proposals based on criteria such as:

- Improving academic success for underrepresented and underserved students.
- Expanding successful programs.
- Creating a new initiative with an evaluation plan.
- Involving key partners.

Examples of innovative models to expand include:

- Bridge programs addressing the “summer melt” between high school and college.
- Engaging community and business leaders.
- Incentives to increase full-time attendance.
- Campus completion coaches.

Grant recipients would be asked to evaluate and share their project and outcomes. These evaluations could be used to identify successful initiatives.

In addition, funding in the amount of \$200,000 would be used to improve communication and support for College Bound Scholarship students and the “trusted messengers” who serve them.

2. Adult reengagement—Information clearinghouse and support framework

Reaching the state’s goals for educational attainment will require a renewed commitment to serve students who must overcome a variety of barriers to attend school and complete a degree or certificate. In Washington, nearly 400,000 adults ages 25-44 have attended college but not completed a degree or certificate.² Reengaging these students will help them secure living wage employment and achieve their career and educational goals.

To successfully serve returning adult students, we need connect them to resources that will help them overcome barriers they typically face. These barriers include the need to work and earn money and the challenges of being a student with family responsibilities. A state system aimed at boosting completion for adult students should leverage existing efforts and programs. The state should also develop ways to identify students and connect them with resources that will meet their needs.

Washington is poised to build upon efforts that serve returning adults. These efforts include:

- Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) policies.
- Campus efforts to recruit students who left without finishing.
- Robust data systems.

In addition, Washington is participating in a project on returning adult students initiated by the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). The project will allow SHEEO to share best practices in different states and identify strategies—including college affordability—to better serve returning adults.

Recommendation

Initiate a cross-sector statewide program to recruit and retain adult students, with an emphasis on those with some college and no degree.

- **\$50,000 in 2018** for program development and **\$200,000 in 2019** for program implementation (\$250,000 total for the 17-19 biennium).

Year One: FY 18

The adult reengagement program would convene agency partners and institutional leaders to:

- Analyze existing policies and programs.
- Expand information content on state agency websites.
- Determine the degree to which customized information would be tailored to students and provided to institutions.
- Make recommendations related to student identification, student support, and affordability.

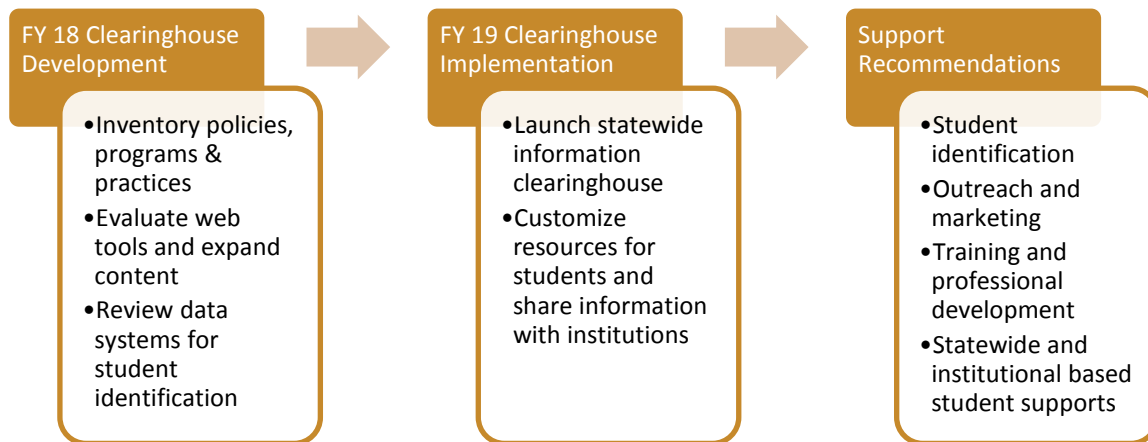
The various tools currently available would be evaluated to make stronger connections between existing systems such as Ready, Set, Grad, CareerBridge, and WACareerPaths. Any improvements to these systems would need to include resources for adult students. WSAC, in collaboration with sector partners, would develop recommendations for the launch of a sustainable framework to support adults. The framework would need to address barriers and outline optimal services. Preliminary recommendations for development of a statewide adult reengagement initiative will be available December of 2017.

Year Two: FY 19

The second year would include implementation of the committee’s recommendations related to an information clearinghouse, student identification, and outreach. Implementation would include launching a statewide website that meets the needs of returning adult students with customized information about:

- Career interests.
- Labor market information.
- Related postsecondary programs.
- Admissions and transfer policies.
- Financial aid resources.

The website would include features and functionality that provide customized information to students and allow information to be shared with schools. Development of informational resources would begin by January 2018 with anticipated launch by December 2018. Continued development of recommendations related to student identification systems, marketing, student supports, and professional development would occur throughout 2018.



3. Increase child care assistance

Access to child care is a barrier for many older students as they attempt to balance family and school. About 25 percent of undergraduate students with financial need have children. Although this is an important issue for returning adult students, state effort in this area has been minimal. WSAC currently manages a matching grant program for the six public baccalaureate programs, funded at \$75,000 per year.

Recommendation

Expand financial support for child care costs to alleviate the financial burden on students with children.

- **\$385,000** additional funding per year to expand the existing effort (\$770,000 total for the 17-19 biennium).

This recommendation is related to the adult reengagement strategy. We will need to review child care availability at colleges and universities and also expand an existing competitive grant program. A modest increase is needed to expand the matching grant program, designed to make child care more affordable for adult students with children. Funding would be distributed to schools that request matching funds to expand child care support for students.

4. Expand State Work Study service

The State Work Study (SWS) program allows students to earn while they learn at jobs relevant to their field of study. SWS provides employment opportunities for low- and middle-income students and is the only state aid program open to graduate students. About 4,500 students currently gain valuable work experience while offsetting their educational expenses. Nearly 1,000 employers contribute an average of 40 percent of student earnings and mentor student trainees in quality job experiences. Recent stakeholder surveys indicate students appreciate the flexibility of work-study positions and ability to gain experience in their field of study. And more than 95 percent of employers believe SWS experiences make their organizations more productive while imparting useful post-graduation employment skills. Unfortunately, the program was cut dramatically during the great recession, with annual funding falling from more than \$21 million to about \$8 million.

Recommendation

Expand State Work Study to provide additional work-based learning opportunities.

- **\$5 million in 2018**, with additional funding each year to serve 2,500 more students (\$10 million total for the 17-19 biennium).

State Work Study (SWS) can support targeted state workforce policies such as:

- Incentivizing students to pursue STEM related fields.
- Engaging in community service.
- Mentoring younger students.

For example, Western Washington University leveraged SWS to help launch their innovative Compass 2 Campus mentoring program, and Seattle Pacific University used SWS to provide tutors for Seattle Public Schools to assist with existing AVID programs. To incentivize new institutional mentoring efforts, up to \$1 million from the additional funding could be set aside annually. This would fund wage and administrative costs of institutional SWS projects supporting academic success and educational attainment for low-income and first-generation students.

5. Expand State Need Grant service

The State Need Grant (SNG) program is the largest state aid program, serving about 70,000 students per year. The program's broad reach allows students to study at 67 institutions, from private career schools to research universities. As such, the program can help students wherever and however they enter postsecondary education and training – from a traditional student going to college immediately after high school graduation, to a returning adult student who wants to get a credential that boost their earning potential.

Since 2010, there have been more eligible students than available funding. This trend continued through 2015-2016, when over 25,000 eligible students went unserved. Eligible unserved students have higher average debt loads than their served peers. They also tend to take fewer credits, which slows their progress and reduces the chances of completion.

Recommendation

Provide sufficient funding to serve all eligible students in State Need Grant.

- **\$ 101 million** additional funding each year to provide tuition assistance to 25,000 additional students (\$202 million total for the 17-19 biennium).

Fully funding SNG will improve access and affordability and enhance academic success for 25,000 additional students. Funding all eligible students increases financial predictability for students, which allows them to improve their financial planning. SNG supports higher postsecondary participation among currently underserved groups, including those who are:

- Low-income.
- First-generation college students.
- Students of color.
- Older students.

Action Item – Strategic Action Plan Priorities

The Council will identify the proposals and budget amounts for WSAC's 2017-19 biennium agency budget. In October, the Council will review a final draft of the 2017-19 Strategic Action Plan. The report will also include broad system-wide strategies to increase educational attainment.

Endnotes

¹ Sharpe, R. and Webster, M. *Affordability Framework*. Washington Student Achievement Council, (December 2015), Olympia, Washington.

² Shankster, L. *Some College, No Degree: A Look At Those Who Left College Early*, Washington Student Achievement Council, (December 2015), Olympia, Washington.