

WSAC Agency Budget Request – Supporting Roadmap Key Challenge Areas

The following recommendations for the agency 2019-21 biennial budget will support progress toward the educational attainment goals.

2019-21 Proposals—Synopsis

The Roadmap progress report identified closing opportunity gaps, engaging regional leadership, improving affordability, and reengaging adult learners as the key challenge areas that must be addressed to prepare Washington residents for today's workforce needs.

Closing Opportunity Gaps

Item	Annual Request
CBS Supports	\$400,000
FAFSA/WASFA	\$225,000

Reengaging Adult Learners

Item	Annual Request
Enrollment Navigation	\$500,000
Child Care Financial Aid	\$3,000,000
Campus Technical Assistance	\$500,000

Engaging Regional Leaders

Item	Annual Request
Innovation Grants	\$5,000,000

Improving Affordability

Item	Annual Request
Savings Match	\$500,000
State Work Study	\$5,000,000
State Need Grant – full and predictable funding	\$50,0000,000 (avg.)
State Need Grant – expand MFI to 100	\$47,000,000 (avg.)

Closing Opportunity Gaps

Washington's high school graduation rates have improved slightly over the past few years, yet stark gaps remain for students of color, low-income students, foster youth, and other students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Optimizing two key initiatives, a) support for College Bound Scholars and b) expansion of financial aid application efforts, can enhance support for Washington's underserved students.

Quick Facts:

- College Bound
 - For the class of 2017, 57 percent of CBS students enrolled in postsecondary directly after high school (the state average was 59 percent).ⁱ

- In the 2017 WSAC CBS study, the number one recommendation from students to improve their college-going behavior was to “provide more support and information”.ⁱⁱ
- FAFSA/WASFA
 - As of late July 2018, 53 percent of Washington’s public high school seniors (class of 2018) completed a FAFSA.
 - During the 2017-18 academic year, 12th Year Campaign sites had a 10 percent higher FAFSA completion rate than non-sites and a 6 percent higher completion rate than the state average.ⁱⁱⁱ

CBS Students Supports - \$400,000/year

Proposal: Expand online tools and communications to support College Bound Scholarship students to provide timely information and guidance to CBS students and their families, from CBS enrollment throughout the educational pathway.

Approximately 40 percent of Washington high school seniors do not enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school. This rate is roughly the same for CBS students, even with the promise of the scholarship to alleviate their financial burdens. Assisting these students throughout their K-12 years and at critical transition points will help students prepare, enroll, and persist through their educational journey. With over 280,000 students signed up for the CBS program and a ratio of 600:1 of student caseload for school counselors, we are clearly not meeting students’ needs. Digital engagement tools can assist students on their higher education pathways, and they include platforms that can enhance staff capabilities to provide timely and personalized support to College Bound students.

FAFSA/WASFA Completion - \$225,000/year

Proposal: Expand training opportunities, resources, and support for high school counselors and college access providers working to assist students with FAFSA/WASFA completion.

Completing a financial aid application is a critical step in pursuing postsecondary education, yet just over 50 percent of Washington’s public high school graduates completed a FAFSA in 2018.^{iv} Without a FAFSA, students are not able to receive federal and/or state financial aid for which they may be eligible. Increasing the number of FAFSA and WASFA completions hinges on the training and support of school counselors and college access providers.

Support Returning Adults

Washington will not reach the attainment goals without intentional strategies to support the 300,000 former students who have earned academic credit but not completed a postsecondary credential. Adults who do wish to return to school possess risk characteristics to academic success, such as attending part-time, working full time, and supporting families. Additionally, there is no support system to provide information for prospective adult students, who want to complete their education. The following budget items (enrollment navigation, childcare, financial aid, and campus technical assistance) can enhance the educational outcomes of returning adult students.

Quick Facts

- 300,000 adults have earned one year’s worth of credits without completion.
- One third of undergraduate students are parents.
- Child care costs are over \$12,000, while tuition ranges from \$4,000 to \$10,000.
- Returning adults face unique barriers to academic success.

Enrollment Navigation - \$500,000/year

Proposal: *Ensure returning adult students have access to knowledgeable professionals able to assist with career exploration, program prerequisites, admissions requirements, and financial barriers (e.g. former fees, defaults, repayments, tuition, fees, equipment, child care).*

Prospective returning adult students, who can face unique challenges to academic enrollment and completion, often lack access to higher education advising and support. Concerns related to the transferability of credits, past academic debt, placement tests, academic progress policies, program selection, and more can quickly become impediments to enrollment and completion. Individualized, high-quality advising and counseling can provide relevant and timely information to help prospective students address their admissions, enrollment, and affordability concerns.

Child Care Financial Aid - \$3,000,000/year

Proposal: *Expand the Child Care Matching Grant to support more student parents and include additional sectors (community and technical colleges and private nonprofit institutions). An additional 1,200 students would be served.*

Access to affordable child care is a critical concern for student parents. Child care centers simply may not be available when needed. And even if child care is available, the cost can be prohibitive when combined with educational costs. The average annual cost of child care exceeds public tuition and fees. Limited access, or unaffordable options, can squelch the opportunity to return to the classroom. The current program of \$75,000 per year is limited to the public baccalaureate institutions, as funding for the two-year system was eliminated during the recession. The grant would prioritize institutions participating in adult reengagement framework and providing match funding to the scholarship. The scholarship would coordinate with other programs with streamlined administration.

Campus Technical Assistance - \$500,000/year

Proposal: *Support institutional efforts to assess and improve retention and completion strategies for returning adult students.*

To serve returning adult students, campuses must offer adult-friendly policies, programs, and supports. State funding would provide technical assistance for institutions engaged in the Adult Reengagement Framework initiative to collaborate with national experts and peer institutions to share best practices and engage in assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of services supporting adult learners (e.g. enrollment processes, course schedules, academic policies, financial aid, child care). The results will help campuses scale promising practices wherever possible. All participating campuses will be eligible to receive training, and ten institutions will receive robust assessment services.

Engage Regional Leaders

Washington has statewide attainment goals based on workforce demand at the state level, but workforce needs and rates of educational attainment vary widely by county and region. Some counties or regions may have already met the state's attainment goal. Others may have much lower attainment rates and different local workforce needs.

Quick Facts, by region:

- The highest graduation rate is 96 percent and the lowest is 56 percent.

- The highest rate for high school graduates directly enrolling in postsecondary education is 78 percent and the lowest is 36 percent.
- The highest Postsecondary educational attainment is 69 percent and the lowest is 18 percent.
- The highest College Bound Scholarship sign-up rate by the end of 8th grade year is 100 percent and the lowest is 48 percent.
- The highest College Bound Scholarship FAFSA completion rate is 77 percent and the lowest is 27 percent.

Regional Innovation Grants - \$5,000,000/year

Proposal: Establish a competitive grant supporting regional efforts to create or expand educational pathways and increase educational attainment.

Robust economic growth and accelerated educational attainment rely on regional efforts, responsive to regional needs and competitive advantages. The clear link between educational attainment and economic development means that Washington State should pursue an innovative regional approach to meet its educational attainment and workforce needs. The regional grant will improve the state's understanding of how policies and practice work at the regional level, and inevitably strengthen the state's collective efforts to reach its goals. The funding objective of the grant should meet three criteria: 1) the extent to which regional partnerships can develop credible solutions that achieve the state's goal at a lower cost through innovation, 2) regional and community partners have demonstrated commitment following through on the proposed solutions, and 3) scalability of successful solutions for adoption by other regions.

Improve Affordability

The costs of college are daunting. Financial aid programs help, but the total cost of attendance is substantial, leaving low-income families struggling to cover their share. Washington has a nationally recognized commitment to providing need-based financial aid to low-income students; yet despite the investment in stable tuition increases and increases in financial aid, many students and families continue to face financial barriers to educational attainment.

Quick Facts:

- National and regional models provide evidence that savings match programs encourage asset building, and that students continue to save even after exiting the program.
- 23,000 unserved students in the State Need Grant program in 2017-18, an increase of 2,000 students.
- About 700 employers match State Work Study funding at a current average of 40 percent, delivering an additional \$4.6M in student earnings in 2016-17.

Savings Match - \$500,000/year

Proposal: Create a savings matching pilot program to help incentivize savings and allow students to reduce or even eliminate debt.

Many families are hesitant to incur debt to finance a college education, and the high cost of college contributes to the gap in participation from low and low-middle income families.^v State-matching programs can motivate families to save for higher education expenses by contributing state dollars to individual savings accounts. Several models for state-matching programs are available. With the opening of DreamAhead, Washington now has the infrastructure to test this strategy at scale. Providing a savings

match program can motivate students to build assets while they're in school and reduce debt loads for low- and middle-income students.

State Need Grant Funding and Forecasting - \$60 million Year 1/\$40 million Year 2

Proposal: Fully and predictably fund the State Need Grant Program, ensuring that all eligible students receive the grant.

Fully funding State Need Grant can help Washington address persistent opportunity gaps in our educational system. As the state's largest investment in affordability, State Need Grant is a logical vehicle to help address higher education access. Yet, 23,000 students are without funding. A fully funded program would provide stability for students and families, as well as institutions. To make State Need Grant a forecasted program similar to College Bound does not change the fully-implemented costs, but instead requires a change in the underlying statute.

Key Assumption: the funding assumed in the four-year outlook brings the costs down compared to previous years. Without these appropriations, the cost to fully fund the program rises substantially.

State Need Grant Expansion - \$47 million/year

Proposal: Expand State Need Grant eligibility to serve students from 0-100 percent of the state's median family income.

The current State Need Grant program works, providing financial assistance to tens of thousands of students per year. Still, the eligibility criteria prevent many lower-middle class students from qualifying. We know these students often don't have family resources to address financial need. Expanding eligibility by serving all students from families up to the state's median income would cover 15,000 more students. The average unmet need is virtually the same for students from 0-70 percent MFI as it is for those from 71-125 percent MFI. Serving these students with State Need Grant will reduce student debt and encourage persistence and completion.

State Work Study - \$5,000,000/year

Proposal: Expand career-connected learning opportunities through the State Work Study program, producing over \$8 million in wages while serving an additional 3,000 students.

Employers increasingly point to challenges finding prospective employees with the skills necessary to fill jobs required for economic growth. And current students who might be otherwise interested in the training needed to fill these positions are too often working long hours in jobs disconnected from their career interests. Reinvestment in State Work Study helps counter both trends by providing career-focused, flexible, part-time work opportunities that improve persistence and post-graduation employment outcomes. Surveys of student-participants and employers show that the program helps build real-world skills. The program's budget has been frozen for years while minimum wage rises. This has led to a steady decrease in the number of students served and depresses the total amount of hours worked.

Sources

- ⁱ CBS Postsecondary Enrollment Rates: WSAC Application Data matched with National Clearinghouse Data December 2017. Washington High School Graduate Postsecondary Enrollment Rates: ERDC High School Feedback Report.
- ⁱⁱ (2017). College Bound Postsecondary Enrollment: An exploration of students' understanding and beliefs . Washington Student Achievement Council.
- ⁱⁱⁱ WSAC Administrative Data, June 25, 2018.
- ^{iv} Source: WSAC Administrative Data: bit.do/FAFSACompletionData
- ^v Kantrowitz, Mark “FAFSA Completion Rates by Level and Control of Institution” (2009) online here: <http://www.finaid.org/educators/20091014fafsacompletion.pdf> (accessed 8/2/2018)