

A Retrospective on Progress in Educational Attainment

A look back at five years since the 2013 Roadmap

The Washington Student Achievement Council adopted a state plan—the Roadmap—in November 2013, creating a vision to significantly increase access, affordability, and alignment in higher education, and the educational attainment level of Washington’s residents by 2023. The Roadmap set two key goals measured by the adult population ages 25-44: 70% would have some form of postsecondary credential and 100% would have a high school diploma or equivalent.

Much has happened since the Governor and Legislature approved the Roadmap, but more work remains. This is a good time to reflect and to assess our strategies and our work for the next five years and beyond.

Attainment

Educational attainment is increasing but at a rate unlikely to reach our goals by 2023. The equity challenge of closing gaps across populations is particularly severe.

	2013 Attainment	2018 Attainment
Postsecondary Credential	52%	56%
High School Credential	90%	91%
	Postsecondary Attainment by Subgroup - 2013	Postsecondary Attainment by Subgroup - 2017
White	48%	51%
Asian	66%	71%
Black	31%	39%
Hispanic	19%	25%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	26%	33%
American Indian and Alaska Native	22%	23%

Working with its partners across K-12 and higher education, WSAC issued progress reports in 2015 and 2017. Three key focus areas to further close the attainment gap emerged over these reports: affordability, access, and returning adults. Below are key progress measures, grouped by focus area.

Affordability

	2013	2017
Average Tuition at Public Institutions	2 year: \$3,557 4 year: \$9,797	2 year: \$3,487 4 year: \$8,347
State Need Grant Eligible but Not Served	30%	23%

Access

	2013	2017
College Bound Sign-Up Rate	N/A	72%
FAFSA 12 th Grade Completion	49%	54%
Postsecondary Enrollment (under 25)	2 year: 106,638 4 year: 119,764	2 year: 110,951 4 year: 127,901
Postsecondary Completions (under 25)	46,678	50,095

Recent High School Graduates' College-Going Rates

	2013	2015
Overall	62%	60%
Low-Income Students	49%	48%
Non-Low-Income Students	69%	68%

Returning Adults

	2013	2017
SNG Enrollment (25+)	31,914	25,214
Postsecondary Enrollment (25+)	138,403	129,974
Postsecondary Completions (25+)	50,478	47,532

Focus on Affordability and Financial Aid

Washington has made significant progress over the past five years on college affordability and access to financial aid. The state has limited tuition increases, either by freezing tuition or by limiting increases to inflation and matching any tuition increases with increases in financial aid. In addition, increased funding for the State Need Grant has reduced the eligible-but-unserved population by almost 12,000 students.

An Evolving Success Story: College Bound Scholarship & the 12th Year Campaign

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program is a clear success. Just ten years ago, CBS enrolled its first cohort of middle school students from the population eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program. Low-income students constitute approximately 46% of all Washington students enrolled in the state's public schools and are less likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college than the overall student population.

Today more than 70% of eligible students sign up for CBS each year. In 2017, 76% of CBS students went on to graduate from high school, compared to 63% of eligible students who didn't sign up.

Unfortunately, too many CBS students do not fill out a FAFSA in 12th grade or continue on to postsecondary education after graduation. WSAC launched the 12th Year Campaign during the 2013-14 school year to provide technical assistance to high schools and community-based groups who help students plan for college. In five years, the Campaign has grown to include 160 school partners and has established a continuous improvement strategy.

Emerging Opportunities in 2019

This year will see three very important opportunities to advance our agenda. First, the Governor has proposed rebranding the State Need Grant as the Washington College Promise Scholarship and fully funding the program to ensure that all who are eligible will receive a scholarship. This will be a powerful contribution to both affordability as a financial matter and to the ability to build a compelling “college promise” message.

Second, the Governor has unveiled the Career Connect Washington (CCW) initiative, which addresses several specific themes in the 2013 Roadmap report on alignment to employment opportunities and work-based learning. The CCW plan supports high school students with a sequence of career exploration, career preparation, and career launch experiences that can be aligned to the existing High School & Beyond Plan requirement and College Bound Scholarship outreach to become an integrated career and college preparation pathway. CCW will also support new pathways to postsecondary education attainment for these students and other young adults. Most importantly, if successful, the CCW effort could significantly reduce or even eliminate the attainment gap in a decade if all students can access these programs.

Finally, WSAC’s returning adult initiative is expected to launch in 2019, in partnership with many colleges and universities, as well as some regional and employer leadership groups. Approximately 389,289 Washington adults have some college but no credential. This initiative will initially target underrepresented groups, with the aim to help these individuals get back on track.

WSAC Assets

WSAC brings a wide range of assets to this work. Council members have substantive leadership experiences and relationships relevant to our work. The agency has a deep bench of skilled professionals in policy, research, communications, and program management.

Our work to support enrollments in the College Bound Scholarship program in middle school and FAFSA completion in the 12th grade connects us to every secondary school in the state. While WSAC has long-standing relationships with various players interested in state education and higher education policy, staff has worked extensively to broaden relationships with regional leaders around the state among employers, education institutions, and community-based organizations. WSAC is also reaching out to state groups that pose new opportunities for engagement around lower-income populations, immigrants, prison reentry, foster youth, and employers across more industry sectors.

WSAC is also the home for GET, the state’s long-standing 529 program, and DreamAhead, a new college savings program launched in 2018. We plan to explore possible synergies in how these programs can serve lower-income families directly and in collaboration with potential community partners.

The Challenge Ahead

As the 2015 Roadmap Update report noted: “We need more than business as usual.” Steady, incremental improvement will not deliver on our goals of 70% postsecondary and 100% high school credentials. We need to build on this good work while exploring innovation that can drive success at statewide scale.

Many factors shape results when taking on one of the toughest societal and public policy challenges like increasing educational attainment. We will probably never know the direct cause and effect relationships between our work and our results, but we can be very clear about our goals, flesh out a theory of change on how we get there, measure annual progress on the specific tactics that emerge from that theory, and hold ourselves collectively accountable to bending the trend line of educational attainment upward in a dramatic fashion over time.

The Council meeting on January 30, 2019, will focus on this conversation and identify priority strategies that can help increase our pace of change. We are reaching out to partners to solicit their perspectives in advance of that meeting. Council members and staff will continue conversations with our partners, both old and new, in other formats over the next few months. Our goal is to refresh the 2013 Roadmap by the middle of this year to guide our work over the next five years.

You can find the source information for this document [online](#).