

## **A possible model for educational attainment**

How the public health sector uses community outreach to increase access

### **Summary**

The public health sector uses community outreach programs to engage underserved households with the health system to improve health outcomes. These programs could be a model for efforts to increase college going and utilization of financial aid, or become partners in a broader body of work to support family success.

### **Why do we need to increase direct enrollment across underserved populations in 12th grade?**

Washington has adopted an aggressive goal for educational attainment that calls for 70% of adults between the ages of 25 and 44 to earn a post-secondary credential. Current attainment levels are significantly higher among white adults at 51% compared to 39% for African-Americans and 25% for Latinx adults. The state will need to close gaps across various populations in order to reach our attainment goal consistent with our commitment to equity.

People cannot earn credentials (i.e., “attainment”) unless they first enroll. Washington has low rates of both direct enrollment in college (62% vs. 70% nationally) and completion of financial aid applications by 12<sup>th</sup> graders (WA ranks 47<sup>th</sup> among states). Our state cannot reach its attainment and equity goals without increasing the rate of participation in postsecondary programs, especially from lower income families, students of color, first generation students, and others.

College affordability is a barrier for many families. Financial aid can contribute to increasing enrollment from lower income households. The new Washington College Grant’s guarantee and the increase in income eligibility limits will go into effect on July 1, 2020. The state’s high school graduating class of 2020 will be the first to enter this greatly improved financial aid environment.

### **What supports currently exist to support college going for high school students?**

The foundational support for students planning their future after graduation is their school counseling office. School districts struggle to adequately fund counseling, which can be especially difficult in schools serving lower income and rural communities. These offices also need to fulfill many other functions besides providing college and career going advice.

School counselors are often directly involved in the High School and Beyond Plan, a framework for students’ college and career planning. WSAC’s 12<sup>th</sup> Year Campaign works with OSPI and other partners to provide technical assistance to school staff supporting college and financial aid applications.

Classroom teachers are a role model and frequent advisor to their students on planning for life after high school. There does not appear to be a consistent approach to supporting teachers in this work beyond what an individual middle or high school may provide internally.

The state and federal government and philanthropy fund many college going support programs. These include WSAC's GEAR UP program, the College Success Foundation, Washington College Access Network, AVID programs and others. These programs vary widely in scale, resources, operational model and delivery cost per student. No strategy exists for geographic distribution to assure a statewide level of equity in access to these additional supports.

Students and their families also turn to informal and social networks to learn about college and careers. National surveys reveal that students turn to friends, family, employers, coworkers, youth group volunteers and others for advice. Some students value the advice from these informal sources more than formal sources. Higher income families tend to have a much broader social network with extensive experience in higher education and connections to careers. This gap can exacerbate the opportunity gap facing first generation and students of color.

Community-based organizations often play a role in planning for life after high school. These organizations span sectors from youth development (Boys Clubs/Girls Clubs and Junior Achievement) to refugee and immigrant supports (various family service organizations). The work of these organizations may evolve over time as they develop a broader perspective on youth or family success.

The digital era has made many other sources of information available to students who have internet access. This includes the websites of colleges and universities, state and federal governments (ReadySetGrad in Washington and the US Department of Education's College Navigator), and independent organizations (both nonprofit and for profit).

Students must navigate all of these potential resources without any assurance of accuracy in the advice they receive. This cuts across all sources to some extent, but is likely to be a much bigger challenge with the informal and web-based sources.

## **What other issues connect the educational attainment challenge with the public health sector?**

The Council recently adopted a strategic framework that includes a strategic cluster of work to help students connect to financial supports outside of the educational realm. These include healthcare, transportation, housing, food security, mental health and other needs. These needs can stand in the way of college going for students from lower income families. College affordability for these families is not just a matter of paying for tuition and fees.

Council staff are already working closely with college and university staff and with other state agencies that serve lower income families. Health and education outcomes are deeply intertwined. Healthcare access can be a significant barrier to success in education at all levels, and higher educational attainment tends to lead to better health outcomes.

## **What models for community outreach exist in the public health sector?**

Mary Jo Ybarra-Vega who leads the Promotores de Salud network based at the Quincy Community Health Center will discuss this community outreach program at the Council meeting. "The Promotores de Salud (Promoters of Health) are a group of Spanish-speaking educators that reach Latino communities throughout the Yakima Valley, providing medically-accurate and culturally-appropriate programs, information, and critical resources to thousands each year."

The public health sector has developed formal strategies and implemented many variations on community health strategies for more than three decades. Both the Department of Health and the Health Care Authority (the state's Medicaid program manager) support community-based public health outreach programs in Washington.

## Questions for consideration

### Major questions

- 1) What are we missing in terms of understanding the environment for college going supports as experienced by WA students?
- 2) Are Promotores de Salud and other sector's community outreach programs possible models for reaching underserved populations on education issues?
- 3) Could existing outreach programs extend their scope of work to include additional issue areas? For example, should the state consider funding Promotores de Salud or other community-based outreach programs in health or other sectors to add educational pathways into their ongoing work?
- 4) Should we include other community-based organizations that are direct youth and family service providers (e.g., Boys Clubs/Girls Clubs) in our exploration of how WA students get information or support for college going?
- 5) What are specific next steps WSAC could take to advance this conversation with its partners and other stakeholders?

### Background questions

- 1) What assumptions in the narrative might you disagree with or question?
- 2) Is there anything missing?
- 3) What data would you need to address these questions
- 4) What data points are of high enough communication value to be included in a narrative of this type?