

Direct Enrollment: Key Principles & Promising Practices

Context

Washington has a long-term trend of under-enrollment compared to the rest of the nation.ⁱ

About 70% of HS seniors across the US continue their education within one year of graduation:

- 77% in Mississippi
- 75% in Massachusetts
- 68% in Virginia
- 64% in California
- 60% in Washington

COVID-19 has created a crisis of learning loss and disruption in college-going pathways.

- Research shows that Black, Latinx, and low-income students across the county are at higher risk of not receiving quality remote instruction, leading to greater learning loss due to school closures. ⁱⁱ
- WA has seen an overall 10% decrease in FAFSA filing since this time last year, with a 16.7% decrease at Title I eligible high schools and an 18.8% decrease at high minority high schools. ⁱⁱⁱ
- Nationally, immediate postsecondary enrollment by the class of 2020 decreased 21.7% from the Fall of 2019. ^{iv}

Within these already low indicators of educational attainment, persistent racial gaps remain.

- American Indian (40%), Native Hawaiian (45%), and Latinx students (46%) from the class of 2020 had lower FAFSA completion rates than their White peers (51%) while experiencing higher error rates, further lowering completion. ^v
- There is a major difference in the rate of immediate enrollment in postsecondary programs by racial group—ranging from 37% for Native Hawaiian students to 82% for Asian students. ^{vi}

Key Principles of Direct Postsecondary Enrollment

The Council's Strategic Action Plan recognizes that state higher education policy is broader than statutes and appropriations. The Council can play a central role in building broad consensus for the strategic direction that all partners and stakeholders can work together to realize. Increasing enrollment is based on so many individual and organizational behaviors. That complexity makes it a particularly appropriate subject for high level statements that shape the direction and ultimately the success of this shared work.

These statements are meant to be aspirational – we may not have consensus on how to fulfill these aspirations, but do we have agreement that this is our shared vision for direct enrollment in Washington? Coming to agreement and building consensus for such statements will, in the future, become part of a revised Strategic Action Plan that adapts to the needs of state residents.

- All Washington residents have a clear and accessible path to directly enroll in postsecondary education.
- Messaging about college-going affordability is coordinated, consistent, and responsive to the needs of communities across the state to increase the confidence of students and families that college IS affordable.
- The transition from high school to college is as seamless and easy for students and families as the transition from middle school to high school.
- K12 schools and districts understand the financial aid and college admissions process.
- All classroom teachers and school administrators understand the range of postsecondary options, the supports for low income families and the increasing value of continuing education beyond high school.
- Colleges and universities deliver programs to help close learning gaps exacerbated by Covid-19, especially for BIPOC students.
- Community partnerships across education, business, and regional leaders are necessary to build college-going as a societal, cultural norm.

Discussion Questions

- What are your reactions to the key principles?
- What might be missing?
- Who will be essential parties to a consensus that can yield results?

Background

Direct Admissions - A practice that supports these key principles:

There must be an intentional redesign of the postsecondary transition to be simple and easy to navigate for students and those who support them. Direct admissions programs that automate the college admissions process offer that opportunity.

Washington Models – Using partnerships to transform the postsecondary transition:

The Chehalis Student Achievement Initiative

Combines the ease of a direct admissions program with robust advising and college-readiness activities

Key program elements - Launched in 2017 by the Chehalis Foundation, W.F. High School, and Centralia College to:

- Increase math readiness through free summer programs.
- Bolster navigational supports with dedicated staff at both the high school and the college.
- Formalize college and career planning during the school day, with staff members helping students complete their free application, enroll, and register with the college all within regular high school hours.
- Pair recent high school graduates with a peer college student mentors to offer additional transition supports.

Outcomes

- Increased the W.F. West high school graduation rate from 77% in 2010 to 99% for the class of 2020.
- 100% of the class of 2020 graduates applied and were accepted into a postsecondary program.
- Increased college completion rates of W.F. West High School grads by 10%. ^{vii}

Lower Columbia College (LCC) Direct Admissions Initiative

Layers proactive outreach over key momentum points in students' college-planning experience

Key program elements - Began in February 2020 with a partnership between LCC and Kelso School District (KHS) to:

- Implement the KHS Outreach Navigator model, with a dedicated person serving as the liaison between KHS students and LCC staff, and paid college student ambassadors assisting with outreach and onboarding.
- Leverage participation in dual credit programs by showing students how to use their earned college credits within postsecondary programs and pointing to financial aid that will fund these pathways.
- Include an LCC admissions letter in seniors' graduation packet for all eleven high schools in the region, with clear next steps to enrollment and a celebratory message of congratulations.

- Offer a free virtual Summer Bridge program with topics ranging from “College 101” to “Tips for Successful eLearning at LCC.”

Outcomes

- More than 1, 000 students received a direct admissions letter.
- More than 800 prospective and recently applied students engaged with Summer Bridge Program information and materials.
- Roughly 35% of the KHS class of 2020 graduates directly enrolled at LCC- a similar rate of enrollment to 2019, pointing to these efforts mitigating COVID-19 direct enrollment declines. ^{viii}

The Admission Guarantee (TAG) Program at Wenatchee Valley College (WVC)

Builds local partnerships with multiple school districts to promise every graduating senior in the region a spot at WVC.

Key program elements: Beginning as a pilot in 2016, the TAG program has expanded to eleven schools to:

- Develop data exchanges with superintendents and principals to send every senior a letter and email announcing their automatic acceptance to WVC with a warm welcome, clear next steps, and a waived admission fee.
- Increase awareness of local higher education options for high school students and families, as well as counselors and school staff, by developing authentic relationships earlier in the admissions process through the Outreach and Recruitment Coordinator.
- Improve culturally relevant outreach for students and families with bi-lingual services and college-planning events.

Other State Models

Idaho: A State-Wide Approach

Leverages the state’s centralized longitudinal data system (SLDS) across K12 and higher education

Key program elements

- HS students are either admitted to all 8 state institutions (including the more selective universities) or to the remaining 5 institutions based on a range of factors.
- Students and guardians receive an email in the fall of their senior year informing them of their admission.
- Students must still submit an official transcript, complete a college application, and submit the FAFSA if they want to receive financial aid.

Outcomes

- Idaho college enrollment has increased by 3.1%.

- Direct enrollment rate has increased by 6.7%.
- 3% decrease in students leaving Idaho for college. ^{ix}

Hawai'i: A Partnership Approach

Key program elements

Next Steps to Your Future Initiative - A joint project by The University of Hawaii Community Colleges (UHCC), Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education, and community partners to:

- Provide free virtual college application and financial aid sessions and a Summer Advising program that provides each student with a dedicated advisor.
- Create the free, online Career Exploration program for the class of 2021 where students explore career options, learn about education pathways and online college success strategies, and register for Fall courses, all while earning free college credit.

The UH Fast Pass Initiative was recently created for the Class of 2021 to:

- Simplify the University of Hawai'i's admissions process by sending GPA-eligible students either a conditional letter of acceptance or a special invitation to apply to at least one of the three universities.
- Expedite processing of applications and offer an application fee waiver.

Outcomes for Next Steps to Your Future

- More than 1, 500 class of 2020 graduates (about 10%) enrolled in 129 Career Exploration summer courses, earning more than 4,000 college credits. Thirty-one percent of these students identify as Native Hawaiian.
- The Summer Advising program reached 1, 700 students with free personalized support and information on the college admission and enrollment process. ^x

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[The Condition of Education - Postsecondary Education - Postsecondary Students - Immediate College Enrollment Rate - Indicator April \(2020\)](#)
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- ^v Kwakye, Isaac, Emma Kibort-Crocker. "Equity Landscape Report." 2020. Accessed on March 2, 2021 [2020-10-20-Report-Equity-Landscape.pdf \(wa.gov\)](#).
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- ^x University of Hawai'i News. "Next Steps initiative boosts thousands of high school graduates." (September 2020). Accessed March 2, 2021. <https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2020/09/04/next-steps-boots-hs-graduates/>