

Reflection on 2021 Progress and Ongoing Work for 2022

WSAC made significant progress on many policy and data development action items in our 2021 Strategic Action Plan. Other issues emerged during the year. This document summarizes that progress and provides additional context on those emerging issues and agency work. The discussion at the November meeting will help prepare to adopt a 2022 action plan in January.

Equity

Policy Development

Progress

- Council adopted an [equity definition](#) and an [equity statement](#) to guide work.
- Council revised the attainment goal to call for closing gaps by race and ethnicity at the state and regional levels.

Data Development

Progress

- WSAC's research division published a report, [Equity Landscape Report: Exploring Equity Gaps in Washington Postsecondary Education](#), that details the racial and income equity gaps for students' postsecondary pathways.

Ongoing

- Applying the analysis of racial and ethnic gaps at a regional level.

Affordability

Policy Development

Progress

- WSAC's legislative proposal for auto-enrollment for College Bound Scholarship was adopted but retained some eligibility standards not used in WCG.
- Strong support continues among elected leaders for state financial aid programs (WCG and CBS).

Ongoing

- Continuing frustration with efforts to increase FAFSA application that may be revealing key factors:
 - Long-term trends among lower-income students that predate COVID disruptions.
 - Challenge of getting school and community leaders to prioritize college going.

Data Development

Progress

- Launched more sophisticated research into the decline in utilization of WCG by income cohorts.
 - [Research reports](#) demonstrate the shift within FAFSA filers, as well as the overall decline in FAFSA filing.
 - [Research reports](#) provide an in-depth look over time at FAFSA completion for first-time students age 25 and over (disaggregated), counts of FAFSA completion among continuing postsecondary students (disaggregated), and WASFA completion.

Ongoing

- Developing adult-specific financial aid metrics with equity disaggregation remains an area of future work. Some demographic information, including race, is not available for FAFSA completion for adult students.
- Developing a financial aid utilization rate remains an area of future work, given data limitations (i.e., we do not have an accurate count of all students in Washington who are eligible for financial aid to use as a denominator for the rate).

Relevant Agency and Partner Work

- Apprenticeship programs: WSAC issued new rules on award amounts and application process (e.g., Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee).

Enrollment

Policy Development

Progress

- The dual credit task force will have a final report and recommendations by January.
 - The task force reached broad consensus that the state should cover the cost for students and families in all dual credit programs. The task force appears unlikely to reach agreement on specific strategies to accomplish that objective.
- Since March 2020, WSAC has done outreach to 514,000 Washingtonians through Compass marketing, resulting in 172,000 unique users of Compass. Over 400 users have been connected directly to 42 campuses via Compass.

Ongoing

- The task force reached broad consensus that the state should cover the cost for students and families in all dual credit programs. The task force appears unlikely to reach agreement on specific strategies to accomplish that objective.
- Outreach to adults showed the difficulty of effectively engaging the target population; we don't know how many of those 400 enrolled.

Data Development

Progress

- In collaboration with ERDC, dual credit analysis confirms that increased postsecondary enrollment is high for students who've participated in dual credit, and shows that the rate of earning college credit is inconsistent, depending on the type of program student participate in.
- In collaboration with ERDC, dual credit analysis confirms that increased postsecondary enrollment is higher for students who've participated in dual credit, remedial needs are lower, and the rate of earning college credit is inconsistent, depending on the type of program student participate in.
- Research reports (including Lessons on Recovery, Fall 2020 Enrollment Report, and Understanding Postsecondary Enrollment Trends) measured and highlighted the myriad impacts of COVID-19 and recession on enrollment, especially for BIPOC students, lower income, adults, and other sub-populations suffering disparate health and economic impacts.

Ongoing

- There are gaps in data collection that limit the extent to which further questions can be accurately answered about the dual credit's impact on college completion rates, time-to-degree, and tuition-savings, as well as the differential impacts resulting from different course-taking behavior.
- An updated Fall Enrollment Report looking at Fall 2021 will be released in 2022; however, getting timely data on enrollment data remains challenging.

Relevant Agency and Partner Work

- The newly developed guaranteed admission programs that include test-optional admissions.
- SNAP pathway to state financial aid.

Student Supports

Policy Development

Progress

- A comprehensive vision and multiyear agenda (inclusive of a messaging/communications strategy) has been developed by diverse stakeholders.
- An institutional assessment of postsecondary students' unmet basic needs was developed with higher education leaders across sectors. Some colleges and universities have committed to begin implementing the survey in spring 2022.
- A big legislative win last session was the removal of work requirements and degree limitations for some postsecondary students. This increased access to affordable childcare (Working Connections Childcare) for some, but not all, income-eligible postsecondary students.
- Another legislative win was the expansion of funding to support more students experiencing homelessness.
- Federal changes have been extended that make more postsecondary students eligible for SNAP (via work study or having an Expected Family Contribution of \$0).

Ongoing

- Financial aid limits may impact a student's ability to receive support services.

Data Development

Progress

- A collaborative [report between WSAC and ERDC](#) explores food insecurity for postsecondary students in Washington. The report found that, despite some evidence of declining food insecurity and public benefit receipt over the past decade, data indicate that food insecurity is still a pressing issue for postsecondary students in Washington.
 - The report was able to capture the number of postsecondary students in Washington who received SNAP, which is an important public benefits program to help address food insecurity.
- [Research reports](#) also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary students' mental health.

Ongoing

- Data on postsecondary students' access to basic needs and participation in public benefits programs remains limited.

Relevant Agency and Partner Work

- The enormous influx of federal dollars for student emergency grants may create an opportunity to learn how significant such supports may be to increase student retention and completion.

Completion

Policy Development

Progress

- Washington participates in a national initiative to review existing policies and data on racial and ethnic gaps in transfer. This work will culminate in a final report by spring of 2022.

Ongoing

- Establishing completion goals as part of state policy to increase student success.
- Exploring opportunities to increase alignment between quantitative academic coursework and skills/competencies from high school to postsecondary to the workforce.

Data Development

Progress

- WSAC's research division published a report, *Equity Landscape Report: Exploring Equity Gaps in Washington Postsecondary Education*, that details the racial and income equity gaps in completion rates, including transfer rates, for students of color. Findings from that report show that racial and income equity gaps are pervasive.