



# Regional Partnerships Legislative Report on Program Implementation

December 2025

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## Executive Summary

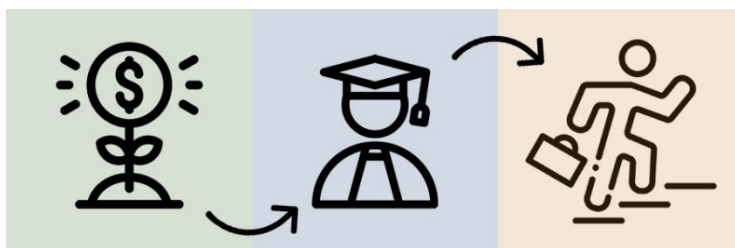
Helping more people in Washington find economic opportunity is only possible when everything works together to uplift people, families, and communities. WSAC's investments in regional partnerships directly improve educational systems and structures, so that learners can reach their goals and move toward better futures.

These investments take time, but they are necessary for creating lasting community-level changes. Early results show that these investments help learners who have been historically underserved by higher education.

- **Retention rates rose by 17 percentage points for BIPOC students** who were given direct mentorship at two-year colleges in one partnership region.
- **FAFSA filing rates for low-income students rose from 28 percent to 60 percent in just one year** in one school district after receiving support from a regional partnership.
- **A school district recorded its highest FAFSA filing rate** after long-term shifts in how the region views education for its mostly Hispanic and American Indian or Alaska Native student body.

This year's legislative report shows how RCG partnerships' strategies support the long-term goal of creating economic opportunity for everyone in Washington.

Details on program costs can be found in the 2025 companion report, *Regional Partnerships: Legislative Report on Program Implementation*.<sup>1</sup> Reporting required by RCW 28B.120.060 can be found in Appendices A-C.<sup>2</sup>



**Regional Partnerships invest in local communities, increase educational attainment, and grow access to economic mobility.**

### Introduction

It's easy to oversimplify the equation that leads to economic mobility – find *the one* strategy, fix those few administrative burdens, implement evidence-based practices with fidelity. To the contrary, there is no simple investment strategy, no single program or intervention that can be replicated successfully in every community. Achieving economic mobility for all Washingtonians will only occur when, behind the scenes, all the systems and structures that intersect with educational opportunity work together in a coordinated effort. This coordination is the power of WSAC's Regional Partnership investment approach: working with trusted colleagues who provide hands-on coaching and technical assistance, regional partnerships collaborate with their communities to design strategies that work for *their* context.

WSAC's regional partnership model of state investment is in its third academic year, and the positive impacts are accumulating. In this report, we unpack four key areas where regional partnerships are designing, piloting, and implementing strategies with direct impacts on learners' access to education and career training:

- Filing a financial aid application.
- Addressing basic needs for learners and their families.
- Enrolling in college education or career training.
- Completing a college credential or training program.

The long-term result of sustained investment in the Regional Partnership approach will be increased economic opportunity for all Washingtonians.

#### Scaling Impact through Policy Innovation and Statewide Coordination

Washington is renowned for having the most generous need-based aid program in the country. Even so, FAFSA completion rates remain low, suggesting the limits of financial aid as an enrollment strategy. A recent policy innovation and new statewide coordination have the potential to meaningfully expand access to financial aid across Washington.

- Individuals deemed income-eligible for the WA Grant through participation in public benefits programs *will not need to complete an aid application to receive state funds*. Filing a FAFSA is still the only way to access federal financial aid, but the notification of automatic eligibility may increase awareness and, in turn, access.
- Led by WSAC and with the leadership and support of the Governor's office, college access professionals across Washington are partnering in an effort to better coordinate financial aid support for high school seniors and families statewide.

### Filing a Financial Aid Application

*Why it matters:* When an individual submits an aid application, the institutions they apply to prepare award letters that include specific amounts that the student would receive if they were to enroll. These letters help individuals understand whether and how they might afford the costs associated with pursuing college education or eligible job training.



#### COMMON INDICATOR: FAFSA FILING RATE FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

*Measures the percentage of expected high school graduates at Washington's public high schools who file a FAFSA.*

#### How RCG Directly Improves the Common FAFSA Filing Indicator

Partnerships understand that they must treat the application as more than a mechanical step in a student's journey if they are to meaningfully improve financial aid access in their communities.

- **Mpower** is shifting the educational culture by helping more learners identify the value of applying for financial aid. Thanks to targeted mentorship and career coaching supports for high school students, FAFSA filing rates in the service region are increasing. In the Riverside School District, the FAFSA completion rate for low-income students jumped from 28 percent for the Class of 2023 – before the RCG investment began – to 60 percent for the Class of 2024.
- Yakima Valley Partners for Education (**YVPE**) developed a sequenced strategy where residents can access local, trusted Spanish-speaking tax preparers before filing for financial aid. The approach leads with trust-building. As a result, six out of the eight school districts in YVPE's service region achieved record-high FAFSA filing rates for the Class of 2025.

#### RCG's Broader Impact on Financial Aid Access for Washington's Residents

At the same time, regional partners also know that Washington cannot increase educational attainment through support for high school students alone. For regional partnerships supporting adult learners, their impacts on financial aid access would not be captured in the common indicator.

- **Centro Cultural Mexicano** is expanding financial aid access by uncovering true barriers and perceptions of affordability facing Latino Learners across King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties. After surveying 400 community members—high school graduates, adult learners, and individuals seeking job training—the partnership identified financial access, housing, childcare, and language as consistent barriers to enrollment. In response, the partnership is equipping regional leaders design more inclusive outreach and support systems.



**12 of 12** partnerships help their communities navigate financial aid applications



**4 of 12** partnerships monitor short-term outcomes related to financial aid access and affordability

### Addressing Basic Needs for Learners and Their Families

*Why it matters:* When an individual's basic needs are met – for themselves and for their family – they are able to focus on their long-term educational and career goals and the steps required to get there.



#### COMMON INDICATOR: BENEFITS UTILIZATION RATE

*Measures the percentage of college-enrolled respondents who reported accessing basic needs support services in the most recent statewide Basic Needs Survey.*

#### How RCG Directly Improves the Common Basic Needs Indicator

By directly addressing the basic needs of college students, regional partnerships ensure that students have access to resources and benefits that help them meet their basic needs and stay enrolled.

- In Snohomish County, **ELEVATE** supports adult learners by integrating basic needs services—such as food security resources and a completion fund—into its regional infrastructure for credential attainment. With the opening of the Adult Learner Center at Everett Community College, the partnership now offers on-campus supports, including a lending library, hotspots, and laptops.
- For learners in rural communities, reliable transportation is a requirement for being able to attend college courses in person. **YVPE's** transportation pilot connects rural communities, such as Mabton and Toppenish, to Yakima Valley College's Grandview campus. This strategy is designed to increase high school students' participation in the dual credit program, Running Start.

#### RCG's Broader Impact on Basic Needs Security

For every individual who has overcome basic needs insecurity and enrolled in education or career training, there are others who are prevented from enrolling due to the same concerns. Regional partners are innovating where and how they provide resources and supports for local families, so that community members can move from meeting their basic needs to pursuing their educational goals.

- The **Olympic Peninsula Resource CO-OP** streamlines access to services and basic needs support for adult learners and youth aging out of foster care. The partnership's "one-stop shop" model enables participants to directly access housing, childcare, financial aid, and mental health services alongside enrollment support. In the first half of 2025, the CO-OP provided financial aid and college application support for over 90 people.
- **Cornerstone** provides support to whole families so that they can reach their academic and career aspirations. The partnership offers parents attending local colleges with educational supports, basic needs resources, and emergency funds. In the past academic year, the partnership has enabled 11 Cornerstone parents to enroll in local colleges.



**6 of 12** partnerships integrate **basic needs support** into their strategies



**3 of 12** partnerships work to **limit basic needs insecurity** among college students

### Enrolling in College Education and Career Training

*Why it matters:* College education and career training open pathways to credentials that lead to higher wages, greater job stability, and long-term career growth. For high school students, enrolling in the fall after graduation helps them maintain momentum toward their goals.



#### COMMON INDICATOR: DIRECT ENROLLMENT FROM HIGH SCHOOL RATE

*Measures the percentage of Washington high school students who enrolled in college within one year of graduation.*

#### How RCG Directly Improves the Common College Enrollment Indicator

Partnerships that work directly with high school seniors can guide students through the transition from their K-12 classroom to a post-high school plan that meets their skills and interests.

- **Kitsap Strong** is establishing regional hope-centered infrastructure that supports K-12 direct enrollment and retention through a summer bridge program called Launch2College. All high school graduates from the inaugural Summer 2025 cohort are currently enrolled at Olympic College, demonstrating early success in fostering educational engagement.
- **GROW-Net** provides students in the Kiona-Benton school district with dual-language college and career programming, parent-oriented information sessions, family workshops, and college visits. The partnership's holistic approach facilitates graduates' direct enrollment at nearby colleges. In the past year, district enrollment at WSU Tri-Cities grew from one student to seven.

#### RCG's Broader Impact on Enrollment

Regional partnerships prioritize trust-building so that new pathways to college and career training are community-led and, as a result, more individuals will pursue these pathways—even if it's not directly after high school graduation.

- At the request of tribal elders, the **Washington State University Native American Health Sciences (WSU NAHS)** partnership is developing tribe-specific strategic plans. Native American youth will learn from a health sciences curriculum set within their cultural and geographic context. More Native American students enroll in healthcare pathways when they witness healthcare careers.
- **United Way of the Blue Mountains** hosts regional advisory groups, creating space for open dialogue about college and career pathways for first-generation families. These community-led conversations surface the real incentives and barriers that rural, Hispanic students face. With this knowledge, partners can design supports that align with students' goals. Over time, this approach is creating a stronger educational culture in the Walla Walla and Columbia counties.



**12 of 12** partnerships help their communities enroll in college and career training



**5 of 12** partnerships monitor short-term outcomes related to enrollment in college or career training

### Completing a College Credential or Career Training Program

*Why it matters:* Credentials signal to employers that individuals have the skills and knowledge needed for in-demand jobs. Getting a credential can increase access to higher wages, a better quality of life, and long-term career stability.



#### **COMMON INDICATOR: Degree Completion within 8 Years of HS Graduation**

*Measures the highest college credential earned by Washington high school graduates within eight years of high school graduation.*

#### **How RCG Directly Improves the Common College Completion Indicator**

When plans following high school reflect learners' interests and preferences, retention and completion become attainable.

- The **City of Seattle Postsecondary Success Network** is improving retention for BIPOC students with culturally responsive mentors, career-connected learning, and coordinated support across schools and community organizations. In its first year of RCG-funded work, mentored Seattle Promise scholars had a 71 percent retention rate—17 percentage points higher than their scholar peers.
- **Methow Futures** promotes local college and career pathways for students through real-world learning, including internships, apprenticeships, and dual credit opportunities. The partnership added seven new internship sites this past year, with over 90 percent of students at the district's Independent Learning Center participating in weekly internships. This early introduction to real-world learning encourages students to complete credentials that lead to local employment.

#### **RCG's Broader Impact on Credential Attainment**

An estimated 1.1 million adults in Washington enrolled in college but did not earn a credential, and an additional 1.2 million have a high school diploma but no college enrollment.<sup>3</sup> Partnerships that help adults earn a credential or complete a training program unlock economic opportunity for learners and their families. This positive impact is not captured in the common indicator described above.

- **Cornerstone's** approach to supporting whole families promotes stability at home while encouraging parents to pursue their goals. The partnership helps Cornerstone parents obtain credentials through career assessments, resume reviews, job search assistance, and enrollment support at Centralia College. To date, 27 parents have enrolled in college, and 9 have graduated.
- **ELEVATE** helps adult learners get closer to credential completion through Academic Credit Prior Learning. Adult learners can earn up to 40 credits from Adult Basic Education courses at local organizations, which count toward a degree at Everett Community College.



**5 of 12** partnerships support their communities in **completing a college credential**



**2 of 12** partnerships monitor short-term outcomes related to **credential completion**

### Conclusion

Changing the educational culture in Washington's communities is the only realistic way to sustainably improve educational success and long-term economic mobility. The work of systems change takes time. It cannot undo longstanding trends in educational outcomes overnight. Nor does it narrowly limit itself to improving outcomes for students whose progress is captured by common educational indicators. Even so, regional partners' impacts in communities are already evident after just two school years. Over time, these partners can create impacts that span generations of learners and families.

WSAC has requested \$1.25 million for Regional Partnerships in the 2026 supplemental operating budget. With this investment, WSAC can continue to shape the local environment to increase college and career enrollment and completion. This funding does not only fulfill our state's commitment to equity and educational opportunity but returns on the state's investment by increasing economic mobility for Washingtonians.

### Appendices

- Appendix A: [Programmatic Updates](#)
- Appendix B: [Summaries of Work for RCG Partnerships](#)
- Appendix C: [Educational Outcomes in RCG Service Regions, by Geographic Region](#)
- Appendix D: [Regional Partnership Evaluation Framework](#)
- Appendix C. [Washington Student Achievement Council 2025 Strategic Action Plan](#)
- Appendix D. [Regional Partnership Reapplication Recommendations](#)
- Appendix E: [Request for Partnership Reapplication](#)

## About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

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TTY/TDD users may dial 7-1-1 for relay services

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information on WSAC's \$1.25 million request can be found in the 2026 Supplemental Decision Package.

<sup>2</sup> See also SB 5789: <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28B.120.060>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Educational Attainment" American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1501, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2024.S1501?q=S1501>: Accessed on November 21, 2025.



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