

Progress: Moving Affordability Forward in Washington State

Washington has made sustained policy commitments to improve the affordability of higher education, yet significant challenges remain.

What Washington Has Done

- **Washington College Grant (WA Grant):** In 2020, the state replaced the State Need Grant with the Washington College Grant. This change expanded eligibility to more low- and middle-income students, helping to cover tuition or greatly lower costs.
- **Expanded financial aid outreach:** Statewide efforts, including the *Washington Completes FAFSA* campaign, work to raise awareness of financial aid and improve application completion.
- **WCG-Connect:** The state reduced administrative barriers by automatically determining WA Grant eligibility for students receiving certain public benefits, eliminating the need to complete a FAFSA or WASFA.

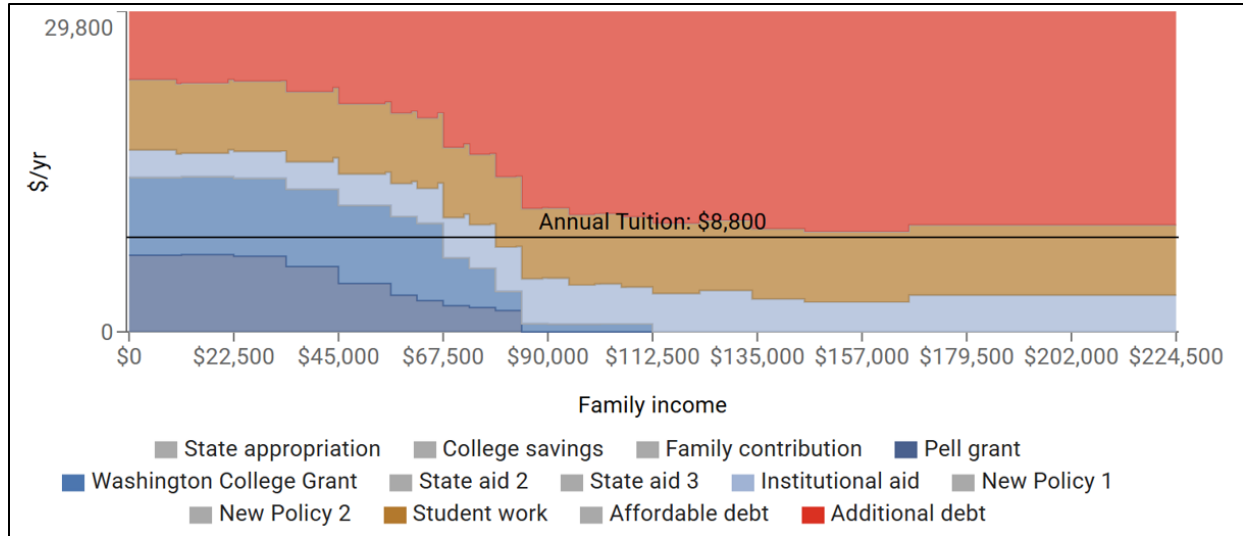
Impact of 2025 Legislative Session

In 2025, Washington faced budgetary pressures that resulted in reductions in higher education funding. These included removing Independent Colleges of Washington from WA Grant eligibility, eliminating Bridge Grants, and reductions to other student support initiatives. These funding limitations affected the reach and consistency of these programs. Together, they underscore the importance of carefully examining how policy decisions and fiscal conditions influence affordability across income levels.

Affordability Challenges Persist

The total cost of attendance at public regional institutions (2022–23) continues to exceed available resources for many students, even after accounting for:

- Pell Grant, WA Grant, Institutional Aid, and Student Work.



Focus for Deeper Understanding

A key goal is improving our understanding of financial need by income level. What does the remaining “gap” (shaded red in the previous chart) mean for students?

Questions and Data Points for Further Exploration

- Student debt levels by income cohort and repayment timelines.
- The role and impact of WA 529 participation across income levels.
- How Washington’s approach compares to strategies used in other states.
- What we know and do not know about undergraduate student loan borrowing.

What barriers do you see? What would you like to learn, explore, and or discuss further?

Next step

Council agrees to form a sub-group, including interested partners and stakeholders, to help guide WSAC staff in preparing for the next full Council conversation in May.