

2022 Strategic Action Plan



Key Takeaways

Education and training beyond high school is essential.

Some credential beyond a high school diploma is increasingly essential to earn a living wage and avoid the worst impacts of an economic downturn. Lifetime earnings, for instance, are almost double for those with a bachelor's degree than those with only a high school diploma.

All sectors of society shape public attitudes on educational pathways.

Washington's high school graduates are less likely to continue their education than students across the country and in California, Virginia, and Mississippi. We cannot rely on high schools and colleges alone to increase participation in higher education. College-going choices are shaped by many other societal factors and messages.

Student success is shaped by factors outside the classroom.

Students face many different types of costs beyond tuition and fees. Earnings loss due to class and study time comes on top of the costs of housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other needs. These financial burdens can derail students even when financial aid covers their full tuition and fees.

Racial and ethnic disparities appear throughout educational pathways.

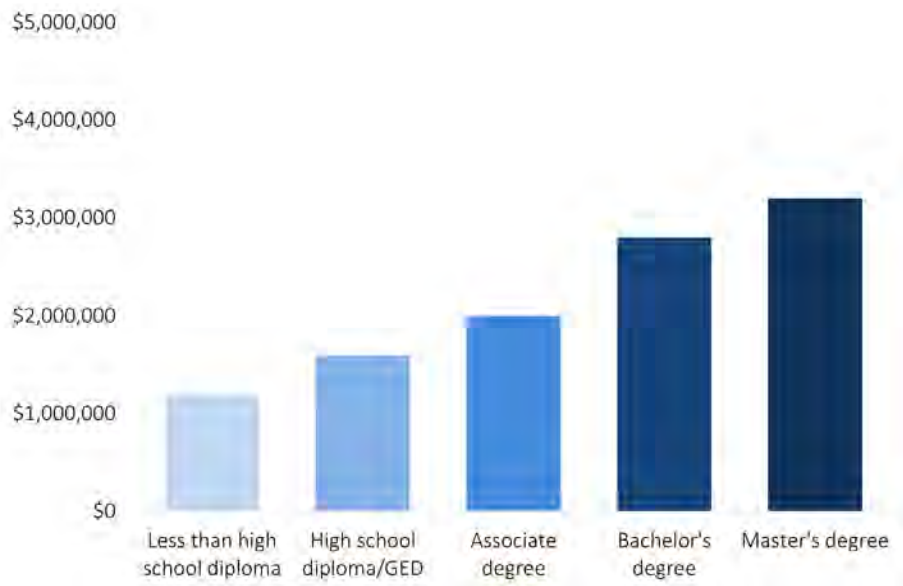
WSAC is prioritizing racial equity as a necessary part of our goal to increase student postsecondary credential attainment to 70 percent for Washington state residents who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status. Today, only 50 percent or less currently have a postsecondary credential. Enrollment patterns differ by race and ethnicity across institutions and programs.

Strategic Action Plan 2022

Washington's State Goal for Educational Attainment

Some type of credential beyond a high school diploma is increasingly essential for earning a living wage and avoiding the worst impacts of an economic downturn. Lifetime earnings, for instance, are on average almost double for those with a bachelor's degree than those with only a high school diploma (figure 1). And those with a postsecondary credential tend to have a lower risk of unemployment than those without. Postsecondary credentials include traditional college degrees, certificates, apprenticeship, and other career-based programs. These credentials are provided by a wide range of public and private universities, two-year colleges, and training programs.

Figure 1. Median Lifetime Earnings by Educational Attainment in the U.S.

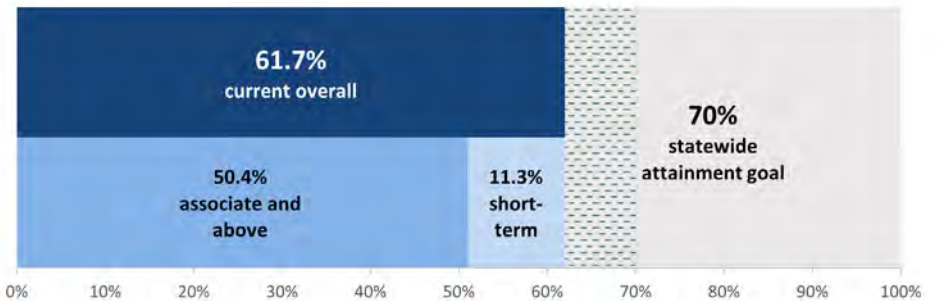


Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–2019

The benefits of education or training beyond high school provide a strong rationale to increase educational attainment in our state. In 2013, the Washington Student Achievement Council proposed a statewide goal for educational attainment that called for 70 percent of the state's 25- to 44-year-olds (i.e., our early and mid-career residents) to have a postsecondary credential. The goal was adopted by the state Legislature and signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee.

When the goal was adopted, 55.4 percent of 25- to 44-year-olds had a postsecondary credential.¹ By the end of 2019, our educational attainment rate had increased to 61.7 percent (figure 2). This pace of improvement will not be enough to meet the plan's time frame to achieve 70 percent by 2023.

Figure 2. Current Attainment Rate and Statewide Goal



Source: Associate and higher data retrieved from American Community Survey, 2019 PUMS 1-Year Data, Washington postsecondary attainment, ages 25-44. Short-term credential data retrieved from Lumina Foundation, A Stronger Nation, Washington residents ages 25-64.

The 70 percent goal was based on analysis of the skill demands in the Washington job market, but more importantly, it serves as an aspirational vision that we now know cannot be achieved by incremental improvement over time. The growth in Americans' participation in postsecondary education that surged in the latter half of the 20th century has slowed in recent decades. Washington needs an aggressive change agenda and sustained financial investment to reach the 70 percent goal in a timeframe that makes a difference.

Higher Education Policy in Washington State

State and federal higher education policy focused for many years on the supply and affordability of postsecondary education. Capital budgets for new facilities, appropriations to subsidize the cost of education, tuition policy, and funding for financial aid programs dominated the policy landscape.

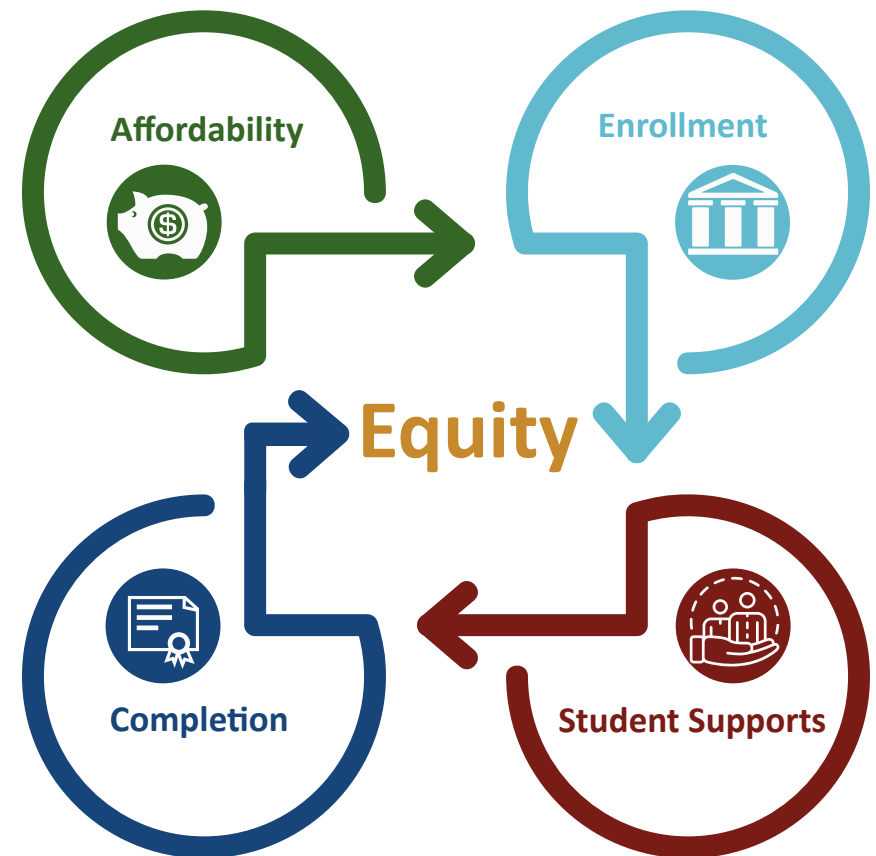
Higher education equips individuals with the tools they need to succeed in the labor market with higher-paying jobs that lead to improved living standards and more secure and fulfilling lives. Ensuring access to higher education is critical for our state as we build a future of opportunity and economic stability for all.

During the past dozen years, at the federal level and in many states, higher education policy became more focused on educational attainment. This gave rise to new issues of access and success, with an increasing awareness of opportunity gaps between racial and ethnic groups that continued to define student success. Many policymakers came to believe that their educational attainment goals could not be achieved without improvement at scale across this wider range of challenges.

In 2019, the Washington Student Achievement Council adopted a Strategic Framework to better understand how state higher education policy contributes to campus and student success. The framework organizes the policy work into four areas deemed essential to achieve our 70 percent goal (figure 3):

- » Affordability
- » Enrollment
- » Completion
- » Student Supports

Figure 3. WSAC Strategic Cluster Areas



The framework is an expression of our belief that if we build an affordable and supportive educational environment, more Washingtonians will enroll in programs and complete credentials. Ensuring equitable access and success for all students is central to the strategic framework.

The Council also adopted six lenses, or values, to guide our work. The equity lens is foundational to our work and shapes everything we do. The other

lenses we strive to apply to both policy and practice commit us to focus on the student experience, work at the regional level, mobilize networks of partners, promote alignment of all public investments to support student success, and encourage innovation across the spectrum.

The WSAC Strategic Action Plan

The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) is built on our educational attainment goal and the strategic framework that organizes the work to increase the likelihood of achieving our goal. The SAP is not an agency-specific document that addresses only our programs and initiatives. It is meant to be the state's policy built through the Council's work to engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders to forge a consensus for state action.

The state higher education policy agenda is built through the Council's work engaging a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

The SAP includes a summary of our current state policy environment and a work plan for the Council, partners, and stakeholders to take on over a two-year cycle.

Washington's Existing Higher Education Policy

Discussion of public policy and legislation understandably focuses on new ideas. Rarely does one see all existing state higher education policy explained in plain language in one document. This section is the Council's effort to capture that policy as a baseline to inform our change agenda and to enable community leaders to see the state's approach in full.

We define "state higher education policy" broadly to include statutes, budget investments, and agency rules, as well as more informal, recurring state practices or actions that can define a meaningful commitment to a policy approach. A good example of the latter shows up in the informal yet persistent connection between financial aid, tuition policy, and state

appropriations to colleges and universities. The Council can help support valuable informal policy through identification, recognition of value, and commitment to preserving the policy.

State higher education policy includes statutes, budget investments, agency rules, and recurring state practices and actions.

The Council strives to describe state policy based on broad consensus, not just WSAC's perspective. Aspirational statements are grounded in statutory language or other context based on existing law, programs, or appropriations. We hope that by memorializing all of this in one document, engaging a broad range of stakeholders and partners in the development of this document, and sharing with policymakers, we will strengthen the state's commitment to these important policies.

This statement is organized around the 70 percent educational attainment goal and WSAC's four strategic framework clusters—Affordability, Enrollment, Completion, and Student Supports—and our commitment to the Equity Lens. It explains the purpose of each cluster. Some specific issues could be placed under more than one cluster, so we make choices and avoid repetition in the interest of clarity and understanding.

*If we build an **affordable** and **supportive** educational environment, more Washingtonians will **enroll** in programs and **complete** credentials.*

This statement reveals highly developed policy clusters (e.g. Affordability), as well as emerging policy clusters (e.g. Student Supports). Thus, it reveals gaps in our state's higher education policy and motivates work to fill these gaps in the future.

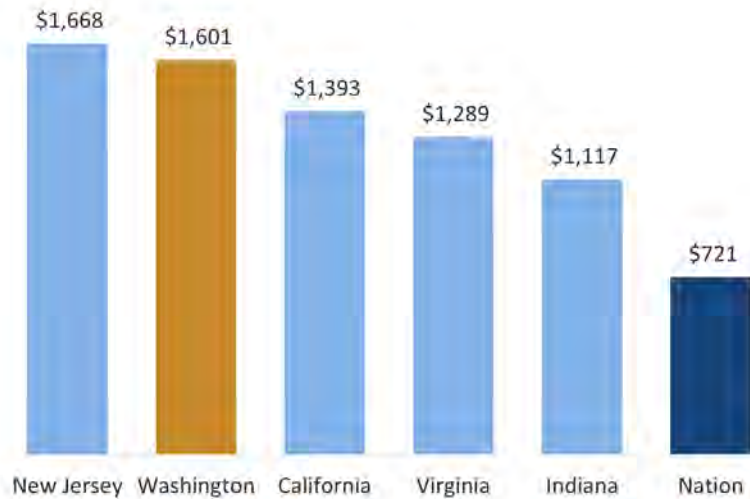
Affordability

Affordability

Affordability is the most cited barrier to enrolling and continuing in education beyond high school. The financial barriers go beyond the cost of the education itself, expressed as tuition and fees. Many students must support, or contribute to the support, of their household. Because these other costs are so significant and often overlooked, the Council addresses those barriers as a separate cluster entitled Student Supports.

The affordability cluster focuses on the tuition and fee costs in higher education. Washington may have the most comprehensive state policy on affordability in the nation. For instance, Washington awards the second-highest amount of grant aid per undergraduate full-time equivalent student in the nation (figure 4).

Figure 4. Need-based Grant Aid per Undergraduate Full-Time Equivalent Enrollment, by State, 2018-2019



Source: National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, 51st Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid 2019-20.

Washington's higher education policy on affordability is among the most comprehensive in the nation.

Financial aid programs are designed to make postsecondary education affordable for students who face financial barriers. Many students in Washington are [eligible for state aid](#) to help cover the costs of college, in addition to the federal Pell grant (figure 5). As expected, most students who receive state financial aid have incomes below 55 percent of the state median level. The same is true for students receiving federal aid.

Figure 5. Washington Financial Aid Recipients by Median Family Income

State Financial Aid Recipients

MFI Category	Percent	Number
0-55%	67.0%	72,519
56-75%	16.6%	17,960
76-100%	11.5%	12,428
Over 100	1.5%	1,581
Unknown*	3.5%	3,729

Federal Pell Grant Recipients

MFI Category	Percent	Number
0-55%	87.0%	74,999
56-75%	11.3%	9,730
76-100%	1.7%	1,490
Over 100	0.1%	70

* Includes state aid programs that do not require FAFSA, such as SBCTC Opportunity Grants, Work Force Training Funds, and other state-funded gift assistance.

Source: WSAC Research analysis of Unit Record Report, Washington state financial aid and Pell grant recipients by state median family income (MFI), academic year 2020-21.

Washington's affordability policy is based on the logic that an affordable higher education system will allow more students to enroll and complete postsecondary programs, leading to an increased count of credentials toward the state attainment goal.

Affordability

Higher education should be affordable for all Washingtonians.

- » Higher education should be affordable [without imposing limits by age](#), to include both adults and recent graduates from high school.
- » Higher education should be affordable to state residents, regardless of [citizenship status](#).
- » Washington’s effort to ensure affordability for students should encompass [all forms of postsecondary programs](#), including traditional degrees, career-technical education certificates, and apprenticeships.
- » Policies to ensure affordability should also enable student options across all types of institutions, both public and private.
- » Students need support with financial literacy and planning to maximize the affordability of higher education.

Washington makes higher education affordable through three major policies.

- » State financial aid programs based on income eligibility (“need-based”).
- » State subsidy and tuition policy for public institutions.
- » State investment programs to help families save.

State financial aid programs offer flexibility and reach beyond the lowest-income households.

- » All Washington residents who meet the [income eligibility standards](#) are guaranteed financial aid.
- » State aid pays tuition and fees for students from the bottom third of households by income—currently \$64,500 for a household of four.
- » The state contributes part of tuition and fees for students from households above the bottom third and up to the statewide middle income (MFI) level—currently \$107,000 for a household of four.
- » Income-eligible students who receive federal financial aid grants can keep their combined state and federal grant that can help cover costs beyond tuition and fees.

- » Students can use state financial aid regardless of consecutive or full-time enrollment.

All Washington residents who meet income eligibility are guaranteed financial aid for higher education.

The state subsidizes public colleges and universities for all students.

- » The amount of state subsidy directly affects the level of tuition and fees.
- » State law ensures that tuition increases are not greater than the rate of inflation.
- » Consistent state investments combined with tuition funding meets the cost of delivery of education for students.
- » State support helps colleges and universities provide higher quality academic and student support programs that otherwise might not be affordable within campus budgets alone.
- » State policy directs all Washington public postsecondary institutions to commit a portion of their tuition revenue to prioritize financial aid for low-income students.

Some state financial aid programs are designed to increase college and career readiness and are intended to support specific populations.

- » [Set an early vision for college](#): Students from our lowest-income households see in middle school that there is a path to an affordable higher education for them.
- » [High demand STEM and technical jobs](#): Financial aid is tied to increase access to high demand education pathways for lower-income students.
- » [Specific populations](#): Some financial aid programs support populations beyond income eligibility to include [foster youth](#), [homeless youth](#), [Native American students](#), etc.

Affordability

- » *Work-based learning:* Financial aid supports work-based learning by partnering with employers to fund jobs for students.
- » *Public needs in the job market:* Financial aid programs can be used to attract Washington residents to jobs with high public need, such as teaching, healthcare in underserved communities, etc.
- » *Apprenticeship:* Apprenticeships are eligible for aid awards, and maximum grants have increased to match community and technical college awards. WSAC has undertaken efforts to help more apprenticeship providers navigate the process and meet administrative requirements to participate.

Washington primarily uses the federal model for students to apply for and receive financial aid.

Washington mostly relies on the federal model for students to apply for and receive financial aid.

- » State financial aid is awarded and distributed by the college or university that the student attends and is sector neutral.
- » All colleges and universities must meet certain state eligibility requirements and standards in order to participate in state financial aid programs.
- » The federal application form (FAFSA) is used for most students to [apply for and receive state financial aid](#), which prevents students from having to fill out two separate applications.
- » There are efforts to enable students to gain access to state aid through alternative means, such as participation in other public benefits. WSAC created a pilot that would enable students to receive Washington College Grant (WCG) if their family receives Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and a bill in the 2022 legislative session allows for students receiving one of three public assistance programs to be eligible for WCG without the need for a FAFSA.

- » Through the [WASFA \(Washington Application for State Financial Aid\)](#), Washington offers financial aid to students who are ineligible for federal aid because of their citizenship status.
- » Costs of attending college beyond tuition and fees are considered using the federal definition of “total cost of attendance.”
- » Students must maintain and demonstrate academic progress toward their postsecondary credential.
- » The Legislature created a “Bridge Grant” supplement to WCG, allowing students with the lowest incomes to receive an award above tuition to help defray non-tuition costs.

The state has provided some programs to address student debt.

- » The office of the [student loan advocate](#), administered by WSAC, provides current students information around taking on student debt and offers people with existing loans resources for managing debt.
- » Additional support for outreach and support for borrowers in state government to take advantage of public service loan forgiveness, with the student loan advocate designing materials and helping with those issues.
- » Some [state loan programs and loan refinancing programs](#) have been established in statute. The Legislature set aside \$150 million for a new state loan program in 2022.

Washington helps families save for college.

The state supports households with the ability to save for college.

- » The state offers a guarantee to account owners in a prepaid tuition plan ([GET](#)), that their investment will keep pace with tuition increases at the state’s highest-priced public university.
- » State legislation directed and supported the launch of a traditional college savings plan ([DreamAhead](#)).

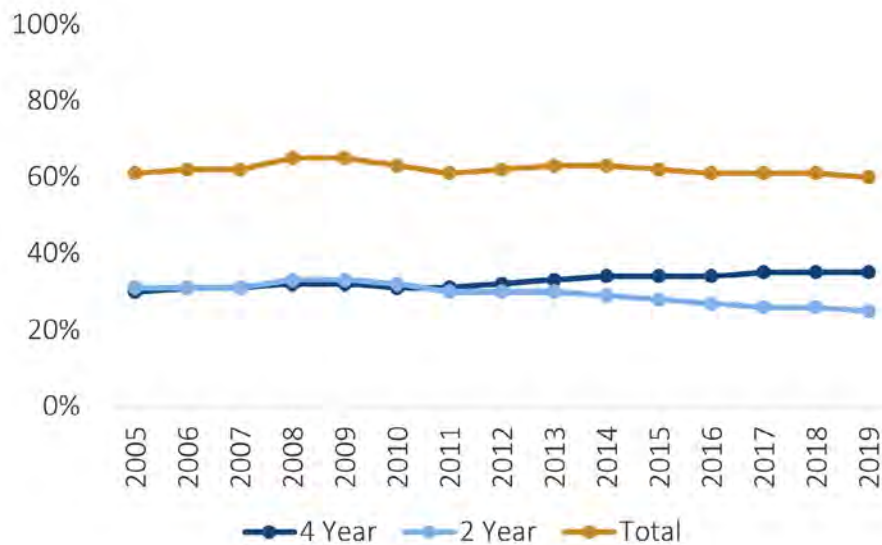
Enrollment

Enrollment

Washington residents enrolled in higher education in increasing numbers and as a percentage of the state population during the second half of the 20th century. Along with most other states, the rate of growth slowed over the past 25 years.

Washington has a surprisingly low rate of enrollment by high school seniors within a year of graduation (figure 6). Our state average of 60 percent is around 9 percentage points below the national average and far behind states with competitive economies, such as Massachusetts (75%) and Virginia (67%).^{2,3} Among the west coast states, Washington's direct enrollment rate falls behind Oregon (62%) and California (64%).⁴

Figure 6. Direct Postsecondary Enrollment Rate from High School



Source: Education Research and Data Center (ERDC), Washington postsecondary enrollment during first year after graduation, 2005-2019 graduates, by sector.

Enrollment is often seen more as a matter of practice than policy. However, the Council believes that there is a significant role for state policy to play in this effort. We have some elements in place, but like most other states, we don't have a comprehensive enrollment policy in place.

Washington must work to increase enrollment for K-12 students, as well as working-age adults.

All Washington residents should have a clear and accessible path to enroll in postsecondary education.

- » All Washington residents should be aware of the benefits of continuing their education beyond high school, including the economic, social, and health returns of earning a credential.
- » Washington must increase postsecondary enrollment for both traditional K-12 students and working-age adults.
- » Washington's effort to increase enrollment should encompass all forms of postsecondary programs, including traditional degrees, career-technical education certificates, apprenticeships, and more.
- » Policies to ensure ease of enrollment should also enable student choice across all types of institutions, including private colleges.
- » Washington's efforts to increase enrollment should be particularly focused on supporting students of color, especially Black, Indigenous, and Latino students, who have been historically and institutionally marginalized from accessing higher education.

The state's K-12 system provides some funding, infrastructure, and programming to motivate and support college pathways for traditional K-12 students.

- » High school counselors and other K-12 staff offer college and career readiness and financial aid advising to students in school.

Enrollment

- » Washington’s K-12 system has worked to integrate college and career readiness through the [high school and beyond plan](#).
- » A range of [dual credit programs](#) are available; students can receive college credit in high school by completing a college course, passing a standardized exam, or participating in technical programs that have articulation agreements.
- » Washington’s public baccalaureate institutions began piloting a guaranteed admissions pilot intended to increase access and credential completion in 2021.
- » Some dual credit programs have low or no cost to low-income students.
- » Students can graduate high school by demonstrating readiness through [multiple pathways](#), including dual credit.
- » State policies require that K-12 schools implement academic acceleration and provide a financial aid advising day to help students be college and career ready and gain financial literacy.
- » The state has provided funding for [Regional Challenge Grants](#) to support local or regional partnerships among K-12, colleges, businesses, and community-based organizations to expand innovative interventions to increase college enrollment and completion, with a focus on eliminating opportunity gaps for marginalized populations.

Washington must aim to support enrollment among students of color in particular.

The state provides some additional infrastructure outside of the K-12 system to support Washington K-12 students’ pathways to postsecondary education.

- » Washington makes some investments in [college-going programs](#) provided by WSAC and [nonprofit groups](#) that provide resources and information to students and families about how to enroll in college.

- » State agencies offer web-based information and [digital tools](#) to support high school students and increase access to financial aid and college planning.
- » [Career Connect Washington](#) is increasing options for students to participate in work-based and academic programs that provide college and career readiness while earning college credit and/or wages.
- » Washington has a network of federal programs that support low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students in their preparation and pursuit of postsecondary education.
- » The state subsidy to postsecondary institutions may also provide support for campus operations, including admissions, outreach, and enrollment activities.

Work-based and academic programs offered through Career Connect Washington prepare students for college and career while earning college credit or wages.

Washington has some resources to support working-age adults’ ability to pay for and access college and career programs.

- » Some financial aid programs are available to increase postsecondary attainment for non-traditional, income-eligible students.
- » State agencies offer [web-based information and digital tools](#) to support working-age adults in navigating college enrollment, various programs, and basic needs resources.
- » Federal programs and funds support students’ postsecondary enrollment regional workforce development councils (WDCs) to increase the number of adults in education and training programs.

Student Supports

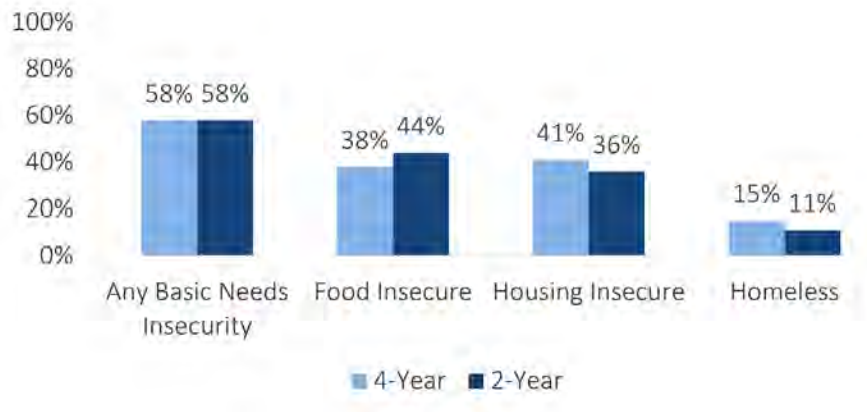
Student Supports

Students face many different types of costs beyond tuition and fees. Earnings loss due to class and study time comes on top of the costs of housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other needs. These financial burdens can derail students even when financial aid covers their full tuition and fees.

Financial burdens like housing, food, childcare, and transportation can derail students even when financial aid covers their tuition and fees.

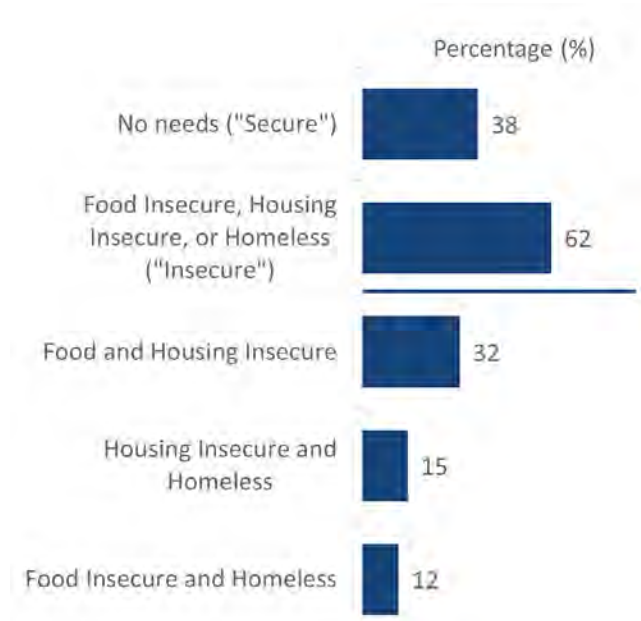
National data shows that a majority of college students face some basic needs insecurity (figure 7). In Washington, a survey of community and technical college students revealed that more than 60 percent face housing or food insecurity or are experiencing homelessness (figure 8).

Figure 7. National Basic Needs Insecurity by College Type



Source: #RealCollege During the Pandemic—New Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity and Student Well-Being. The Hope Center (2020).

Figure 8. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among Washington State Community and Technical College Survey Respondents



Source: Washington State Community and Technical Colleges #RealCollege Survey. The Hope Center (2019).

These needs can vary for different types of students. Less than one in five undergraduates working toward a degree in Washington (19.3%) are traditional students attending college directly out of high school.⁵ Large numbers are working adults, many with children. Increasing workforce demands for “lifelong learning” will make these students a growing portion of our postsecondary enrollment.

This is an emerging issue in Washington and makes us one of the few states to expressly identify and begin work on these challenges. There may be many opportunities to better align existing programs in the social services realm to help students succeed.

Student Supports

Access to basic needs should not be a barrier for Washington residents seeking a postsecondary degree.

- » Basic needs encompass access to affordable housing, sufficient food, quality childcare, mental healthcare, and affordable transportation.
- » Access could be provided through higher education institutions, existing federal or state public benefits, and/or local resources.

Some of Washington’s financial aid programs may cover costs beyond tuition and fees.

- » Costs of attending college beyond tuition and fees are considered using the federal definition of “total cost of attendance.”
- » If a student receives more total aid across all sources, these additional funds help support the cost of housing, food, etc.

Many Washington postsecondary students may be eligible for federal or state public assistance programs to address food, housing, and childcare.

- » The state administers and builds off federal programs to provide programming and support to some income-eligible postsecondary students to help with childcare, food, and other emergency funds.
- » The state has encouraged state partnerships to expand access to food for postsecondary students.

The state has made modest investments in the four-year and two-year public institutions to address costs beyond tuition and fees

- » The [Student Emergency Assistance Grant](#) program distributes funding to two-year community and technical colleges to help students cover emergency expenses.
- » The state has supported the needs of college students experiencing homelessness and those who aged out of foster care in four-year public and two-year public institutions through a [pilot grant program](#). A 2022 investment expands the pilot to all public community and technical colleges and baccalaureates.

- » The state has supported pilot programs to address [suicide prevention](#) and [mental healthcare access at four community and technical colleges](#). A 2022 proviso invests in a study of student health care and insurance access, as well as a small pilot for health insurance navigation.
- » The state has increased some access to childcare subsidies for community and technical college students.

Most public and private institutions provide some form of support for basic needs for students.

- » Emergency grants can cover one-time needs like rental assistance.
- » Some institutions have an on-campus food pantry or partner with a local food bank.
- » Institutions may form innovative partnerships with local housing authorities or developers.
- » Case management and integrated teams provide navigation for basic needs and mental/behavioral health.
- » Childcare centers provide early education and childcare for enrolled postsecondary students and their families.

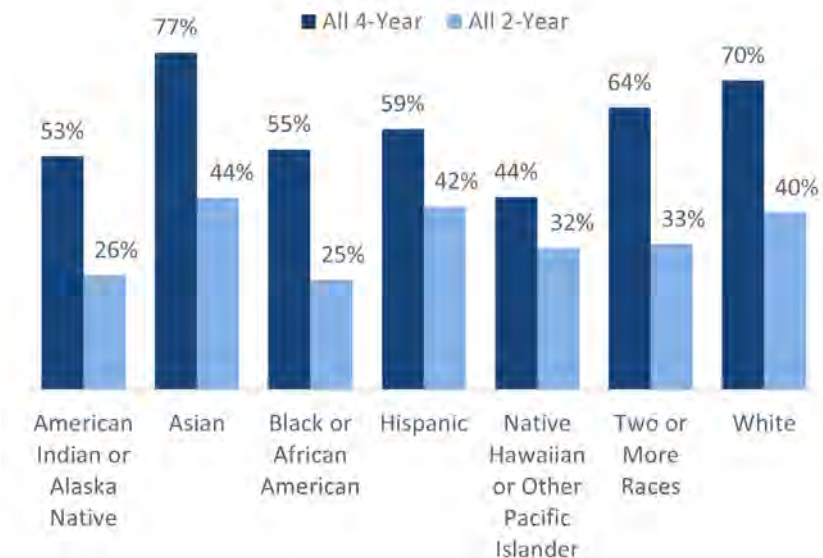
Completion

Completion

Reaching our goal of dramatically expanding the postsecondary education level of Washington residents requires higher enrollment and a greater rate of student success. While not the only measure, successful completion of a postsecondary program is now a widely accepted indicator of student success. Completing a program is necessary to earn a credential that can help students achieve their life and career goals.

Successful completion of a postsecondary program is an indicator of student success.

Figure 9. Washington Graduation Rates within 150 percent of Normal Time, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Washington graduation rates within 150 percent of normal time (within 3 years for 2-year institutions, within 6 years for 4-year institutions), Fall 2014 cohort for 4-year and Fall 2017 cohort for 2-year, by race.

Currently, Washington's overall completion rate at public four-year institutions is 69 percent, and 39 percent at public two-years.⁶ This is measured over periods that begin at first enrollment but continue for six years for a bachelor's degree and three years for an associate degree. There are also glaring racial inequities in graduation rates in our state (figure 9).

We need to improve how we measure completion indicators to better align with our state's definition of student success.

Completion rates as measured today are an imperfect metric. We need to improve the completion indicator to align with our state's definition of student success. There are important considerations about the range of programs included, the inclusion of returning adult students, how part-time status affects the indicator, and more, that impact how we measure student success. Washington needs to develop a consensus on what are the key indicators of student success and how to best calculate those indicators to create a valuable measure for policymakers.

Postsecondary students should persist and earn a credential.

- » Higher education should guide and support student academic pathways through postsecondary education into the workforce.
- » If Washington provides the necessary resources and establishes a supportive learning environment, then all students who want to, can and should be able to succeed at earning a postsecondary credential.
- » The time it takes students to complete a credential may vary depending on students' academic or career interests (short-term workforce credential vs. doctoral degree) and enrollment (part-time or full-time).
- » Washington's efforts to increase completion rates should be particularly focused on supporting students of color, especially Black, Indigenous, and Latino students, who have been historically and institutionally marginalized from accessing higher education.

Completion

Washington has made significant investments to support implementation of Guided Pathways at Community and Technical Colleges.

- » Guided Pathways can be an effective approach to increasing persistence and completion for low-income students.
- » Washington's implementation of the [Guided Pathways](#) model has a focus on closing racial equity gaps.
- » Colleges receive technical and leadership support to clarify pathways for students, help students access and pursue that pathway, help students stay on course, and ensure students successfully learn and complete their pathways.

Washington has a statewide system that supports students' seamless transfer from one institution to another.

- » Colleges have statewide agreements that give students flexibility to transfer between sectors.
- » Students can earn a transfer associate degree aligned to four-year degree program at universities.
- » Students can receive academic credit for prior learning obtained through the military, formal and informal education, or industry training.

Higher education should guide and support student pathways from postsecondary education into the workforce.

The state investment in public colleges and universities supports student persistence.

- » The amount of state subsidy directly affects the degree to which advising and academic support is available to students.
- » Washington's [funding model](#) for the community and technical colleges has some connection to student completion.

- » The state has an allocation formula that includes a factor measuring student performance at two-year institutions.
- » The funding model acknowledges the achievement gaps of historically underserved students and provides a focus on these populations.

Equity

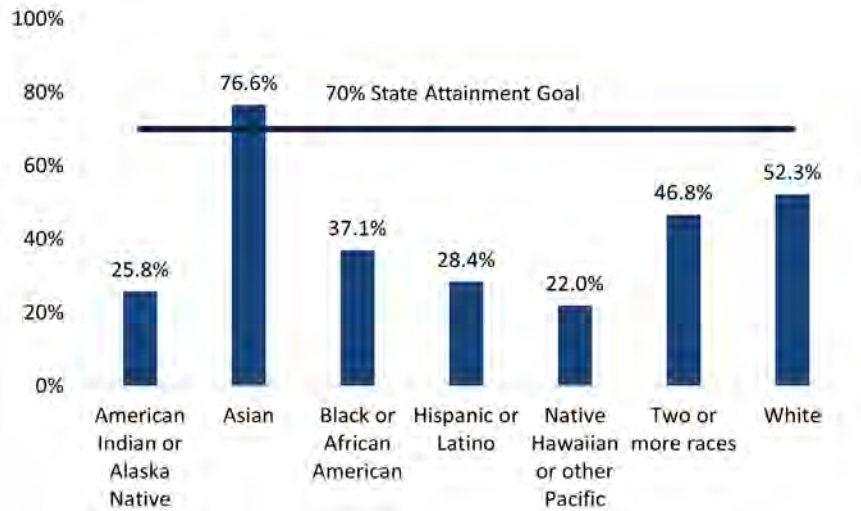
Equity

The Council has committed to equity as the defining priority for our work in developing state higher education policy. WSAC, the state agency, is similarly committed to that goal in its work in support of the Council and across all of its program activities.

WSAC recognizes historic and current institutional and structural racism in Washington and in our country.

Equity is an outcome in which justice is realized within our society through a continuous, intentional process of identifying and abolishing racism and all forms of oppression designed to marginalize students, communities, and families who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status, and all oppressed groups.

Figure 10. Proportion of Washington Residents Ages 25-44 With Postsecondary Credentials by Race/Ethnicity



Source: 2019 American Community Survey PUMS 1-Year Data, Washington State

WSAC is prioritizing racial equity as a necessary part of our goal to increase student postsecondary credential attainment to 70 percent, especially because, for Washington State residents who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status, only 50 percent or less currently have a postsecondary credential (figure 10).

Further, the racial demographic makeup of public high schools in Washington is different than public postsecondary institutions in the state (figure 11). For instance, Hispanic/Latino students make up almost a quarter of the public high school population, but only about one-tenth of the public higher education population. Ensuring racial equity in our state requires that our higher education system reflects the diversity of our population.

Figure 11. Racial distribution at public high schools and postsecondary institutions in Washington

Race	High School	Public 2-Year	Public 4-Year
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.3%	0.9%	0.4%
Asian	8.4%	10.9%	11.1%
Black or African American	4.6%	5.7%	2.6%
Hispanic or Latino	24.7%	9.9%	12.8%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1.2%	0.7%	0.7%
Two or more races	9.1%	14%	11.9%
White	50.7%	45.9%	50.7%
Not Reported	N/A	12.0%	9.7%

Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Washington high school enrollment headcount by race, academic year 2020-21; State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), Washington public 2-year institutions unduplicated fall headcount by race, academic year 2020-21; Education Research & Data Center (ERDC) Washington public 4-year institutions unduplicated fall headcount by race, academic year 2020-21.

As a Council, we recognize the historic and current institutional and structural racism in Washington State and in our country and acknowledge our complicity in maintaining this reality by upholding policies, processes, and practices that have created barriers on the path to this goal for Black students, Indigenous students, Latino students, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status, and their families and communities. We hold ourselves accountable as Council members and as individual leaders to eliminate these barriers by:

- » Building authentic, long-term relationships with Black students, Indigenous students, Latino students, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status, in service of co-creating new and equitable policies, practices, and processes informed by those who have been most impacted.
- » Strongly advocating for funding and clearly prioritizing resources for systems change in support of Black students, Indigenous students, Latino students, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students.
- » Collecting and sharing racially disaggregated data and bringing awareness of the opportunity gaps and progress made with organizational partners to invoke advocacy and action.
- » Ensuring the Council and WSAC executive leadership reflect the racial diversity of the students and communities they serve.
- » Engaging in continuous and long-term assessment of target intervention programs and the Council's progress against its postsecondary attainment goal and the associated Strategic Action Plans.

2022 Priorities

Below is a summary of priority issues developed from Council meeting discussions, WSAC staff work, and stakeholder input. The Council adopted this 2022 agenda of priorities in January 2022.

Equity

Policy Development

- » Develop core principles to regionalize our state metrics, including the definition of a region and how we support regional leaders to use this resource to work on shared goals.
- » Engage with regional BIPOC leaders at Council meetings to inform work.
- » Embed equity lens across all policy, data, and practice work, with an initial look at financial aid processes.

Data Development

- » Apply the analysis of racial and ethnic gaps at a regional level.
- » Determine equity indicators or benchmarks to measure progress for each cluster.

Related Practice Work with Partners and Stakeholders

- » Explore and try out student design teams to shape work.

Affordability

Policy Development

- » Should there be a defined standard(s) for affordability based on household income levels that recognizes the effects of state subsidy, tuition policy, and financial aid based on the total cost of pursuing a postsecondary education?
- » Do students have reasonably similar experiences in applying for and receiving state financial aid across all institutions?

- » Should the state encourage households at certain income levels to save for college costs?

Data Development

- » Develop adult-specific financial aid metrics that mirror the role that “direct enrollment” and other metrics play in discussions about traditional-age cohorts coming out of high school.
- » Develop a financial aid utilization rate disaggregated by income and equity populations.
- » Understand impact of current inflation patterns on institutions’ ability to maintain tuition policy.

Enrollment

Policy Development

- » Explore strategies that will increase the number of schools and community leaders making postsecondary pathways a priority.
- » How do we better understand the role of families in making college-going decisions?
- » How can we engage employers to support adult enrollment that can help meet their hiring and upskilling needs?

Data Development

- » Conduct comprehensive look at enrollment to include analysis of dual credit, out of state, apprenticeship/training programs, traditional transfer, etc.
- » Explore a dual credit data system that can help us measure its impact on enrollment, completion, time-to-degree, and tuition-savings, as well as the differential impacts resulting from different course-taking behavior.
- » Explore more timely reporting on statewide enrollment to inform current and future discussions on enrollment.

Related Practice Work with Partners and Stakeholders

- » The newly developed guaranteed admission programs that include test-optional admissions.
- » Pathways to state financial aid through SNAP and other public benefit programs.
- » College & Career Compass.

Student Supports

Policy Development

- » What is understood about financial aid limits and a student's ability to receive support services?
- » Can we help build a vision for campus and community that supports mental health and wellness needs?
- » Can we help state leaders and the public better understand the immediacy of basic needs and how that impacts educational success and college going?

Data Development

- » Does the WSAC/ERDC joint document create a baseline for future work and measurement?

Related Practice Work with Partners and Stakeholders

- » Work with a student design team to build a vision for a supportive environment.

Completion

Policy Development

- » Should we establish completion goals as part of state policy to increase student success? What should be included in these goals?
- » How can the state appropriately fund efforts to increase completion, including the first experiences of students arriving on our campuses (from K-12, the workforce, or another institution)?
- » How can we increase alignment between quantitative academic coursework and skills/competencies from high school to postsecondary to the workforce?

Data Development

- » Apply the analysis of racial and ethnic gaps at a regional level.
- » Determine equity indicators or benchmarks to measure progress for each cluster.

Related Practice Work with Partners and Stakeholders

- » How do we measure completion to focus attention on equity and student success?
- » Should we measure post-completion impacts?

Endnotes

1 Associate and higher data retrieved from American Community Survey, 2013 PUMS 1-Year Data, Washington postsecondary attainment, ages 25-44. Proportion with certificates as highest level of education retrieved from “Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees” by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University (2012).

2 Source: Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., and Dilig, R. (2020). The Condition of Education 2020 (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved February 22, 2021 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144>. Note: National Immediate college enrollment rate is defined as the annual percentage of high school completers who are enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions in the October immediately following high school completion. High school completers include those who graduated with a high school diploma as well as those who completed a GED or other high school equivalency credential.

3 Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Virginia Department of Education.

4 Source: Oregon Department of Education and California Department of Education.

5 Source: WSAC analysis of IPEDS 2018 Fall Enrollment Survey. Data retrieved on 2/22/2021.

6 WSAC analysis of National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Washington graduation rates within 150% of normal time (within 3 years for 2-year institutions, within 6 years for 4-year institutions), Fall 2012 cohort for 4-year and Fall 2015 cohort for 2-year.