



**Education beyond high school is as important as ever.**

Washington's economy is heavily dependent on workers who complete a credential after high school, such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate. Credentials have become more essential for individuals and our state as our communities realize the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the early months of the pandemic, unemployment for high school graduates was 9% (nearly three times higher than it was a year prior at this time), compared to an unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's or advanced degree of 4.8%. Post-high school education helps individuals gain the knowledge and skills they need to pursue careers over a lifetime, succeed economically, and create strong communities.

**As we seek to recover from the pandemic, it is clear that a post-high school credential is as important as ever to enable people to succeed in our economy, particularly people of color, young people, and people who are low-income.** Young Washingtonians and displaced workers alike will require training and postsecondary education to meet the demands of today's world. Our goal remains the same - that 70% of Washington students will earn a credential by the high school class of 2030.

**Slashing post-high school education would cut off an important path to success.**

Despite the economic necessity of earning a credential beyond high school, far too few Washington students are completing postsecondary education and training. Just 41% of the high school class of 2017 is projected to complete a credential by age 26. Our Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and Native American students are projected to earn credentials at even lower rates.

The reality: Washington's public colleges and universities are still recovering from deep cuts made during the Great Recession. They are, and have been, doing more with less in the last decade. Now, with additional costs and revenue losses to core and ancillary services (such as student housing, food, sports and events) because of COVID-19, the ability to help students achieve their educational and career goals is endangered. The additional threat of potential state funding cuts represents a "one-two punch" to their budgets that ultimately affects students, communities, and the institutions' role in rebuilding the state's economy post COVID-19.

Lawmakers must avoid leveling any second punch and stand with the 7 in 10 Washington voters across geographic and political lines who agree that cutting funding for education beyond high school is a bad idea. Maintaining funding is essential to mitigate impacts on students, particularly those furthest from opportunity, and to position the postsecondary system as a driver of recovery.

**Enabling more Washingtonians to earn credentials will help us recover.**

Training or education after high school is essential to provide Washington students with the opportunities necessary to succeed in our state's changing economy. Studies repeatedly show a credential after high school is one of the strongest predictors of lifetime earnings and other positive outcomes. And credentials protect Washingtonians' careers from changes in the economy.

Colleges and universities across the state of Washington are a critical part of our state's recovery strategy, including addressing inequities for students of color and knocking down barriers to credential attainment. Some industries will emerge from this crisis in need of an expanded workforce. Already this crisis has highlighted critical workforce shortages – particularly in healthcare and the sciences – that must be addressed through postsecondary education and training at both community and technical colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

**Protecting the progress we have made.**

In 2019, the Washington State Legislature took historic steps to support Washington students and families by passing the Workforce Education Investment Act (HB 2158). In 2020, the Legislature affirmed that commitment by passing ESSB 6492, fixing technical problems and ensuring a strong financial footing for the programs in WEIA.

WEIA investments include the [Washington College Grant](#), which is available for any student from a family of four making \$97,000 a year or less. Because it is a grant, it does not need to be repaid, meaning it makes the difference for thousands of students being able to attend education or training after high school. And this grant is now available to **every** student who qualifies.

The Legislature also provided funding for career connected learning, expansion of child care for students, outreach to support students from low-income backgrounds in obtaining financial aid, and initiatives that better enable students to complete their degree or certificate (such as Guided Pathways).

Our state has also invested in new high-demand degree and certificate programs in areas such as computer science, engineering, medicine, and nursing, including at new locations to increase access. Total enrollments have grown by the thousands since the last recession, which has required hiring new staff and faculty to provide instruction and service capacity. Investments in competitive salaries for community and technical college faculty who teach nursing and other high-demand programs is also increasing capacity in sought-after programs.

**Increasing equity in Washington.**

Communities of color that are low-income have been hit the hardest by COVID-19. Cutting post-high school education would only exacerbate that inequality. Reaching our goal that 70% of Washington students earn a postsecondary credential demands that Washington fund robust certificate and degree programs and support services for those who have been historically and structurally excluded.

**The way forward: invest in students' pathways to success.**

Many Washington students use academic advising, food and housing supports, behavioral health care, and tutoring as they work to complete their credential. The current public health crisis has increased the need for student support services. As we look to a stronger future in our state, investments in supports like these will break down barriers for students to find and succeed on their best-fit education-to-career pathway, particularly students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students who are the first in their family to attend education after high school. In fact, a majority of Washington voters agree that additional funding is needed for post-high school education and training.

Washington has a track record of investing in opportunities for students to explore their educational and career options through coursework and other experiences. Protecting funding for Washington's dual credit programs - Running Start, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, College in the High School, Cambridge International, Dual Credit for CTE - and career connected learning, which gives students the chance to gain real-world skills and explore careers, will launch more students toward success in post-high school education and careers.

Our state must also grow capacity in workforce training and high-demand fields, including health care and STEM. The data is clear that the need for degrees and credentials in these areas continue to grow.

**Credentials are essential for Washingtonians. Let's protect funding today so Washingtonians can earn credentials for a successful tomorrow.**

#### **About the College Promise Coalition**

The College Promise Coalition brings together leaders and advocates from education, business, labor, and community-based organizations to open up diverse pathways for Washington students to pursue the unique opportunities in our state. This unprecedented partnership advocates for post-high school opportunity and access for all Washington students, and work with policymakers to adopt and fund policies that increase higher education attainment.