



Education beyond high school is as important as ever.

Washington's economy depends on people who complete a credential after high school, such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate. Post-high school education helps individuals gain the knowledge and skills they need to pursue careers over a lifetime, succeed economically – even in uncertain economic times – and create strong communities.

Our goal remains the same - that 70% of Washington students will earn a credential by the high school class of 2030. But even before the pandemic, post-high school education enrollment and credential attainment rates had flattened. During the pandemic, the rates declined dramatically. For the Class of 2019, just 43% of students are projected to earn a credential by age 26. Black, Hispanic and Latino/a, and Native American students are projected to earn credentials at even lower rates.

Recent polling shows Washingtonians agree that increasing credential attainment is a priority:

- 78% agree that education beyond high school is necessary for success in today's work world, whether a certificate, a 2-year career-training degree or a 4-year degree.
- More than eight in ten Washington voters support the 70% credential attainment goal.

Enabling more Washingtonians to enroll and earn credentials is critical to Washington's 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.

Many industries are facing 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.

Building on the progress we have made and recovering from pandemic impacts.

In 2019, the Washington State Legislature took historic steps to support Washington students and families by passing the Workforce Education Investment Act (HB 2158).

WEIA investments include the [Washington College Grant](#), which is available for any student from a family of four making \$107,000 a year or less. Because it is a grant, it does not need to be repaid. This grant is now available to **every** student who qualifies. **The challenge today is ensuring students know about and have the support to access this life-change financial aid.**

The Legislature also provided funding for career connected learning, expansion of child care for students, outreach to support students with low incomes in obtaining financial aid, State Work Study and support initiatives that enable students to complete their degree or certificate (such as Guided Pathways). **Building on these efforts is critical.**

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. But workforce shortages persist in key fields. **Expanding high-demand degree and certificate programs will strengthen our economy and provide opportunities for Washingtonians to pursue meaningful careers.**

The ability to recruit and retain staff and faculty is critical to providing high quality education for students. As with other professions, inflationary pressures and the rising cost of living are impacting our colleges and universities across the state. **Providing competitive salaries and benefits will keep faculty and staff at our campuses and allow our colleges and universities to continue to serve students and compete in a global marketplace.**

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

Dual Credit and Career Connected Learning: Washington has a track record of investing in opportunities for students to explore their education and career options through classes and other experiences. Expanding opportunity and breaking down barriers, especially financial ones, to Washington's dual credit programs in public and private, not-for-profit colleges and universities (Running Start, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, College in the High School, Cambridge International, Dual Credit for CTE) and career connected learning will launch more students toward success in post-high school education and careers.

High-Demand Degrees/Certificates: Our state must grow capacity in workforce training and high-demand fields, including health care and STEM. The need for degrees and credentials in these areas continues to grow.

Supporting students on the path to enrollment and completion: The pandemic highlighted the great need for student supports such as advising/counseling, food and housing, and tutoring. 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.

Eliminating barriers to student attendance and completion: Washington ranks near the bottom of all 50 states for completion of the FAFSA by high school seniors. Providing assistance to students and families on FAFSA/WASFA completion provides access to both the Washington College Grant and Pell Grants.

Credentials are essential for Washingtonians. Let's prioritize investments 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.