

## **THE WASHINGTON ENROLLMENT AND RECOVERY INITIATIVE:**

### **Ten Thousand More Through the Higher Education Door**

**In response to the higher education enrollment crisis created by COVID-19 pandemic, the College Promise Coalition recommends the following expenditures from American Recovery Act funds appropriated to Washington state. Our goal is to increase higher education enrollment in Washington by 10,000 students per year for the next three years, with a focus on students of color and students from low-income backgrounds from the high school graduating classes of 2019-2023.**

#### **A Crisis in Higher Education Attainment**

Washington state is facing a major crisis in higher education attainment—the young people of our state, particularly young people of color and others who are lower income, have not been able to enroll in college and career pathways as planned. Their preparation for future careers has been stalled through no fault of their own.

The junior year of high school is an especially critical time for college and career planning. Today's seniors will have spent the last half of their junior year, and much of their senior year, in fully remote learning. Today's juniors have been similarly impacted.

We have seen declining enrollments in our 2-year and 4-year public and private, not-for-profit colleges and universities. These declines are concerning as historic data indicate that delaying enrollment decreases the likelihood of credential completion and may negatively impact long-term earnings and our economic prosperity. The impact on students from low-income backgrounds has been more dramatic.

Most jobs in Washington, even before the pandemic, required some form of postsecondary degree or credential. The state has set a 2030 goal of having 70 percent of the students who go through our education systems get a degree or credential by the time they are in their mid-twenties. We were already behind and the pandemic has made it worse.

We cannot afford to let the future prospects of our young people be a COVID casualty. We need to step up as a state and offer them strong support. Their futures and the future of the state labor force depends on it.

#### **Proposal to Increase Enrollment:**

The State is slated to receive additional funding from the American Rescue Plan to address COVID impacts and work toward an equitable recovery. This proposal calls for the creation of a three-year Enrollment & Recovery Initiative that aims to address the lost opportunities and support the enrollment of low-income and students of color in all available pathways beyond high school. This includes degree and certificate programs as well as apprenticeships and Career Launch. The focus will be on the high school graduating classes of 2019-2023.

Coordinated efforts between high schools and colleges must be supported throughout the summer to ensure that students make their transition. Once enrolled at college they must receive strong wrap-around supports so they stay in school and complete their degrees or credential with labor market value.

Our proposal is focused on four areas, all with a targeted emphasis on low-income students and students of color:

**Outreach and engagement** to inform students and families about available pathways and financial aid, and to encourage students to pursue a credential past high school. This effort will include personal outreach to students and families -- especially students of color and low-income students -- through high schools, community-based organizations, and other trusted and influential resources. This personal connection can be supported by a strong, culturally relevant marketing campaign so students and families know about the available pathways and financial aid. Additionally, pilots around direct admittance should be considered.

**Support students who are enrolling** by providing funding for 2-year and 4-year, public and private, not-for-profit colleges and universities to provide increased support to students from the high school graduating classes of 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 when they arrive on campus, with a focus on students of color and low-income students. Funds can also be provided for summer and to re-engage those who may have stopped attending, often due to financial need.

**Financial aid and emergency aid** for students should be supported including an effort to reach 100% FAFSA/WASFA completion for all high school seniors, emergency stipends and expanded financial aid efforts.

**Accountability and tracking success** will be critical. We were already far behind our 70% post-secondary attainment goal prior to the pandemic. If we are to manage the current crisis and build upon successes, measuring our successes will be key.