



## **THE WASHINGTON ENROLLMENT AND RECOVERY INITIATIVE: Ten Thousand More Through the Higher Education Door**

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), 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, 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 from low-income backgrounds.** 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.

But the reality is Washington was already struggling to meet the 70% goal, and the pandemic made the situation worse. Fall 2020 postsecondary enrollment in Washington dropped 13 percent compared to the previous year, which is twice the national rate of about 7 percent. ([WSAC](#)) Also, a record number of Americans are resigning from their jobs, driven by labor market changes and accelerated by the pandemic. Many career switchers are realizing that they need additional education and training to land a new job. ([Hechinger](#)).

**We must take action now to ensure Washingtonians have the opportunities to earn a credential or degree.**

In response to the higher education enrollment crisis exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic, the College Promise Coalition recommends bold action to increase post-high school education enrollment and credential attainment. Our goal is to increase enrollment in Washington by 10,000 students per year for the next three years, with a focus on system changes that better meet the needs and aspirations of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds from the high school graduating classes of 2019-2023. Investments in multiple strategies will help meet the range of students' needs across our state, including pilot programs to test new ways to best support students.

**FAFSA Initiatives:**

Set a goal to achieve 100% completion of FAFSA/WASFA for all high school juniors and seniors, and to triple FAFSA/WASFA completion for returning students.

Fund Regional Partnerships of high schools, public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities, community-based organizations, businesses, and labor organizations to provide comprehensive outreach and navigation support, including help completing FAFSA/WASFA.

Increase funding for work study programs to support FAFSA/WASFA completion and other college-going work in/at high schools by current college students (near peer mentoring).  
Fund 2- and 4-year colleges and universities to run direct social media campaigns to potential students to complete the FAFSA/WASFA and apply.

Create a pilot with the Department of Revenue and other relevant state agencies to assess the feasibility of determining eligibility for the Washington College Grant without FAFSA/WASFA completion. This would eliminate a major barrier to college enrollment.

**Dual Credit Programs Free to All Students:**

Fully fund all dual credit programs to all students, including the costs to K-12 districts and postsecondary institutions. Participation in dual credit programs has a strong correlation to postsecondary enrollment. Covering costs for College in the High School and Running Start participation and providing students from low-income backgrounds with meal and transportation stipends will reduce barriers to participation.

**Outreach:**

Fund a strong, culturally responsive outreach and marketing campaign to increase awareness among students and families about available state and institutionally funded financial aid resources and other supports. This campaign should utilize digital and social channels as well as community-based media outlets, in multiple languages to reach students and families and focus on available financial aid as well as information about pathways and resources to help students enroll.

**Student Supports:**

Provide stipends for college students from low-income backgrounds to help them cover the full cost of attendance (housing, food, technology, transportation, books/fees) and stay enrolled.

**Navigators:**

Expand funding (available to K-12 districts, CTCs, four-year universities and community-based organizations) for well-trained college and career advisors and counselors who have direct experience navigating postsecondary enrollment and persistence with students from low-income backgrounds and/or students of color in high schools with high poverty rates. These navigators should help students connect with institutional, community, state, and national resources and services.

**Guaranteed Enrollment/Direct Admission:**

Provide grants to public or private not-for-profit universities or colleges, school districts, or high schools to build on existing direct admission programs and create new ones. These funds could cover application fees, administrative costs and the costs of creating enduring data-sharing partnerships between high schools and postsecondary institutions.

**Career Connected Learning Pathways:**

Expand the ways that students reach post-high school education by providing multiple pathways, such as Career Launch, and make sure that students, counselors, and those offering student supports are well acquainted with these options.