



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 recent data shows an alarming trend – much of the progress made in increasing the rate of credential attainment for Washingtonians was wiped out by the pandemic. According to the Washington Roundtable, the projected credential attainment rate for the high school Class of 2021 is 40%, 3 percentage points lower than expected credential attainment for the high school Class of 2019. Enrollment in post-secondary programs for the Class of 2021 is down 10% compared to the Class of 2019.

Our annual public opinion polling shows Washingtonians agree that increasing credential attainment is a priority:

- 79% 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. In addition, many industries are facing critical workforce shortages that must be addressed through postsecondary education and training at both community and technical colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

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

Supporting students on the path to enrollment and completion through high-quality career navigation and advising: College and career counselors can help students 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 families to attend education after high school. But there is a high degree of inconsistency in the availability of college and career advising programs across districts and even within districts. Greater consistency and availability of career navigation and advising will better enable students to pursue the credentials needed to achieve their career aspirations and support economic mobility.

Dual Credit and Career Connected Learning: Last year the Legislature removed a significant financial barrier to College in the High School by eliminating the fee to earn college credit through the program. And nearly 20,000 students are enrolled in Career Launch programs (including registered Apprenticeships) through investments in

Career Connect Washington. Continuing to expand dual credit classes across Washington as well as career connected learning opportunities should be a major priority.

Increasing FAFSA/WASFA completion rates. 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.

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

Continue building on 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).

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-changing financial aid.**

The Legislature also provided funding for career connected learning, expansion of childcare for students, outreach to support students from low-income backgrounds 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 and leveraging capacity for 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. The Legislature has made significant investments in compensation across higher education, but there is more to do. Ensuring that we are **providing competitive salaries and benefits will keep faculty and staff at our campuses and allow our colleges and universities to continue to serve students, provide the services and programming to retain and complete students and compete in a global marketplace.**

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.