

Washington Competes: A Sector-wide Agenda for Higher Education Growth and Completion

In 2017, state policy makers have an opportunity to build on recent investments in order to serve more students and strengthen the state's competitive advantage by increasing investment in Washington's college and university systems. Because higher education is a public good, everyone benefits when there are more college graduates.

Postsecondary education is essential to being competitive in today's global economy. Washington's economic vitality hinges on a strong and vibrant education system that includes early learning, K-12, and higher education. Increasing the number of individuals with a postsecondary credential reduces reliance on social support programs and ensures that Washington families are not left behind.

Current Challenges:

Unmet Workforce Demands – A skilled and educated workforce is the foundation of a prosperous economy. According to the Washington Roundtable, there will be 740,000 job openings in Washington in the next five years. Yet as identified in the Washington Student Achievement Council's Roadmap report, only 51% of adults currently possess a postsecondary credential. Our state's colleges and universities are key to creating a local pipeline for Washingtonians to fill these jobs and make meaningful progress toward the Roadmap's postsecondary attainment goal of 70%.

Degree Attainment – Washingtonians ages 25 to 34 are projected to be the first generation in history with lower educational attainment than their parents. Many have some college credit but have not completed a degree. At the same time, a growing number of Washington students come from groups that have been historically underserved by higher education. Ensuring the academic success of these students requires strategies and investment in proven student success initiatives.

Competing for Excellence – Providing quality education requires access to talented and dedicated faculty and staff. Yet Washington's colleges and universities face an increasingly competitive national marketplace to attract and retain top-notch educators.

The Path Forward:

Addressing our educational and economic challenges requires increased state investment to improve student access and degree completion, preserve affordability, and maintain the high quality of our colleges and universities. Washington's colleges and universities request funding to bolster certificate and degree production, student success, and educational quality.

Degrees to meet demand: Address state needs through targeted investments

- ◆ Expand capacity to support student completion in the areas they pursue. This includes enrollments that fill skill gaps in high-demand fields such as STEM, teacher preparation, health care, and priority workforce programs.
- ◆ Reduce bottlenecks in high-demand and priority workforce programs and courses, and improve student time to degree or credential.
- ◆ Ensure that graduates have the breadth of knowledge, aptitudes, and experiences enabling them to adapt to a changing economy and workforce. The workforce of tomorrow will need to be more nimble and flexible than before – the core skills that the humanities can provide lay the groundwork for a lifetime of learning and reinvention – of business, of themselves.

Student success: Ensure that students have the resources to graduate

- ◆ Invest in proven strategies that retain students and lead to degree completion.
- ◆ Strengthen pathways for historically underserved populations, transfer students, veterans, and adult learners.
- ◆ Fully fund the State Need Grant to permit more students to attend college and reduce student debt loads.

High impact credentials: Ensure that all students excel in today's competitive labor market

- ◆ Provide an educational experience that equips students with knowledge, skills, and experiences that translate from the classroom to the workplace.
- ◆ Invest in competitive compensation for faculty and staff in order to attract and retain quality educators.

Each year, Washington's 50 public and private colleges and universities together award 71,000 credentials to students in all 39 counties. However, we need to produce more to meet the state's growing economic needs and to ensure that Washingtonians are not left behind. We are ready to build on nationally-recognized programs to increase the multi-billion dollar economic impact that our colleges and universities have on the state's economy, as well as to enhance the economic well-being of all Washington residents.