



# Washington's Community and Technical Colleges Student Success through Innovation

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*Through innovative research and partnerships, Washington State's community and technical college system has become a national leader in student success and achievement.*

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## Washington State's student success initiatives

Washington's community and technical colleges are committed to "Creating Opportunities for Washington's Future" by raising the knowledge and skills of the state's residents. To support that commitment, community and technical colleges are involved in local and national programs designed to increase educational attainment for all residents across the state.

### Student Achievement Initiative

Washington's community and technical colleges serve a wide array of learning needs from adult literacy to professional-technical training and academic degrees. To measure student success across these three mission areas, Washington's two-year college system identified key academic benchmarks that lead to successful completion of programs, certificates and degrees. These measures include:

- Building towards college-level skills (basic skills gains, passing precollege writing or math)
- First year retention (earning 15, then 30 college-level credits)
- Completing college-level math (passing math courses required for either technical or academic associate degrees)
- Completions (degrees, certificates, apprenticeship training)

Since it began in 2006-07, overall student achievement has increased 34 percent across the system.

Through this partnership with the Community College Research Center at Columbia University, the Student Achievement Initiative has become a national model for measuring and incentivizing student momentum and achievement across a broad educational spectrum. The Initiative also improves public accountability by more accurately describing what students achieve in the state's two-year colleges each year and rewarding colleges with funding for meaningful outcomes.

### Student Completion Initiative

Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Washington State Legislature, the Student Completion Initiative is focused on improving access and completions for low-income young adults in pre-college and college courses in two-year colleges. The initiative funds three projects:

- Open Course Library: Access and success in 81 high enrollment courses will be expanded through lower textbook costs for students, new resources for faculty, and improved course completion rates.
- Rethinking Pre-College Math: Student completions in pre-college mathematics courses and their success in college-level math classes will be improved.
- I-BEST Pre-College Education Models: I-BEST for Pre-College Education will extend the educational pathways in currently-approved I-BEST programs that are at least two quarters in length (with the possible addition of a "green economy" pathway).

## Achieving the Dream

Washington is one of 22 states participating in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative to help more community or technical college students—particularly low-income students and students of color—succeed. Sixteen of Washington’s community and technical colleges are Achieving the Dream institutions.

Achieving the Dream works on multiple fronts — including research, public engagement and public policy — and emphasizes the use of data to drive change. Strategies identified to help more students continue their studies and earn certificates and degrees include:

- Helping students better prepare for college-level work by focusing on pre-college education.
- Instructional techniques like team learning and coordinated studies to engage students and make learning more relevant to their lives.
- Using student success courses to teach skills such as time management and effective study skills.

## The Transition Math Project

The Transition Math Project — a collaborative project of K-12 schools, community and technical colleges, and baccalaureate institutions led by the SBCTC — has been dedicated to successful student transition into and through college-level math since its inception in 2006. The TMP has worked to align standards and expectations so students enrolling in college will be prepared to enter college-level math courses. Past projects include:

- College Readiness Standards in Math, defining the core knowledge and skills expected of students in entry-level college mathematics and quantitative courses.
- School district/college partnerships to develop and share curriculum and instructional materials.
- Statewide effort in college math placement testing and college math readiness diagnostic assessment for high school students.

Current work addresses this transition to college-level math success through the Re-Thinking Pre-college Math (RPM) project, focusing on helping accelerate and improve student progress through precollege math courses in Washington community and technical colleges.

## Student transfer

This year marks 40 years of successful transfer agreements between the community colleges and universities. Washington is one of the few states in the nation to have a comprehensive Direct Transfer agreement with the state’s private and public universities.

In 2009-10, 19,000 community and technical college students transferred to four-year public institutions. CTC transfer students comprise nearly 38 percent of graduates of public BA degrees earned in Washington State.

### Transfer to a baccalaureate institution

Historically, transfer policy in Washington consists of several cross-sector agreements including:

- Direct Transfer Agreement: The DTA Associate Degree, sometimes called the Associate of Arts (AA), is designed to transfer to most Bachelors of Arts degrees at Washington’s four-year institutions.
- Associate in Science - Transfer degree: The AS-T degree is for community and technical college students seeking to major in engineering and science. Degrees structured under the AS-T umbrella provide priority admissions consideration at public universities for most science and engineering majors ahead of non-degreed transfers.
- Associate in Applied Science - Transfer degree: The AAS-T degree is built upon the technical courses required for job preparation but also includes a college-level general education component.
- Major Related Programs: MRPs help transfer students better prepare for entry into specific, selective majors in their junior year.

### Transfer within the two-year college system

- Common Course Numbering: Common course numbering makes course transfer easy between and among Washington’s 34 community and technical colleges.
- Prior Learning Assessment of Credit: Prior learning assessment is an opportunity for colleges to award credit for student learning done outside of the academic system that meets Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) Accreditation standards. Credit earned through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) at one college will be accepted toward the appropriate course or program at any other Washington community or technical college.