2020-2030
STRATEGIC PLAN
INTRODUCTION

Washington’s community and technical colleges were designed around a remarkable idea: that education past high school should be available to everyone, regardless of their economic or academic backgrounds. Today, this vision is more important than ever. A high school diploma for most is no longer enough to earn a good living and lead a comfortable life. People need education past high school just to get started in a well-paying job, and continuous skill-building to keep up and get ahead. At the same time, employers need skilled workers to stay competitive and thrive. However, only 56 percent of adults in Washington have a certificate or degree past high school.¹

In 2013, the Washington Student Achievement Council issued a Roadmap Report to increase educational attainment in Washington.² In 2014, Gov. Inslee signed legislation endorsing the goals proposed in that report.³ The two educational attainment goals are:

- All adults ages 25-44 will have a high school diploma or equivalent, and
- 70 percent of adults ages 25-44 will have a postsecondary credential.

The call to increase educational attainment in Washington became more urgent in 2016, when the Washington Roundtable issued a report that found that most of the 740,000 job openings in the coming years will require education past high school. The Washington Roundtable set a goal that by 2030, 70 percent of Washington students will earn a postsecondary credential by the age of 26.⁴

Washington’s community and technical colleges are central to meeting the state's education goals because we serve as a nexus between high school, higher education and the workforce. Each year, about 363,000 students come to our colleges to find the educational path that's right for them — whether it's to train for a career, learn a skilled trade, earn an industry certificate or apprenticeship, or transfer to a university.⁵ We train healthcare workers, IT technicians, welders, construction workers, engineering technicians, nurses and educators. Thirty-nine percent of graduates from Washington’s public universities start at a community or technical college.⁶

However, we have more work to do.

As Washington’s largest system of public higher education, community and technical colleges need to improve completion rates so our students reach their personal goals and our state reaches its goals for a skilled and educated citizenry.
This strategic plan establishes three goals for our system:

1. Achieve educational equity for students historically underrepresented in higher education.
2. Improve completion rates for all students across all types of programs.
3. Increase enrollment and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college access.

Measurable outcomes will be reported every year to drive improvements throughout our college system. This strategic plan emerged from a collaborative process that included students, presidents, trustees, educators and business leaders. We thank them for their vision.

**State Board for Community and Technical Colleges**
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- Chelsea Mason, Puyallup
- Jay Reich, Seattle
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This strategic plan aligns with a vision statement approved by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges in June 2019:

“Leading with racial equity, our colleges maximize student potential and transform lives within a culture of belonging that advances racial, social, and economic justice in service to our diverse communities.”

The vision statement reflects the diverse nature of our students, who represent all ages, backgrounds, incomes, races and ethnicities. They work, raise families, pay bills and care for their loved ones. In any given class, a student can be sitting side-by-side with a 16-year-old Running Start student, a worker who is training for a new career, and a 50-year-old veteran. How well we serve these students will shape the future of our state’s families, communities and businesses.

Our goal in this strategic plan is to improve completion rates across-the-board for all students, and to improve completion rates faster for students of color. This is both a moral and practical imperative. People who earn a college credential tend to earn higher incomes, participate more fully in their communities, and reap the benefits of a thriving economy. However, SBCTC research shows our colleges are producing white graduates at a higher rate than graduates of color.

Additionally, both the Washington Student Achievement Council and the Washington Roundtable warn that reaching state education goals will be impossible without closing equity gaps. As our state becomes more diverse, equity gaps will hold more people back and impede progress toward our state’s educational goals.

As the doorway to college first-generation college students and students of color — 47 percent of our students are students of color compared to 32 percent of the general population — community and technical colleges face an urgent need to close equity gaps.7
This strategic plan calls upon our community and technical college system to achieve three goals:

1. **Achieve educational equity for students who are historically underrepresented in higher education.**
   - Eliminate inequities in college access, retention and completion for students historically underserved in higher education: Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, Black/African American and Asian.
   - Eliminate inequities in wages and university transfers. Our colleges offer a wide range of credentials. Generally, the longer the credential, the higher the wages upon graduation. We want to see students of color equally represented in degree programs that either result in sought-after skills and higher wages or successful transfer into a university.

2. **Improve completion rates** for all enrolled students across all types of programs and credentials — workforce degrees, transfer degrees, certificates and apprenticeships.

3. **Increase access and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college access.** This includes young adults, working adults, low-income people, people of color, immigrants and single parents.
The following strategies will advance the three goals previously outlined.

**Strategy 1: Implement actions, policies and investments that produce equitable outcomes.**

- Using the new vision statement, engage college system leaders in equity-based professional development, advocacy and actions across the college system.
- Develop a ladder of professional development opportunities that lead to leadership positions. Cultivate future, equity-minded leaders with faculty and staff at all levels, from frontline staff to aspiring mid- and senior-level college administrators.
- Conduct policy audits to eliminate barriers for students in the key areas that can make or break their ability to enroll, and stay, in college. Examples include admissions, financial aid, precollege education and basic skills instruction.
- Create an equity resource bank of best practices in the areas of student services, curricula, hiring and employment to share successful practices throughout the system.
- Implement accessible technology for students, faculty and staff.

**Strategy 2: Implement research-based strategies that are proven to improve completion rates for all students. These strategies include Guided Pathways and Career Launch programs.**

Guided Pathways involves fundamentally redesigning the college experience for all students — from advising and support services to course sequencing and program maps. Advisers help students choose a path, stay on the path and get a degree or certificate. This work is especially important for students of color, low-income students, and those who are the first in their families to go to college. Guided Pathways is a way to make sure that students who enter our college system receive the proper supports that guide them, in a structured manner, through to completion.

- Develop new partnerships with industry associations and labor organizations to ensure pathways align to the skills required by employers, thus helping to close the skills gap.
- Ensure that every career pathway — health care, for example — reflects the full range of available credentials, including certificates, workforce degrees, university-transfer degrees, applied bachelor’s degrees and apprenticeships. This enables students to see the broad horizon of professional opportunities in the field and how credentials align with certain careers.
- Embed equity strategies throughout the implementation of Guided Pathways.
- Expand technical assistance to colleges on Guided Pathways.
- Expand partnerships with private foundations and research organizations to scale Guided Pathways across all 34 colleges and evaluate outcomes.
- Identify accountability metrics for college implementation focused on increasing student completions across student demographics.
Career Launch is part of Governor Inslee’s Career Connect Washington Initiative. Career Launch programs prepare young adults for careers by combining paid, real-life job experience with classroom studies.

- Increase the number of students who engage in work-based learning as part of their college program.
- Expand technical assistance to colleges implementing Career Launch programs.
- Develop new partnerships with industry associations and labor organizations to expand Career Launch programs, especially in fields where employers are facing skill gaps.

**Strategy 3: Enroll more diverse students of all ages and backgrounds in our colleges, increasing their access to higher levels of education, higher salaries and greater financial security.**

- Implement the college system’s strategic enrollment plan.
- Increase participation in dual-credit programs for all students but especially students of color, including technical education dual-credit programs.
- Help more low-income Washingtonians — those straight out of high school as well as low-wage working adults — complete financial aid applications for the new Washington College Grant.
- Transition more basic skills students into college-level programs, with full and strategic use of state and federal financial aid.

**Strategy 4: Strengthen advocacy and community partnerships.**

- Hold the 2019 vision statement at the core of the college system’s advocacy work.
- Continue to build upon, and implement, the system’s strategic advocacy and messaging plan.
- Continue to engage more people within our college system in advocacy and outreach efforts, including State Board members, trustees, presidents, faculty, and student leaders.
- Create wider partnerships and alliances with the organizations and people we serve: communities of color, business associations, labor organizations, K-12 schools, and universities. These connections will help ensure we respond to the emerging needs of our students and the employers who hire them.
- Build and strengthen relations with other government agencies, the Legislature, and the Governor’s Office.

**Strategy 5: Improve the college system’s long-term financial sustainability and infrastructure.**

- Build, remodel, and renovate facilities to support teaching and learning spaces that are high quality and technologically equipped.
- Identify funding strategies and potential fund sources to do bigger and better things for our students and the economy, including expanding programs and services and providing competitive compensation.
- Establish financial health and stability indicators and recommend professional development for new college leaders.
This strategic plan establishes aspirational goals, metrics and targets through the year 2030.

**Metrics**

To track progress toward the college system’s goals of achieving equity, improving completion rates and increasing access, the State Board will regularly examine the following metrics.

- **Access** — the number of students enrolled in community and technical colleges.
- **Intermediate outcomes** — shorter-term metrics nationally known to propel students toward program completion:
  - Completion of college-level English and college-level math in the first year of college.
  - Retention rates from first to second term and first year to second year of enrollment.
- **Completions of associate and applied bachelor's degrees, certificates, apprenticeship and successful transfer to a university.**
- **All metrics are disaggregated by student demographics including race and income.**

These metrics are based upon recommendations to the Workforce Education Investment Oversight Board for tracking the impact of new state investments in higher education. These metrics are also consistent with those used for the college system’s Guided Pathways data dashboard and in the college system’s performance funding system, the Student Achievement Initiative.

**Goals and targets**

*Increase access and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college access: young adults, working adults, low-income people, people of color, immigrants and single parents.*

![Graph: Enrollment Target](image)

Enrollment Target:
Credential-seeking 2018 carry forward + retention strategy increases + Running Start

- Projections of credential-seeking students hold constant at 2018 enrollment levels, PLUS
- Simple linear forecast of 2012 to 2018 to estimate increases in Running Start, PLUS
- 500 more students per year from an assumed increased retention rate of 1% per year for new students from the previous year
Double completion rates and achieve educational equity for students who are historically underrepresented in higher education.

Factors considered in the goals and targets

The goals and targets expressed in this strategic plan consider the following factors:

- State and business community goals to close gaps between education attainment and the needs of the state’s economy by 2030.
- The goals and targets are stretch goals, aspirational but achievable if the actions in this strategic plan are implemented.
- All students who contribute to achieving the state’s educational attainment goals are included in the metrics.
- Annual targets are not straight-line projections to the 2030 goals but calculated to increase gains as the Guided Pathways and Career Launch efforts gather momentum.
- Completions are expected to rise faster than enrollments, consistent with the recommendations of the Strategic Enrollment Task Force.
- Enrollments must increase for all demographic groups, but completions must improve faster for underrepresented students of color to achieve the targets.

Endnotes

1 Washington Student Achievement Council dashboard: Statewide Attainment Goals Set the Course. Retrieved from wsac.wa.gov/roadmap/attainment. Data from 2017, the most recent year available at the time this publication went to press.
5 State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Enrollment Data Dashboard, 2018-19 school year.