THE PATH TO 70% CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT FOR WASHINGTON STUDENTS

A REPORT FROM:

WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE

Partnership for Learning
EDUCATION FOUNDATION of THE WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE
Washington benefits from a diverse and growing economy, driven by strong education and research organizations, a vibrant technology sector, global leaders in manufacturing and retail, world-class health care organizations, a thriving agriculture sector, and an entrepreneurial spirit. This robust economy creates a wealth of opportunities for the young people growing up here. However, the job market they are entering is fundamentally transformed from what previous generations encountered.

New jobs are overwhelmingly going to workers with postsecondary credentials. A 2018 analysis of national household employment data by The Brookings Institution indicates that “Americans with college degrees can account for all of the net new jobs created over the last decade. In stark contrast, the number of Americans with high school degrees or less who are employed, in this ninth year of economic expansion, has fallen by 2,995,000.”

An analysis by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce further underscores the importance of postsecondary credentials in today’s job market: Nationally, 55% of jobs that offer a salary of at least $35,000 ($45,000 for workers over age 45) are filled by workers with a bachelor’s or advanced degree. Another 10% are filled by workers with an associate’s degree. The increasing call for workers with postsecondary credentials is even more pronounced in Washington state. The Boston Consulting Group, in partnership with the Washington Roundtable, conducted an analysis of job opportunities and related skills requirements, projecting there will be 740,000 job openings in Washington by 2021. More than 40% of those openings will be net new jobs. Nearly three-quarters of the “career job” openings identified in the study—jobs offering the best starting salaries and opportunities for advancement—will be filled by credentialed workers.

“From January 2008 to January 2013, millions of people without college degrees lost jobs and never regained them, while all of the job gains went to the one-third of the labor force (as of January 2008) with at least a B.A. degree.”

— Brookings Institution on changes in the composition of the modern workforce.

THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR:
Demand for workers with postsecondary credentials is higher than it has ever been. A credential—such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate—is essential for anyone who wants a job that offers a good salary and advancement opportunities. This is true for all workers, regardless of zip code, race, income, or gender.
The hard truth, however, is that our state doesn’t have a culture that promotes—nor an education pipeline that supports—postsecondary education for all students. Just 31% of students in the high school class of 2006 completed a credential—such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate—by age 26. Our research projects that number will reach 40% for the high school class of 2015. Washington is making progress, but not nearly fast enough given the profound and rapid rate of change in our economy. Far too few of Washington’s own high school students are going on to earn the credentials necessary to access the jobs available in their home state.

Our goal mirrors the 70% credential attainment goal that the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and state legislature have set for our state’s adult population (age 25–44). According to WSAC, 52% of the state’s current adult population has a credential, a rate that is substantially higher than the credential attainment rate of Washington’s own high school students. Raising the credential attainment rate of our students is key to reaching the state goal and to ensuring that our young people are prepared for the jobs being created here.

The Washington Roundtable engaged Kinetic West, a Seattle-based social impact consulting firm, to identify the best means by which to make progress toward the 70% credential attainment goal for Washington students. Based on this research, Washington must double the current rate of annual growth in credential attainment. To do that, we must close racial-, income-, and gender-based achievement gaps and raise achievement of the entire student population. We can reach this goal if we match or outperform nation-leading states in high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment of high school graduates, and postsecondary graduation, and if we reengage students who leave the education system prior to credential attainment.

We are committed to pursuing the improvements and recommendations identified in this study and reaching the 70% credential attainment goal for Washington students. This goal is ambitious, and it appears far in the future, but the high school class of 2030 is already in elementary school. We must make improvements throughout the education pipeline, maintain an unrelenting focus on raising achievement and improving equity of outcomes, commit to measuring progress, and be willing to make course corrections along the way. Reaching this goal is doable. Please join us in this effort.
CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT: WHERE WE ARE, WHERE WE’RE HEADED

As with any complex problem, it helps to first understand where we are and where we’re headed, and then break the challenge into key components. Our research uses the high school class of 2006 (the cohort for which the state’s Education Research & Data Center has provided the most extensive data regarding credential attainment) as a baseline, projects performance for the high school class of 2015, and from that data define what we need to do to hit the 70% credential attainment goal for the high school class of 2030. Analysis of education performance against key benchmarks also shines a light on the best opportunities to drive credential attainment gains for Washington students.

BASELINE: THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2006

Three out of four students in Washington’s high school class of 2006 earned a diploma within five years of starting high school. Seventy-seven percent of those graduates enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program at a two- or four-year institution. That percentage also includes students who earned college credits through dual-credit programs while in high school. Fifty-five percent of the high school graduates who enrolled at a two- or four-year institution went on to graduate. Ultimately, 31% of the total cohort—which includes students who dropped out of the education system at any point along the way—earned a credential by age 26.

PROGRESS CHECK: PROJECTED PERFORMANCE FOR 2015 HIGH SCHOOL CLASS

Four out of five students (82%) in Washington’s high school class of 2015 earned a diploma within five years. The percentage of high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary education or training at two- and four-year institutions is projected to remain flat at 77% from the high school class of 2006 to the high school class of 2015. Of those high school graduates from the class of 2015 who enroll in postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions, our analysis projects 63% will graduate. In total, our research projects that 40% of the original class of 2015 cohort will earn a credential by age 26—a gain of 9 points over the class of 2006 baseline.

GOAL: THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2030

The high school class of 2030 entered kindergarten in 2017. To reach the 70% credential attainment goal for this cohort of students, credential attainment must increase by a full 30 points over projected performance for the high school class of 2015. This means annual growth in credential attainment must more than double, from 0.9% growth to 2% growth per year.
CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS FOR WASHINGTON STUDENTS

To reach 70% credential attainment and ensure our students have access to jobs and opportunity in our state, Washington must close racial-, income-, and gender-based achievement gaps and raise student achievement throughout the early learning-to-postsecondary pipeline.

THE RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP:

For the high school class of 2015, the graduation rate for Hispanic (73%) and black (74%) students was 10 points or more below that of their white (84%) and Asian (90%) peers. The gap was far wider for Native American students, 58% of whom earned a diploma. Racial achievement gaps grow after high school, leading to significant disparities in credential attainment.

- **Postsecondary Enrollment**: A projected 57% of Native American high school graduates in the class of 2015 have or are projected to enroll in a postsecondary program at a two- or four-year institution, compared to 67% of Hispanic students, 77% of both black and white students, and 93% of Asian students.

- **Postsecondary Graduation**: Although a projected 77% of black and white students who graduate from high school have or are projected to enroll in postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions, our research projects that only 51% of black students will graduate compared to 64% of white students.

- **Credential Completion**: Our research projects that overall, 40% of students in the high school class of 2015 will earn a credential by age 26. Less than 30% of Hispanic and black students will reach that milestone. Just 14% of Native Americans will do so.

THE INCOME-BASED ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Forty-five percent of Washington’s public-school students in 2014–15 came from low-income households. The high school graduation rate among low-income students in the class of 2015 was 72% compared to a graduation rate of 91% for students from families with greater financial means. A similar achievement gap exists in enrollment rates of high school graduates in postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions. The projected postsecondary enrollment rate for low-income students (65%) is 19 points lower than that of students from households with greater means (84%).

THE GENDER-BASED ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Boys graduate from high school at a lower rate than girls, with 78% of boys in the high school class of 2015 having earned a diploma within five years of starting high school compared to 84% of girls. The gender-based achievement gap grows after high school. Just 31% of boys in the cohort are projected to complete a credential by age 26, compared to 47% of girls.

### Class of 2015: Achievement by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated High School</th>
<th>Graduated from Postsecondary*</th>
<th>Enrolled in Postsecondary*</th>
<th>Earned a Credential by Age 26*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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* Estimated
MOVING FROM 40% TO 70% CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT REQUIRES NATION-LEADING PERFORMANCE: To achieve the 70% credential attainment goal for students in the high school class of 2030, Washington must deliver a nation-leading performance on key metrics, including high school graduation rate, the enrollment rate of high school graduates in postsecondary programs and two- and four-year institutions, and the rate at which those postsecondary students graduate and earn a credential. In addition, Washington must reengage students who drop out of the education pipeline prior to credential completion.

The five-year graduation rate for Washington's class of 2015 was 82%. That must increase to 95% for the class of 2030 to set a course to 70% credential attainment for Washington students by age 26. This would be a gain of 13 points, or 0.9% per year on average.

Assuming Washington successfully raises the high school graduation rate to 95%, then 95% of those graduates must also enroll in a postsecondary program at a two- or four-year institution to keep the state on track to our goal. This would be an 18-point gain over projected performance of the high school class of 2015, or 1.2% per year on average. Improving performance on this metric is our best opportunity to make rapid gains in credential attainment.

If Washington meets the 95% benchmarks for high school graduation and enrollment of high school graduates into postsecondary programs, it must raise the postsecondary graduation rate of those enrollees to 70% to meet the credential attainment goal. This would be a seven-point gain over projected performance for the high school class of 2015, or 0.5% per year on average.

If we reach each of these benchmarks, 63% of students in the class of 2030 will attain a credential by age 26. To meet the 70% credential attainment goal for this cohort and beyond, we must reengage students who fall out of the formal education system at any point along the way. Getting those students on track, enrolled in, and completing postsecondary programs offers tremendous benefits for them individually and the whole of society.

This is not to say that high-quality credentials can only be attained through the high school-to-postsecondary institution pathway. A variety of industry apprenticeship programs and professional settings offer routes to credential attainment outside of two- and four-year postsecondary institutions.

There are 216 registered apprenticeship programs in Washington that produce approximately 1,400 total graduates per year across all age groups (the average apprentice is older than 26, which is the target age by which Washington students would earn a credential as measured by our attainment goal). These apprenticeship credentials are important and are often high quality in nature. Most apprenticeship credentials are delivered through programs or partnerships affiliated with two-year institutions, and those program graduates under the age of 26 are captured in our measurement framework.

Additionally, there are industry-developed and conferred-certificates, which are difficult to credibly track. National research indicates that many of the individuals earning these certificates already hold other credentials, most of which are likely attained at a two- or four-year institution and, consequently, are captured in our measurement framework.

Research is under way to better understand the value and production of credentials attained across all postsecondary education and training venues. Career Connect Washington, a public-private partnership effort initiated by Governor Jay Inslee in 2017, is working to develop a nation-leading career-connected learning system. This includes defining pathways to high-quality apprenticeships and industry certificates. This work should better enable measurement of the quality and quantity of credentials obtained outside of two- and four-year institutions and allow for inclusion of those credentials in our measurement framework. Again, to the extent that apprenticeship and industry credentials are delivered in partnership with those institutions, those credentials are already reflected in this measurement framework.
Successful efforts to raise high school graduation rates begin well before students walk into the building for their first day of high school. They start by ensuring that students enter kindergarten prepared to learn, progress through major checkpoints in the elementary and middle grades, are introduced to a variety of education-to-career pathways, and have a high school experience that prepares them for postsecondary education or training and pursuit of a chosen career path. Focused efforts are needed throughout the early learning to high school pipeline to support steady improvement.

**SPECIFIC ACTIONS:**

- **Increase high-quality early learning options for low-income students.** Washington ranks 39th among the states in preschool enrollment, with just 40% of its three- and four-year olds enrolled. State policymakers should ensure that Washington’s youngest learners enter school ready to learn and excel, with a focus on expanding high-quality early learning options for low-income children. Washington’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is recognized as an effective tool in helping low-income students prepare for K-12 education. That’s why the Washington Roundtable and Partnership for Learning support state policy requiring that ECEAP be available to all children from households with incomes at or below 110% of the federal poverty level by the 2022–23 school year.

- **Make third grade reading the “North Star” for assessing the impacts of early learning investments and for holding the system accountable for student achievement.** Children who aren’t reading at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than their peers who are reading proficiently. Given this fact, it is alarming that nearly half (46%) of Washington students, and nearly two thirds (64%) of our low-income students, are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade. As the state increases its investment in early childhood and K-3 education, it should use third grade reading as a benchmark to assess investment impacts, allocate resources to drive achievement gains, support and expand best practices, and make course corrections.

- **Raise achievement at low-performing schools.** Washington identified at least one low-performing school in more than one third of its school districts in 2016. These schools ranked in the lowest 5% in student performance on state assessments, had fewer than 40% of all students scoring proficient or better on state assessments, or had a three-year average graduation rate for all students of less than 60%. The high school graduation rate at these schools was nearly 30 points below the state average. In 2017, the Washington Roundtable and Partnership for Learning published a report outlining strategies for raising achievement at low-performing schools and among students who are struggling. Policymakers should implement those strategies, focusing on allocating resources to improve student outcomes, enhancing accountability, increasing access to excellent teachers and principals, and closing achievement gaps.

- **Support Washington’s 24-credit high school diploma and communicate its flexibility.** The 24-credit high school diploma ensures students take the classes required to be prepared for a successful transition to postsecondary education or training. Teachers, counselors, and other educators should be equipped to work with students, and their families, to help them understand the high school credit requirements and take advantage of flexibility embedded in the 24-credit diploma structure to develop a high school course plan that best fits a student’s postsecondary goal and career interests.

- **Maintain Washington’s competency-based high school graduation requirements.** The state’s competency-based graduation requirements ensure that students graduate with a basic set of reading, writing, and math skills that will serve them well regardless of their post-high school plans. Students must achieve a minimum score on state assessments or demonstrate achievement of basic standards via an approved alternative as one condition for high school graduation. This requirement has been in place for more than a decade. In that time, high school graduation rates have increased while college remediation rates have declined.
Of the benchmarks identified, the biggest gap in performance between Washington and nation-leading states is in postsecondary enrollment of high school graduates. Consequently, the best opportunity to drive credential attainment gains is to drastically increase enrollment of high school graduates into postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions.

Based on the most recent national data, Washington trails Massachusetts by 25 points, and the national average by 13 points, on the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in a postsecondary program immediately after high school. Washington also trails Massachusetts by 19 points, and the national average by 5 points, on the percentage of adults age 18 to 24 who have a credential or are currently enrolled.

Washington has made no progress in increasing the percentage of its high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions in nearly a decade. Raising that rate of enrollment from 77% to 95% will substantially increase the likelihood that more students complete a postsecondary program and attain a credential. Moving the needle on this benchmark will require targeted efforts to improve student preparation and make postsecondary education more convenient and accessible for more students.

**SPECIFIC ACTIONS:**

- **Improve consistency of “High School and Beyond Plan” implementation.** A state requirement for high school graduation, the High School and Beyond Plan can be an excellent vehicle to help students, beginning in middle school, identify and map an education pathway to the career of their choice. However, there is little consistency in how the plan is implemented across schools and districts. The state should identify, scale up, and make widely available high-quality support programs that make best use of the plan tool, such as AVID, Dream Project, and Gear Up. Counseling resources should be available, and educators should receive professional development training to help students identify options and build their plans accordingly. Consideration should be given to requiring that all plans include application to at least one postsecondary education or training program.

- **Increase utilization of concurrent enrollment and dual-credit programs.** Dual-credit programs, which allow students to earn postsecondary credits while pursuing a high school diploma, are underutilized in Washington state. These programs—such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate coursework, College in the High School, and Running Start—enable students to experience postsecondary education, further map their education-to-career pathways based on that experience and shorten time to credential completion. Research indicates that low-income students; Hispanic, black, and Native American students; and boys particularly benefit from exposure to college-level courses while still in high school. Students also tend to enroll in postsecondary programs at higher rates after participating in concurrent enrollment and/or dual-credit programs. Efforts should be made to market and make dual-credit programs available to all students. This includes increased financial supports for low-income and systemically underserved students.

- **Reduce financial barriers to postsecondary program enrollment.** Tuition, program fees, books, and materials needs, as well as living and transportation expenses, can seem overwhelming to students considering postsecondary enrollment. Efforts must be made to help reduce these barriers, including extension of financial aid resources such as the State Need Grant, College Bound Scholarship, and Washington State Opportunity Scholarship.

- **Make postsecondary education more convenient for students.** Multiple strategies must be deployed to maximize postsecondary education access across the range of students pursuing credentials, many of whom are not traditional, full-time, on-campus, resident students. Strategies include increasing awareness and use of satellite and branch campus networks of the University of Washington and Washington State University, high-quality applied baccalaureate programs through two-year colleges, and high-quality online and hybrid programs like Western Governors University.
AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a student-centered college preparatory system that has been deployed in 6,000 schools nationwide, including more than 350 sites serving 36,000 students in Washington state. Although designed to serve all students, AVID focuses on students in the academic middle who have the determination to go to college. AVID students often come from a more challenged or disadvantaged background and are more likely to be the first in their family to go to college.

These students enroll in their school’s most challenging classes and participate in an AVID elective class where they receive academic, social, and emotional support to help them succeed. AVID coursework and tutorials help unlock essential learning tools that, among other benefits, teach students to get more out of class time, listen for key information, take notes, and ask good questions.

The goal is for AVID students to challenge themselves and successfully transition to postsecondary education or training. The proof is in the outcomes—AVID students in Washington state are enrolling in college at higher rates than students attending comparable schools with similar demographics.

HIGH-QUALITY ONLINE POSTSECONDARY PROGRAMS

In the mid-1990s, a group of U.S. governors came together to answer one question: How can we ensure more of our residents have access to a college education that fits their schedule?

Their answer was to create Western Governors University (WGU)—a fully online university that would serve millions of working adults who had a dream of pursuing a college education but were limited by the boundaries of time and place. WGU students learn at their own pace, utilizing 24/7 access to online learning resources with one-on-one support from faculty members, and work toward competency-based credentials with labor market value.

SPOTLIGHT: WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

SPOTLIGHT: AVID

STUDENT-CENTERED POSTSECONDARY PREPARATION

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The goal is for AVID students to challenge themselves and successfully transition to postsecondary education or training. The proof is in the outcomes—AVID students in Washington state are enrolling in college at higher rates than students attending comparable schools with similar demographics.
Washington has a respectable track record moving students who enroll in postsecondary education through to credential completion. Sixty-eight percent of students who enroll in four-year programs graduate within six years. Forty-seven percent who enroll in two-year programs within three years. Although our state performs well, we trail national leaders on both metrics and there is room to improve.

Washington’s projected postsecondary graduation rate is 63% for high school graduates from the class of 2015 who enroll in programs at two- and four-year institutions. That rate has been growing 0.9% per year on average since the high school class of 2006. Given the historic growth trend, delivering the seven-point gain in postsecondary graduation required to hit the 70% benchmark seems straightforward, but it will not be easy.

If Washington meets the benchmarks set at earlier points in the education pipeline—making a 13-point gain in the high school graduation rate and an 18-point gain in postsecondary enrollment of high school graduates—our two- and four-year postsecondary institutions will be tasked with moving a much larger population through to credential completion. This larger population will be more diverse and include higher numbers of first-generation and low-income students. This population will likely have greater and more complex support needs, requiring additional investment, guidance, supports, and wraparound services.

### SPECIFIC ACTIONS:

- **Ensure students enroll in their “best-fit” postsecondary programs.** The optimal route for high school graduates is to enroll directly into a postsecondary program that best fits their interests and will deliver the desired credential. However, this isn’t the route many students take. Eighty percent of students who enter community colleges across the nation each year indicate that they intend to transfer and earn a bachelor’s degree, but only about a quarter transfer to a four-year institution and about one in six complete a bachelor’s degree within six years of starting community college. If a bachelor’s degree is the student’s desired goal, direct enrollment into a four-year program would increase the chance that students complete and attain their desired credential. The same is true for students pursuing credentials from two-year institutions. Matching students to their best-fit program after high school, and helping them through the application and transition processes, will require counseling and pathway guidance support.

- **Increase transfer support for students advancing from two-year to four-year schools.** Direct enrollment into the best-fit postsecondary program is not always possible. Forty percent of students who earn a bachelor’s degree from a Washington institution start their postsecondary career in the two-year system, but our state has one of the lowest transfer rates in the nation between its community and technical colleges and baccalaureate institutions. Due to often confusing or misaligned transfer credit requirements between two- and four-year colleges, students with associate’s degrees accumulate 17% more credits than they need to transfer. Further, of those students who transfer to a four-year school without an associate’s degree, fewer than 60% report being able to transfer most of their credits and 15% could not transfer any credits at all. The state must take steps to better facilitate and encourage smooth transfers. This includes providing spaces for incoming transfer students and ensuring the transfer process is transparent, streamlined, and requires a minimum of duplicative coursework. Counseling services should be available to help students through the process, especially first-generation college students.

- **Continue to build and evaluate Guided Pathways at state community and technical colleges.** Guided Pathways at Washington’s two-year colleges provide a research-based education model that simplifies and connects course selection to credential and career goals. The state should provide sustainable funding to pursue further development of Guided Pathways—grouping courses together to form clear paths and providing students with intensive and targeted advising—with the goal of expanding to all 34 community and technical colleges in Washington state.

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<tr>
<th>4-YEAR POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION RATE</th>
<th>2-YEAR POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION RATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASSACHUSETTS:</strong> 72%</td>
<td><strong>SOUTH DAKOTA:</strong> 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WASHINGTON:</strong> 68%</td>
<td><strong>WASHINGTON:</strong> 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. AVERAGE:</strong> 59%</td>
<td><strong>U.S. AVERAGE:</strong> 32%</td>
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**THE PATH TO 70% CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT**

**70% OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ENROLLED IN POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS COMPLETE A CREDENTIAL BY AGE 26**

Washington has a respectable track record moving students who enroll in postsecondary education through to credential completion. Sixty-eight percent of students who enroll in four-year programs graduate within six years. Forty-seven percent who enroll in two-year programs within three years. Although our state performs well, we trail national leaders on both metrics and there is room to improve.
Invest in student wraparound supports, especially for systemically underserved populations. Many students struggle to connect with their best-fit program of study. Others struggle to balance coursework and the need to work while in school. Still others struggle with challenging or unexpected life experiences. These students may need supports that are not anticipated by traditional financial aid and career guidance programs. Wraparound supports should be available, particularly for systemically underserved students (e.g., advising on postsecondary major selection, completion coaches, career counseling, financial assistance, and “nudges” to encourage timely credential completion).

REINVENTING COMMUNITY COLLEGE THROUGH GUIDED PATHWAYS

WHAT?
Guided Pathways at Washington’s community colleges focus on helping students—especially low-income, first-generation students and students of color—earn credentials that prepare them for entry into high-demand career fields.

HOW?
From the moment of entry, Guided Pathways students are shown all career and program options available within their meta-major (or collection of academic majors with related coursework). Detailed information is provided regarding the employment opportunities targeted by each program as well as transfer requirements for bachelor’s programs in related fields. Coursework is mapped so students know what to take and in what sequence. Intensive advising helps monitor student progress and provide guidance along the way.

LOW-COST “NUDGES” CAN INCREASE COLLEGE PARTICIPATION

Schools can use low-cost “nudges” to help keep students on track to postsecondary enrollment, manage their coursework, and move toward credential completion. As one example, research indicates that 10% to 40% of students presumed to be headed to college fail to matriculate at any postsecondary institution in the fall following high school. According to a 2013 study by researchers from the University of Virginia and University of Pittsburgh, that percentage could be greatly reduced by low-cost “nudges” such as reminder texts to keep students informed and engaged when they are no longer receiving high school guidance but are not yet on college campuses.

In the 2013 study, researchers sent a series of automated text messages to students, and their parents when possible, reminding them of enrollment deadlines and providing an avenue to get questions answered. Seventy percent of students who received the reminder texts enrolled in college, compared to a 63% of students who didn’t receive the texts. That seven-point differential translates to more than 200,000 students enrolling in college who may not have without the extra push. These “nudges” may be particularly helpful for low-income or first generation college students who often lack college-entry information or may have limited access to counselors and adults with experience navigating the postsecondary system.
If we reach each of the identified benchmarks—successfully raising the rates of high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment of high school graduates in programs at two- and four-year institutions, and postsecondary graduation for those enrollees—then 63% of students in the class of 2030 will attain a credential by age 26. We will still be 7 points shy of the 70% goal for Washington students.

To hit 70%, we must reengage students who fall out of the education pipeline at any point along the way. Although the optimal route to career is to graduate high school, enroll in and complete a best-fit postsecondary program, that doesn’t happen for many students. Unexpected hurdles can arise, circumstances can change, and plans can get sidetracked.

Getting students who fall out of the education system back on track to credential attainment promises great rewards. Reengaging students also offers significant opportunity to tap an underutilized resource for the benefit of the entire state.

Reengagement often happens because of personal relationships, such as a dedicated individual working with a former student. Consequently, reliable or longitudinal data isn’t widely available. There is also a significant lack of research regarding best practices and the effectiveness of reengagement strategies that have been deployed across the nation. Washington has an opportunity to lead in this area.

Successful reengagement efforts will require increased support for programs and targeted interventions for at-risk students and those who have fallen out of the education system, development of additional pathways to high-quality industry certificates, and efforts to help individuals understand and connect with the educational pathways and career opportunities that inspire them.

**SPECIFIC ACTIONS:**

- Include students who “drop out” of the system in the P–16 longitudinal data system to better understand and address leaks in the education pipeline. Washington uses a unique student identifier to anonymously track student demographics and education outcomes. This data enables the state to assess overall education performance as well as the impact and effectiveness of policy and programs. However, when a student drops out of the K–12 system and re-appears in the postsecondary system, the postsecondary institution is not required to retrieve and use that unique student ID. Consequently, it is difficult to track reengagement of students who leave the K–12 system prior to high school graduation. To address this issue, the unique student identifier should be used throughout the P–16 longitudinal system.

- Increase support for and access to workforce development programs and targeted interventions for opportunity youth (adults younger than 26 who are not working or enrolled in school). Engaging young adults who aren’t working or enrolled in school in postsecondary education or training is critical to their futures and to reaching the 70% credential attainment goal for Washington students. Steps must be taken to ensure these students are enrolled in postsecondary education or training and work-based learning and other workforce development opportunities.

- Invest in building pathways to high-quality certificates (e.g., apprenticeships). The collection and dissemination of information is quite limited regarding pathways to industry certificates and apprenticeships that are not awarded in partnership with two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. Work must be done to define and develop clearly articulated pathways to industry credentials that are high in quality and have labor market value. Partnerships among educators, employers, and labor unions to build and promote these pathways will be essential in this effort.
Support “HS 21+” competency-based diploma programs at Washington’s two-year colleges. Competency-based high school diploma programs at our state’s community and technical colleges provide additional high school completion options for adult learners. The state should continue to support development of these programs as a tool for reengaging adults age 21 and over who left the formal education system before earning a high school diploma.

Expand access and availability of high-quality online programs that lead to a credential. Due to work obligations and personal circumstances, many students may not have the opportunity or the ability to enroll in on-campus postsecondary education or training programs. Online postsecondary programs allow these individuals the flexibility to earn credentials. Steps should be taken to ensure that these programs are high in quality and are well-communicated to prospective students and their families.

THE CREDENTIAL IS ESSENTIAL

Today’s job market is fundamentally different than what previous generations entered. Even more dramatic changes are likely on the horizon. But one thing is clear: A postsecondary credential is essential. A high school diploma—once the key to steady, family-wage employment—is not sufficient. Jobs that provide a good salary and a path to advancement overwhelmingly require a postsecondary credential.

Washington state has set a goal that 70% of its adult population will have a postsecondary credential. The Washington Roundtable and Partnership for Learning have set a complementary goal specifically for the students growing up in our state. Washington has made progress toward our goal, moving from 31% credential attainment for the high school class of 2006 to a projected 40% for the high school class of 2015.

TO REACH 70% CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT BY THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2030, WE MUST DOUBLE OUR ANNUAL GROWTH RATE IN CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT.

We must focus efforts to close achievement gaps and hit nation-leading benchmarks in high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment of high school graduates in programs at two- and four-year institutions, and graduation from those programs. Finally, we must successfully reengage students who fall out of the education pipeline prior to credential attainment.

Reaching our 70% goal will be challenging. Achieving it will require coordinated efforts from all of us—elected officials, educators, employers, community organizations, families, and the students themselves. We look forward to that collaboration, to setting annual goals, pursuing improvement, and measuring progress.

PLEASE JOIN US IN THIS EFFORT.

LEARN MORE AT WAROUNDTABLE.COM & PARTNERSHIP4LEARNING.ORG.
The major analytical focus of this study includes examination of credential attainment for Washington’s public high school class of 2006 by age 26 (based on data provided by the Education Research & Data Center, ERDC) and a projection of postsecondary credential attainment for students in the high school class of 2015 by age 26. Our assessment of credential attainment is based on projected cohort performance against three major benchmarks: the high school graduation rate, the projected rate of enrollment of high school graduates in postsecondary programs and two- and four-year institutions, and the rate at which high school graduates who enroll in programs at two- and four-year postsecondary institutions complete their programs of study by age 26.

- **Washington State Postsecondary Enrollment Rate.** Data from the ERDC indicates that 77% of graduates from Washington's high school class of 2006 enrolled in a postsecondary program within six years of high school graduation. This includes students who participated in Running Start or other dual-credit programs while in high school. ERDC data further indicates that the rate of direct enrollment of high school graduates in postsecondary programs after high school remained constant at 60% from the high school class of 2006 to the high school class of 2015. Based on this, we assume the rate of enrollment over time also tracked at a constant rate, with a total projection of 77% of high school graduates in the class of 2015 enrolling in a postsecondary program at a two- or four-year institution within six years of the cohort's graduation from high school. In that time, the enrollment mix did shift, moving from a split of 52% of students enrolling in two-year programs and 48% in four-year programs to the opposite, with 48% of students enrolling in two-year programs and 52% in four-year programs.

- **State-by-State Postsecondary Direct Enrollment Comparison.** We used ERDC's High School Feedback Report to determine Washington's rate of direct enrollment in postsecondary programs at two- and four-year institutions. We used the 2014 data from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems to determine direct postsecondary enrollment rates in other states. These numbers are based on data from the IPEDS Enrollment Survey (Part C) and the Western Instate Commission for High Education. Those numbers also track closely with data in the most recent report (2009–10 academic year) from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Additional NCES data indicate that our analysis may underestimate the gap between Washington and the national average or nation-leading states in terms of postsecondary enrollment.

- **Washington State Postsecondary Completion.** To project a postsecondary completion rate for the high school class of 2015, we developed a blended average graduation rate using extended graduation rates for Washington's two- and four-year postsecondary institutions as reported by IPEDS. We weighted those rates by the percentage of Washington high school graduates who, according to ERDC data, enroll in and attend programs at a two- or four-year postsecondary institution directly following high school. We tested this methodology by applying it to the class of 2006, which produced a 53% postsecondary completion rate (~3% lower than actuals). We revised our future estimates upward 3% to reflect the same relationship between IPEDs and Washington graduate actuals in 2006. Additionally, we accounted for historical data in projecting postsecondary graduation rates for the high school class of 2015. For the four-year postsecondary graduation rate, we projected forward the class of 2009 rate using a 0% compound annual growth rate (2006 and 2009 graduation rates remain the same). For the two-year graduation rate, we projected forward the class of 2012 rate using a 4% compound annual growth rate to reflect growth from 2006 to 2012.

**MAJOR SOURCES USED IN DEVELOPMENT OF THIS REPORT:**

- Boston Consulting Group, Washington Roundtable (2016) "Pathways to Great Jobs in Washington State"
- Community College Research Center (2017) "Strengthening Transfer Paths to a Bachelor’s Degree: Identifying Effective Two-Year to Four-Year College Partnerships"
- Education First, Public Impact, Partnership for Learning, Washington Roundtable (2017) "Creating Great Schools for Washington Students"
- Education Research & Data Center (2015) "A Credential by Age 26?"
- Education Research & Data Center (2015) "ERDC’s High School Feedback Report"

**METHODOLOGY**

The major analytical focus of this study includes examination of credential attainment for Washington’s public high school class of 2006 by age 26 (based on data provided by the Education Research & Data Center, ERDC) and a projection of postsecondary credential attainment for students in the high school class of 2015 by age 26. Our assessment of credential attainment is based on projected cohort performance against three major benchmarks: the high school graduation rate, the projected rate of enrollment of high school graduates in postsecondary programs and two- and four-year institutions, and the rate at which high school graduates who enroll in programs at two- and four-year postsecondary institutions complete their programs of study by age 26.
• Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2017) “Good Jobs that Pay Without a BA”
• National Center for Higher Education Management (2014) “College-Going Rates of High School Graduates—Directly from High School”
• The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) “Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters”
• The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) “Early Warning Confirmed: A Research Update on Third Grade Reading”
• Western Governors University (2018) “Competency-Based Education”

ABOUT THE WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE
The Washington Roundtable is a nonprofit organization composed of senior executives of major private sector employers in Washington state. Our members work together to effect positive change on public policy issues that they believe are most important to supporting state economic vitality and fostering opportunity for all Washingtonians. Learn more at waroundtable.com

ABOUT PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING
Partnership for Learning, the education foundation of the Washington Roundtable, is a statewide nonprofit organization that communicates the need for all Washington’s students to graduate from high school ready for career and college. As a trusted source of information, Partnership for Learning makes complex education issues accessible. Learn more at partnership4learning.org

ABOUT KINETIC WEST
Kinetic West is a social impact consulting firm that empowers leaders from the social, public, and private sectors to solve their toughest challenges. Expertise includes strategy, data analytics, program design, capacity building, and storytelling. Kinetic West works across disciplines with a focus on education, economic development, and human capital. Learn more at kineticwest.com