

Projected Decline in Credential Attainment Demands Bold Action

In 2016, the Washington Roundtable set a goal: 70% of Washington students—overall and within each racial and ethnic community—will complete a postsecondary credential by age 26.

This goal reflects the workforce needs of Washington employers and national and state data projecting that at least 70% of jobs in our

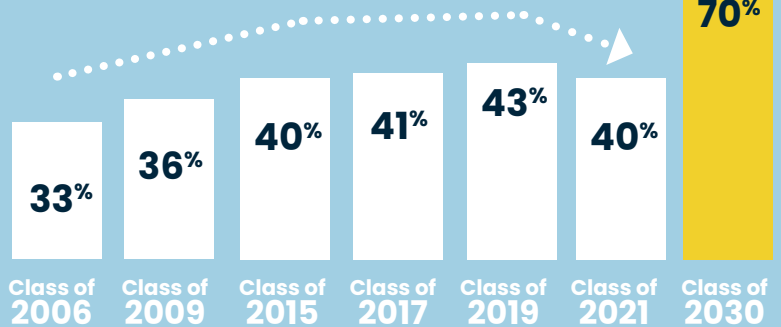
state will be filled by workers who complete a postsecondary credential, such as a degree, apprenticeship, or industry-aligned certificate or license. State data indicates that 33% of students in Washington’s high school class of 2006 went on to earn a credential by age 26. The estimated credential attainment rate rose 10 percentage points over the next 13 years (an average of 0.8 percentage points per year), with a 43% estimated credential attainment rate for the high school class of 2019.

Nearly a third of the progress made since the class of 2006 was wiped out during the pandemic.

The estimated credential attainment rate for the high school class of 2021 is 40%—three percentage points lower than the class of 2019 and 30 points below the goal. This decline is alarming though not surprising given data estimating an enrollment decline of 70,000+ students across Washington’s community and technical colleges and public baccalaureate institutions from fall 2019 to fall 2022.

WA STATE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE 26

Source: Kinetic West



PROJECTED EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR WASHINGTON STUDENTS



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2006

75%

60,200 grads

HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2019

84%

71,300 grads

HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2021

86%

72,500 grads

15-YEAR CHANGE

+11

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

78%

76%*

66%*

-12

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

56%

63%*

64%*

+8

CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE 26

33%

43%*

40%*

+7

* Postsecondary completion and credential attainment rates by age 26 for the high school classes of 2019 and 2021 are projected based on historical patterns. The enrollment rate is a combination of direct enrollment after high school and estimated non-direct enrollment.

Source: Kinetic West

Three headlines emerge when reviewing progress at key steps along the credential attainment pathway:

- 1. Washington's high school graduation rate continued to improve.**
Increases during the pandemic are likely due, at least in part, to the waiver of some state graduation requirements for the high school classes of 2020, 2021, and 2022.
- 2. Projected postsecondary enrollment of high school graduates from the high school class of 2021 is down 10 percentage points compared to enrollment of the class of 2019.**
This drop comes after more than a decade of nearly flat postsecondary enrollment rates for Washington high school graduates.
- 3. Projected postsecondary completion for high school graduates is up 1 point compared to the pre-pandemic level and 8 points compared to the class of 2006.**
The completion rate varies widely across racial and ethnic communities and socioeconomic groups.

WASHINGTON'S HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2021: PROJECTED DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION ATTAINMENT BY INCOME, RACE, AND GENDER



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

REENGAGEMENT RATE

CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE 26

	INCOME		RACE				GENDER		OVERALL		
	LOW-INCOME 41,000	NON-LOW INCOME 43,000	NATIVE AMERICAN 1,000	HISPANIC/LATINO 19,000	BLACK 4,000	WHITE 46,000	AANHPI 7,000	MALE 43,000	FEMALE 41,000	HS CLASS OF 2021	HS CLASS OF 2030 TARGET
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	79%	93%	74%	81%	80%	87%	92%	83%	89%	86%	95%
POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT	53%	77%	49%	56%	71%	67%	85%	61%	72%	66%	88%
POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	46%	56%	49%	66%	75%	59%	66%	64%	75%
REENGAGEMENT RATE										7%	
CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE 26	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	20%	28%	31%	41%	62%	33%	45%	40%	70%

Source: Kinetic West

High School Graduation: While the overall graduation rate has increased, broad disparity by economic status persists, with 79% of students from low-income backgrounds graduating as compared to 93% of their peers from more affluent households. Graduation rates also vary among racial and ethnic communities, indicating continued systemic barriers for some students.

Projected Postsecondary Enrollment: Rates vary considerably across racial and ethnic communities. The enrollment rate is lowest among Native American (49%), Hispanic/Latino (56%), and White students (67%). There is a 24-point difference in the enrollment rate of students from low-income backgrounds (53%) compared to their more affluent peers (77%).

Projected Postsecondary Completion: Only one racial group—Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, or AANHPI (as tracked through state and federal data)—is expected to reach the 75% completion goal. There is an alarming drop in projected postsecondary completion among Black students (49%) compared to the percentage of Black students who enroll (71%). This indicates that, once enrolled, Black students face additional hurdles or have unique needs that are not being met.

Projected Overall Credential Attainment: Data analysis by Kinetic West projects that, of the total cohort of students who started 9th grade together, less than a third of Native American, Hispanic/Latino, and Black students will complete a credential by age 26. Forty-one percent of White students and 62% of AANHPI students will do so.

Gender Disparity: Higher percentages of female students are expected to progress through each step of the credential attainment pathway than male students.

THE WAY FORWARD: PATH TO 70% CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT FOR WASHINGTON STUDENTS

Washington needs far more students from every racial and ethnic community and income bracket completing all types of credentials—degrees, apprenticeships, and industry-aligned certificates and licenses. Progress, and setbacks, build upon each other at each major step along the path to credential attainment, and significant gains are needed at each point. **One avenue to reach the 70% credential attainment goal:**

- **Build on recent progress and raise the high school graduation rate from 86% to 95%.**
Making a 9-point gain by the high school class of 2030 requires an average annual increase of 1 percentage point.
- **Raise the postsecondary enrollment rate for high school graduates from 66% to 88%.**
Making a 22-point gain by the high school class of 2030 requires an average annual increase of 2.4 percentage points.
- **Raise the postsecondary completion rate from 64% to 75%.**
Making an 11-point gain by the high school class of 2030 requires an average annual increase of 1.2 percentage points.
- **Increase the re-engagement rate for students who fall out of the high school-to-credential path from 3% to 7%.**

Washington was experiencing a postsecondary enrollment and completion crisis before the pandemic, and that crisis is only more acute in the face of declining postsecondary enrollment juxtaposed with rapid economic innovation and intense demand for credentialed workers. The needs of our students and our state demand that we come together—across institutions, communities, employers, education stakeholders, students, and families—to catalyze dramatic and demonstrable gains at each stage of the high school-to-credential pathway.

Transformation of the state's postsecondary system as well as clear communications to prospective students about education-to-career pathways and supports that mitigate or remove common barriers will be critical. As employers, we look to the postsecondary leaders in our state to lead this transformation and consider the design of models that better meet students where they are and align with workforce demands. We will partner with Washington's postsecondary institution and agency leaders to support systemwide and institution-specific strategies to grow enrollment and offer students the support and wraparound services they need to transition to postsecondary learning and successfully persist to credential completion.



The 70% credential goal remains ambitious and vitally important.

We are committed to collaboration, partnership, and the hard work needed to achieve it for our students and the future of our state.