

POSTSECONDARY READINESS FEDERAL POLICY PAPER 2021



Introduction

Federal investment in education will help the state of Washington maintain recent hard-won gains for students and families. In the last several years, we have seen increases in state investment in early learning for low income families, significant increased investment in K-12 pursuant to the State Supreme Court order and significant new investment in higher education access including the expansion of the Washington College Grant (state financial aid), community college student guidance (Guided Pathways) and improved 2 and 4 year institutional support. We cannot let the pandemic take us backwards.

COVID recovery continues to be a time when first-time college students and unemployed adults are given the comprehensive support they need to build marketable skills and attain postsecondary credentials. This is our best chance at building a truly inclusive and equitable recovery.



Meeting Our Students & Schools Where They Are

When surveyed, 96% of local high schoolers from South King County indicated that they wanted to continue their education after high school. According to the most recent data from the Road Map Project, only 30% of students from this same region earn a college degree or career credential by their mid-twenties. This stark difference between students' goals and achievements reflects the underlying reality that our school systems are not adequately providing the support that students need to succeed.

Students – especially students of color, first generation and other students facing barriers – need individualized, high-touch support throughout high school in order to make a smooth transition to postsecondary. The current counselor to student ratio of our students is, on average, 482:1 – almost double the recommended standard. Data shows that students of color and first-generation students rely more heavily on school staff when it comes to understanding the college-going process, and by 11th grade only 64% of students in the Road Map Region had conversations about college options with a school staff member. Deficits in school support disproportionately affect first generation students, students of color and students with disabilities, thus deepening the very opportunity gap that we are fighting to close.

TO PRIORITIZE EQUITABLE SUPPORT FOR OUR STUDENTS, WE MUST FUND COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING STAFF THAT MEET THE RECOMMENDED STAFF-STUDENT RATIO OF 250:1 AND INTEGRATE COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING INTO SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

Financial Aid By the Numbers

Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is one of the best indicators of whether or not a high school senior will attend college. According to the National College Access Network (NCAN), seniors who complete the FAFSA are 84% more likely to immediately enroll in postsecondary education. Yet bureaucratic verification procedures vastly reduce the number of students who access financial aid. Almost half of all low-income applicants are asked to submit additional documents to verify the accuracy of their demographic and financial information, further complicating a confusing process; as a result, only 56% of Pell-eligible students selected for verification complete the process. Recent data from NCAN shows that just 61% of high school seniors complete the application by the time they graduate, leaving \$24 billion in federal aid unclaimed. During this process, almost half of all low-income applicants are flagged by the federal government for verification.

Planning for Postsecondary Completion

Supporting postsecondary success doesn't end with access – it ends with completion. While improved rates of college acceptances can be an exciting achievement, we must ensure that these acceptances lead to higher numbers of college graduates as well. With counselor to student ratios hovering around 800:1, first generation students can often be left feeling unsupported in an entirely new environment.

TO ENCOURAGE RATES OF COMPLETION, COMPREHENSIVE FUNDING SHOULD SUPPORT EQUITY-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS, FIRST YEAR SUPPORT SERVICES AND REVISED ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT PROCESSES THAT MORE ADEQUATELY PREPARE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS.

TO FULLY UTILIZE THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE PELL GRANT, THE FAFSA PROCESS SHOULD BE SIMPLIFIED TO MINIMIZE THE BURDEN ON STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.



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