

Building a Future of Opportunity and Prosperity: Washington's Public Baccalaureate Institutions' Commitment to Higher Education

We must establish a dynamic public higher education ecosystem where every student aspiring to earn a bachelor's degree can achieve their goal. Our vision is ambitious and requires a renewed commitment to higher education, recognizing its essential role in our economy.

Washington is at a critical juncture. To meet the state's attainment goals and address workforce gaps, we need to credential 200,000 more students. Research indicates that over 75% of middle school students intend to pursue college, yet only half of high school graduates enroll in post-secondary education, and our sector ranks 48th in the nation in participation by 18–34-year-olds. This gap arises from various obstacles, necessitating a multi-faceted approach.

We must convince students and families of the substantial return on investment in higher education. We must also adapt to a generation of students who expect technology integration in education and the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence. Finally, we need a new conversation about who should bear the cost of increasing attainment, housing, and transitions within higher education. The public four-year sector is ready to engage in these critical discussions.

Invest in Washington's Public Baccalaureate Institutions to Invest in Washington Students

The current higher education business model limits our institutions from serving our current and future students. The lack of state funding to cover actual costs, which has gradually eroded our institutions' base budgets, limits the long-term sustainability of innovative programs and services. This affects our ability to provide the necessary student and academic supports to meet the expectations of incoming classes and retain current students until completion. Reinvesting in public higher education will enable institutions to better meet the needs of students and support the economic future of our state.

Promise and Expand Washington's Commitment to Affordable World-Class Higher Education

Despite having the best financial aid program in the country, many eligible students are unaware of it. The complexity of the current system discourages potential applicants. Together, we are committed to achieving the goal that the first two years of college or university are accessible to Washingtonians. A Washington Promise framework will be scalable to include more students from the middle class and address funding gaps for families just above the current cutoff. We are also committed to proactive engagement to address other cost barriers to families, including housing and basic needs.

Revolutionize Higher Education Key Transitions to and From University

Washington's public baccalaureate institutions are leading the way to remove barriers for students and families at the multiple transition points to university and after completion. In recent years, our diverse sector has led through dual credit equivalencies, streamlining admissions, advancing guaranteed admissions, creating new degree programs and improving supports to increase retention and degree completion. We must flip the model so that our institutions are finding and meeting students instead of students bearing the responsibility to find us. We must collectively recognize the hard work of Washington students through digital and accurate documentation to ensure opportunities for proactive admissions, dual credit equivalencies, and competency-based learning. Success in this space will unlock opportunities through quality data to inform decisions around key student transition points along their educational and career paths.