

Agenda item	Strategic Action Plan (SAP)
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SAP will outline the Council’s policy priorities for the next 1-2 years. We will continue the conversation from the November meeting to determine Council consensus on priorities (layer 2).
Guiding Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Any remaining questions, comments, or concerns regarding Layer 1 (existing policy landscape)? What state policy issues and work will the Council prioritize (Layer 2)? How will this work impact students of color?
Process and Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council began discussing the Strategic Action plan in July. Each Council member worked with WSAC staff to discuss and develop preliminary ideas regarding data and priorities. WSAC convened students, community-based leaders, higher education partners, K12 partners, and other state agency partners to discuss potential work and policy priorities within each cluster in July. WSAC staff have integrated this feedback into the recommendations for Council consideration. The following were considered in developing priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High potential to help Black, Indigenous, and other students of color who are furthest away from postsecondary attainment goal Students, local community leaders, advocates, or regional leaders have indicated the value of the policy High potential impact if the issue is resolved There is research/data indicating the policy will support increased attainment There is momentum and/or feasibility in pursuing the policy There is a clear value WSAC can add to address “between the seams” of systems or institutions
Possible Council Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreement with the depiction of the current policy landscape (layer 1) Agreement of policy priorities Council will pursue (layer 2)
Documents and Attachments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Layer 1: current policy landscape (word document) Layer 2: policy priorities for Council consideration (word document)

Washington’s Higher Education Policy Landscape

Layer 1 includes a high-level description of Washington’s existing state higher education policy. It is organized around the 70% educational attainment goal and WSAC’s four strategic framework clusters: *Affordability, Enrollment, Completion and Student Supports*.

We define “state higher education policy” broadly to include statutes, budget investments, and agency rules, as well as more informal, recurring state practices or actions that can define a meaningful commitment to a policy approach. A good example of the latter shows up in the informal yet persistent connection between tuition policy and state appropriations to colleges and universities. The Council can help maintain valuable informal policy approaches through identification, recognition of their value, and commitment towards their preservation.

This approach reveals highly developed policy clusters (e.g. Affordability), as well as emerging policy clusters (e.g. Student Supports). Thus, it reveals gaps in our state’s higher education policy and may serve as a tool to drive attention to these gaps more clearly in future discussions. While the document may use aspirational language to capture some of the state’s work (as evidenced in the well-developed Affordability cluster), Layer 1 does not include our broader aspirations for change.

Affordability

Higher education should be affordable for all Washington residents

- Higher education should be affordable without imposing limits by age, to include both adults and recent graduates from high school.
- Higher education should be affordable to State residents, regardless of citizenship status
- Washington’s effort to ensure affordability for students should encompass all forms of post-secondary programs, including traditional degrees, career-technical education certificates, apprenticeships and more.
- Policies to ensure affordability should also enable student options across all types of institutions, both public and private.

Washington makes higher education affordable through three major policies

- State financial aid programs based on income eligibility (“need-based”)
- State subsidy and tuition policy for public institutions
- State investment programs to help families save

State financial aid programs offer flexibility and reach beyond the lowest income households

- All Washington residents who meet the income eligibility standards are guaranteed financial aid.
- State financial aid pays tuition and fees for students from the bottom third of households by income – currently \$50,000 for a household of four.
- The state contributes part of tuition and fees for students from households above the bottom third and up to the statewide middle income (MFI) level – currently \$97,000 for a household of four.

- Income-eligible students who receive federal financial aid grants can keep their combined state and federal grant that can help cover costs beyond tuition and fees.
- Students can use state financial aid regardless of consecutive or full-time enrollment.

The state subsidizes public colleges and universities for all students

- The amount of state subsidy directly affects the level of tuition and fees.
- The State law ensures that tuition increases are not greater than the rate of inflation.
- Consistent state investments combined with tuition funding meets the cost of delivery of education for students.
- State support helps colleges and universities provide higher quality academic and student support programs that otherwise might not be affordable within campus budgets alone.
- State policy directs all Washington public postsecondary institutions to commit a portion of their tuition revenue to prioritize financial aid for low-income students.

Some state financial aid programs are designed to increase college and career readiness and are intended to support specific populations

- *Set an early vision for college:* Students from our lowest income households see in middle school that there is a path to an affordable higher education for them.
- *High demand STEM and technical jobs:* Financial aid is tied to increase access to high demand education pathways for lower income students.
- *Specific populations:* Some financial aid programs support populations beyond income eligibility to include foster youth, homeless youth, Native American students etc.
- *Work-based learning:* Financial aid supports work-based learning by partnering with employers to fund jobs for students.
- *Public needs in the job market:* Financial aid programs can be used to attract Washington residents to jobs with high public need such as teaching, healthcare in underserved communities, etc.

Washington mostly relies on the federal model for students to apply for and receive financial aid

- State financial aid is awarded and distributed by the college or university that the student attends and is sector neutral.
- All colleges and universities must meet certain state eligibility requirements and standards in order to participate in state financial aid programs.
- The federal application form (FAFSA) is used for most students to apply for and receive state financial aid, which prevents students from having to fill out two separate applications.
- Washington offers financial aid to students who are ineligible for federal aid because their citizenship status through the WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid).
- Costs of attending college beyond tuition and fees are considered using the federal definition of “total cost of attendance.”
- Students must maintain and demonstrate academic progress towards their postsecondary credential

The state has provided some programs to address student debt

- The office of the student loan advocate that WSAC administers provides current students information around taking on student debt and offers current students with loans resources for managing debt.
- Some state loan programs, and loan refinancing programs have been established in statute

The state supports households with the ability to save for college

- The state offers a guarantee to account owners in a prepaid tuition plan (GET), that their investment will keep pace with tuition increases at the state's highest-priced public university
- State legislation directed and supported the launch of a traditional college savings plan (DreamAhead)

Enrollment

All Washington residents should have a clear and accessible path to enroll in postsecondary education

- All Washington residents should be aware of the benefits of continuing their education past high school, including the economic, social and health returns of earning a credential.
- Washington must increase postsecondary enrollment for both traditional K12 students as well as working-age adults.
- Washington's effort to increase enrollment should encompass all forms of post-secondary programs, including traditional degrees, career-technical education certificates, apprenticeships and more.
- Policies to ensure ease of enrollment should also enable student choice across all types of institutions, including private colleges.
- Washington's effort to increase enrollment should be particularly focused on supporting students of color, especially Black, Indigenous and Latino students, who have been historically and institutionally marginalized from accessing higher education.

The state's K12 system provides some funding, infrastructure and programming to motivate and support college pathways for traditional K12 students

- High school counselors and other K12 staff offer college and career readiness, and financial aid advising to students in school
- Washington's K12 system has worked to integrate college and career readiness through the high school and beyond plan
- A range of dual credit programs are available; students can receive college credit in high school by completing a college course, passing a standardized exam, or participating in technical programs that have articulation agreements.
- Some dual credit programs have no or low cost to low-income students
- Students can graduate high school by demonstrating readiness through multiple pathways, including dual credit
- State policies require K12 schools implement academic acceleration and provide a financial aid advising day to help students be college and career ready and gain financial literacy

The state provides some additional infrastructure outside of the K12 system to support Washington K12 students' pathways to postsecondary education

- Washington makes some investments in college going programs provided by WSAC and nonprofit groups that provide resources and information to students and families about how to enroll in college
- State agencies offer web-based information and digital tools to support high school students increase access to financial aid and college planning
- Career Connect Washington is increasing options for students to participate in work-based and academic programs that provide college and career readiness, while earning college credit and/or earning wages
- Washington has a network of federal programs that support low-income, first generation and underrepresented students in their preparation and pursuit of postsecondary education
- The state subsidy to postsecondary institutions may also provide support for campus operations including admissions, outreach and enrollment activities

Washington has some resources to support working-age adults' ability to pay for and access college and career programs

- Some financial aid programs are available to increase postsecondary attainment for non-traditional, income-eligible students
- State agencies offer web-based information and digital tools to support working-age adults navigate college enrollment, various programs, and basic needs resources.
- Federal programs and funds support student's postsecondary enrollment regional workforce development Councils (WDC's) to increase the number of adults in education and training programs

Student Supports

Access to basic needs should not be a barrier for Washington residents seeking a postsecondary degree

- Basic needs encompass access to affordable housing, sufficient food, quality childcare, mental healthcare, and affordable transportation.
- Access could be provided through higher education institutions, existing federal or state public benefits, and/or local resources.

Some of Washington's financial aid programs may cover costs beyond tuition and fees

- Costs of attending college beyond tuition and fees are considered using the federal definition of "total cost of attendance"
- If a student receives more total aid across all sources, these additional funds help support the cost of housing, food, etc.

Many Washington postsecondary students may be eligible for federal and/or state public assistance programs to address food, housing and childcare

- The state administers and builds off federal programs to provide programming and support to some income eligible postsecondary students to support childcare, access food and other emergency funds
- The state has encouraged state partnerships to expand postsecondary student access to food

The state has made modest investments in the 4-year and 2-year public institutions to address costs beyond tuition and fees

- The Student Emergency Assistance Grant Program, distributes funding to two-year Community Technical Colleges to help students cover emergency expenses
- The state has supported pilot programs to address the suicide prevention and needs of college students experiencing homelessness, across 4-year public and 2-year public institutions.

Most public and private institutions provide some form of access to basic needs for students

- Emergency grants to cover one time needs like rental assistance
- On campus food pantry or partnership with local food bank
- Innovative partnerships between local housing authorities and/or developers with institutions
- Case management and integrated teams provide navigation for basic needs and mental/behavioral health
- Childcare centers for enrolled postsecondary students

Completion

Postsecondary students should persist and earn a postsecondary credential

- Higher education should guide and support student academic pathways through postsecondary education into the workforce.
- If Washington provides the necessary resources and establishes a supportive learning environment, then all students who want to, can and should be able to succeed at earning a postsecondary credential.
- The time it takes students to complete a credential may range depending on students' academic or career interests (short-term workforce credential vs. doctoral degree), and enrollment (part-time or full-time).
- Washington's effort to increase completion rates should be particularly focused on supporting students of color, especially Black, Indigenous and Latino students, who have been historically and institutionally marginalized from accessing higher education.

Washington has made significant investments to support implementation of Guided Pathways at Community and Technical Colleges

- Guided Pathways can be an effective approach to increasing persistence and completion for low-income students.
- Washington implementation of the Guided Pathways model has a focus on closing racial equity gaps.
- Colleges receive technical and leadership support to clarify pathways for students, help students' access and pursue that pathway, help students stay on course, and ensure students successfully learn and complete pathway.

Washington has a statewide system that supports students' seamless transfer from one institution to another

- Colleges have statewide agreements that give students flexibility to transfer between sectors.
- Students can earn a transfer associates degree aligned to 4-year degree program at universities.

- Students can receive academic credit for prior learning that took place in the military, formal and informal education, and/or industry training.

The state investment in public colleges and universities supports student persistence

- The amount of state subsidy directly affects the degree to which advising and academic support is available to students

Washington's funding model for the community and technical colleges has some connection to student completion

- The State has an allocation formula that includes a factor measuring student performance at two-year institutions
- The funding model acknowledges the achievement gaps of historically underserved students and provides a focus on these populations

Layer 2: The Policy and Data Development Agenda

Layer 2 is the Council’s agenda for policy change over the next two years. The opportunities for change in higher education are broad and evolving. The Council, the agency, and our partners/stakeholders have only so much capacity for a change agenda across all potential issues. Layer 2 represents the Council’s balancing of priorities and resources to identify the work that we will undertake. The final SAP document will also describe why we think any budget or policy proposals are likely to help Washington achieve its attainment goal. A commitment to equity remains a foundational principle for each SAP recommendation.

Our agenda is divided into “policy development” and “data development.” Both areas must be strategic in nature and aligned in advancing the larger state policy change. In the world of data, our agenda should focus on key indicators that help identify challenges and opportunities, galvanize the support of state and community leaders, and measure progress over time. Sometimes data development work may be necessary before the policy change conversation; other times the order may reverse.

Layer 2 is a “living and breathing” document to guide our work. The Council may revisit it as warranted over the next two years to adjust the agenda in response to both our capacity to drive the initial agenda and the external developments that affect our work. Ultimately, this agenda is meant to be a “road map” for Council meetings over the next two years, informing Council discussions and ensuring Council action remains focused on achieving the desired results.

Affordability: What should the Council prioritize to maintain and enhance Washington’s affordability policy?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Preserve Washington College Grant (WCG) and other 2158 investments.
2. Advocate to increase ease of access to College Bound Scholarship by enabling automatic sign-up for income-eligible students in middle school.
3. Outreach to recently unemployed workers without a college credential, focused on Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), to increase access to financial aid.
4. Increase Washington’s FAFSA/WASFA completion rate for K12 students, specifically for BIPOC K12 students.

Data Development Agenda

1. Develop adult-specific financial aid metrics with equity disaggregation.
2. Develop financial aid utilization rate with equity disaggregation.

Enrollment: What should the Council prioritize to increase enrollment for K12 and adult learners?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Build a state dual-credit strategy, inclusive of CTE, that increases access and success for BIPOC students AND increases college-going after high school.

2. Outreach to recently unemployed workers without a college credential, focused on BIPOC communities, by building partnerships with employers, community organizations, state agencies, local government and others outside of higher education.

Data Development Agenda

1. Measure impact of COVID-19 and recession on enrollment, especially for BIPOC students, lower income, adults and other sub-populations suffering disparate health and economic impacts.
2. Measure enrollment and success in dual credit courses, especially for BIPOC students and lower income families. Success includes the use of DC credits in later post-secondary pathways.

Student Supports: What should the Council prioritize to ensure postsecondary students have access to food, housing, childcare and mental healthcare?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Build a statewide coalition- with higher education leaders across sectors, student leaders, community-based organizations, and state partners- to develop a comprehensive vision and multiyear agenda (inclusive of a messaging/communications strategy) for future consideration by the Council.
2. Coordinate institutional assessment of postsecondary students' unmet basic needs to inform the State's policy and investments.
3. Facilitate sharing of best practices and research with higher education sectors and partners to learn from what IHE's are already doing that is successfully meeting students' basic needs.
4. Advocate for federal and state policy changes to remove work requirements and degree limitations, for postsecondary student in job training and education programs who are otherwise eligible for public benefits (i.e. SNAP and Working Connections Childcare).

Data Development Agenda

1. Establish baseline data to identify postsecondary students' participation in public benefits across postsecondary sectors throughout the state.

Completion: What should the Council prioritize to ensure postsecondary students can easily persist and earn a credential?

Policy Development Agenda

1. Establish completion goals and determine resources needed to meet goal(s).
2. Explore opportunities to increase alignment between quantitative academic coursework and skills/competencies from high school to postsecondary to the workforce.

Data Development Agenda

1. Measure transfer and other completion metrics, especially for BIPOC students and lower income families.
2. Develop a clear definition of transfer data for Career Launch credentials.