

## Supporting College Pathways for High School Students during the Covid-19 Crisis

### Create flexibility across HS graduation and college admission requirements

- Facilitate weekly meetings of K-16 workgroup
  - Participants include OSPI, COP (public 4 years), SBCTC (public 2 years), ICW (private colleges), AWSP (principals), WASA (superintendents), WSSDA (school directors), WEA, Rural Education Center (rural districts), ESD's (regional service districts), the Governor's Office, Partnership for Learning, SBE, WA PTA, and WA STEM with 35-40 regular attendees.
  - Created flexibility and addressed other issues in dual credit programs, high school graduation requirements, college admissions, grading guidance, and facilitated Q&As with leaders in K12 and higher ed, national policy organizations, and regional CBOs.
- Revised the [Minimum College Admissions Standards policy](#) to allow for institutional flexibility in academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22 for WA's public four-year colleges and universities.
- Support biweekly secondary/post-secondary leadership meeting with CEO's from AWSP, COP, ICW, Partnership for Learning, SBCTC, WASA, WSSDA, and WSAC.

### Communicate directly with students and families to support college going

- Weekly, student-facing emails to both students and student influencers.
  - 6,500 recipient including counselors, principals, superintendents and community leaders
  - Strong engagement shown by average click-through rate of over 11% (vs standard goal of 2.5%)
  - With the assistance of OSPI, WASA, WSSDA, AWSP, etc., these email communications have been shared through additional channels.
- Online focus groups conducted by the College Promise Coalition (CPC) on student and parent attitudes.
  - Findings showed that while people are struggling, students are still focused on college and career plans and seeking help and information.
- Provide one-stop-shop for all things related to COVID-19 and the postsecondary transition through WSAC's [Plan Your Future](#) webpage.
- Support CPC's social media campaign across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and search engine optimization to drive students and parents to WSAC's digital tools.

### Expanded use of digital tools to serve students remotely

- [Otterbot](#)- WSAC's AI texting tool - is actively texting 7,618 high school seniors with information on college planning, financial aid, resources, deadlines, and COVID-19 updates.
  - Otterbot launched in November 2019 as one of the first state initiatives in the nation supporting students seeking financial aid using AI chatbot texting.
  - Originally limited to College Bound seniors, the platform has been made available to any senior.
  - Outbound messages sent weekly which are targeted by status such as financial aid application status, region and school.
  - Answers student questions 24/7 using chatbot technology.
  - Asks students questions to increase engagement in college planning.

- Received over 27,000 incoming texts since launch.
- Converted our returning adult tool, [College and Career Compass](#), to support high school students.

**Continued to engage in targeted outreach & offer regional events across the state**

- WSAC's [12<sup>th</sup> Year Campaign](#) has conducted numerous webinars for practitioners, 40 virtual one-on-one appointments with students from 15 different schools, 5 strategy sessions with counselors, and classroom presentations are scheduled for juniors and seniors in Federal Way during remote learning. Overall, 12th Year sites have a FAFSA completion rate that is 12 percentage points higher than non-12th Year sites.
- Partnered with OSPI to hold a webinar on supporting seniors through the postsecondary transition with almost 200 attendees, and the Spring Counselor Financial Aid Workshops were offered as webinars in April and May with 139 attendees, including high school, college, and CBO staff.
- Piloting virtual Townhall events with Rural Alliance and in Spokane and Seattle school districts. Webinar recordings are available for district use, and Rural Alliance will receive 100 thumb drives with the videos and other resources to distribute to districts, schools and families where internet services isn't reliable.

**Revised policies to allow for maximum flexibility during school closures**

- Approved the use of Dual Enrollment Scholarship funds to purchase tablets or laptops that can be used by scholarship eligible students to complete their Running Start & College in the High School coursework.
- Updated CBS Rules to allow for deadline exceptions due to COVID-19 school closures, while doing additional direct-to-student mailings home, including one with a pre-paid business reply envelope.