COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES
Washington State Board

2020-2030
STRATEGIC
PLAN UPDATE

Approved June 2023
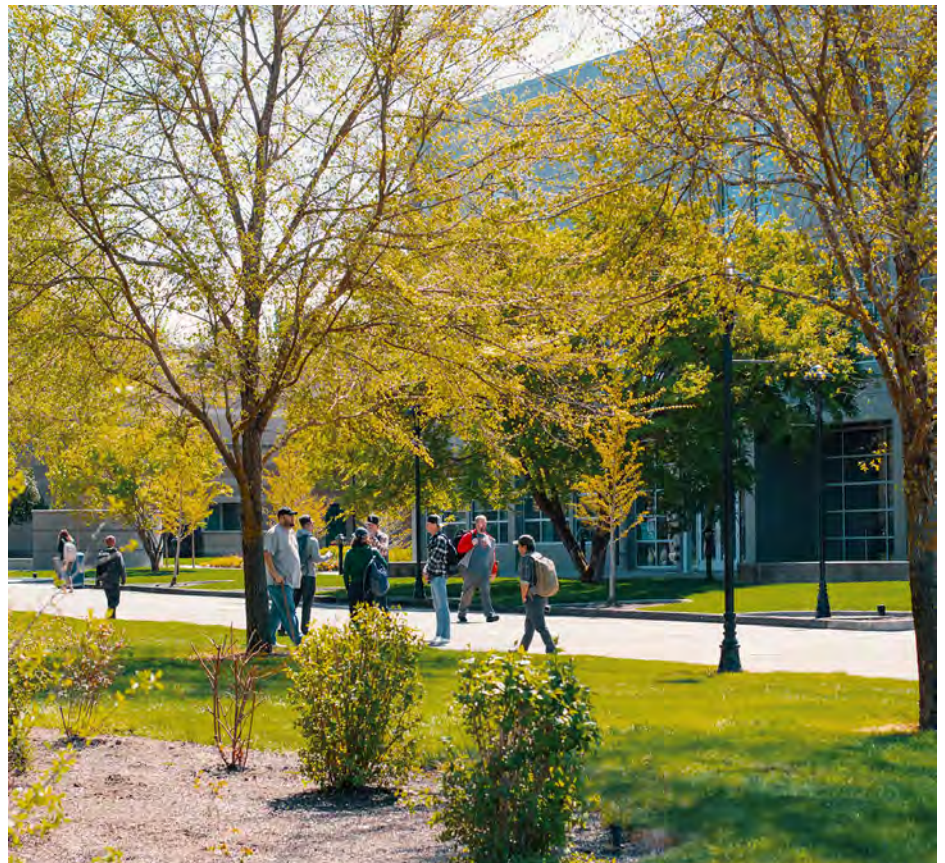
Why We Updated Our College System's Strategic Plan

In February 2020, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges adopted a 10-year strategic plan meant to guide our college system through 2030. One month later, the global pandemic shook the foundations of higher education as we knew it. The pandemic arrived in Washington late winter quarter, and colleges spent spring break quickly moving programs and services online to continue serving students.

Colleges are fully open now, yet higher education will never be the same — nor should it be. The pandemic changed how people work, learn, connect with each other and build community, but it was one of many critical factors affecting colleges.

This updated plan is meant to reflect the changes brought on by these unprecedented times. The plan sets a shared vision and strategic direction for Washington's community and technical college system and is meant to complement, and align with, individual college plans. Systemwide commissions and councils may also refer to this document as they develop their own work plans.

If there's one thing the pandemic made clear, it's that colleges must adapt quickly to a changing world. Fortunately, the pandemic also showed us just how capable we are of meeting that challenge.

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A Message from the State Board

Washington state is experiencing fast-paced demographic, economic, and technological changes. Our state is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Rapid innovations are changing job functions and industries throughout our economy. Technological advancements are shifting the way people live, work, and learn.

In the higher education arena, many students want a more customized educational experience, where they can self-select courses that quickly meet their professional and personal goals. They also want to learn in different ways — online, in person, and hybrid — and at flexible times to accommodate life, work, and family responsibilities.

Today's students want assurance that their investments of time and money will pay long-term dividends. Many question the value of earning a certificate or degree altogether or are pursuing other educational offerings from private businesses like Amazon and Microsoft, from free online courses through edX or Coursera, or from online colleges and universities with a competitive, nationwide reach.

Many of these transformations were already underway before COVID-19, but the pandemic accelerated the pace of change. It also revealed and widened racial and economic disparities, worsened students' mental health, and spotlighted digital inequalities at a time when access to technology is necessary to function in today's world.

As Washington state has changed, so too must our college system. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges has refreshed the college system's original 2020-2030 Strategic Plan to better reflect the higher education landscape before us. Our goal is to maintain the qualities that make our state's community and technical college system among the best and most innovative in the nation while embracing change in a forward-leaning and inclusive manner. Fortunately, we need look no further than the experience from the pandemic to understand that our system can successfully pivot when the moment calls for change.

We hope individual college strategic plans will align with this plan's overall goals while building on their own local strengths and characteristics. We hope you are excited and inspired by what follows.

State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

- Phyllis Gutiérrez Kenney, chair, Edmonds
- Crystal Donner, vice chair, Everett
- Ben Bagherpour, Vancouver
- Mack Hogans, Kirkland
- Chelsea Mason-Placek, Puyallup
- Jay Reich, Seattle
- Martin Valadez, Pasco
- Fred Whang, Tacoma
- Kady Titus, Chewlah*

Executive Director

Paul Francis, executive director, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

* Kady Titus succeeded Carol Landa-McVicker on the State Board effective June 12, 2023. SBCTC thanks former Board Member Landa-McVicker for her service and contributions to this plan.

Our Students and Colleges

Washington's community and technical college system is made up of 34 community and technical colleges that collectively serve about 262,000 people of all ages and backgrounds across the state.[1] Our colleges provide education and training that lead to well-paying jobs, career mobility, and university study.

Community and technical colleges are proud to be the most inclusive and diverse higher education institutions in Washington. Our students are more likely to be the first in their families to attend college, come from lower-income families, be people of color, hold down jobs, and care for parents or children. The median age is 26.[2]

Our open-access colleges serve students for whom a college credential can make the biggest change in the trajectory of their lives and who represent the fastest growing populations in our state. Our students also face some of the biggest barriers to college and the steepest climbs to economic security. How well we serve students in our rapidly changing world will shape the well-being of Washington's families, communities, and businesses now and in the future.

For a map of our colleges, please see Appendix A.

Our Vision

This strategic plan aligns with a vision statement approved by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges in June 2019:

> *Leading with racial equity, our colleges maximize student potential and transform lives within a culture of belonging that advances racial, social, and economic justice in service to our diverse communities.*

Washington's community and technical colleges are gateways to higher education and drivers of social mobility for all Washingtonians, especially people of color. However, State Board research shows our college system is underserving Black and Brown students, even though students of color make up half of our student population systemwide.[3]

We aspire to be anti-racist institutions where all students achieve the dreams that brought them to us. We aim to increase the number of students of color who enroll in programs that lead to high-paying careers, complete required math and English courses in their first year, graduate, and enter the workforce or transfer to universities. These are just a few of the metrics that will support an increase in future earnings and civic engagement, reduce health disparities, and generate wealth to pass to future generations.

Our college system has a responsibility to dismantle its own structural racism and, in doing so, remove entrenched barriers that affect all students who have been impacted by interlocking systems of oppression. Our dedication to equity is not limited to race, but also includes ethnicity, economic status, gender identity, sexual identity, disability, religion/spirituality, immigration status, place of residence, age, and culture.

The Role of the State Board

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is comprised of nine members who are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Washington state Senate. The board provides leadership, coordination, and support to optimize the work of Washington's 34 community and technical colleges. With support from state office staff, the board:

- Provides state-level planning and leadership.

- Sets policies for the college system.

- Convenes colleges to promote best practices, share innovations and facilitate systemwide change.

- Strategically analyzes data from all 34 colleges to track student progress, identify trends, discover strengths and weaknesses, and distribute resources.

- Advocates for Washington's community and technical college system by, among other things, preparing single operating and capital budget requests to the Legislature and allocating funds to college districts.

- Supports the ongoing maintenance and optimization of ctcLink centralized software programs to strengthen student services, human resources, and financial management across all 34 colleges.

How This Plan Was Developed

This updated strategic plan was created with input from State Board members, trustees, chancellors, presidents, college system educational professionals, and external stakeholders. Surveys of Washington community and technical college students were also reviewed during the process.

A Word About Resources

While this strategic plan is aspirational, the State Board acknowledges that limited resources may require prioritization, trade-offs and flexibility in the pursuit of our goals and objectives.

Local and National Trends

The following overview of local and national trends is based on research and insights from experts within, and outside of, the community and technical college system.

- By 2026, Washington employers are expected to create 373,000 net new jobs, 70% of which will likely require or be filled by employees with a postsecondary credential — such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate.

- Washington state is becoming much more racially and ethnically diverse, which makes closing equity gaps all the more urgent.

- COVID-19 exacerbated access and economic insecurity issues for students of color and low-income students and widened the digital divide.

- Students struggle to pay for housing, food, childcare, and other basic needs. Many also need behavioral health supports. These barriers affect students' ability to remain in school.

- The nature of work is changing quickly, with greater use of new technologies, automation, artificial intelligence, and big data. Colleges will need to adapt to adequately prepare students for the modern and emerging workplace.

- Today's learners want a customizable educational experience that allows them to quickly secure career-relevant skills and decide what, when, and where they learn. Colleges face increased outside competition from for-profit and nontraditional institutions that can meet these demands by, among other things, offering competency-based education, credit for prior learning, online options, noncredit offerings, and short-term credentials that can apply to longer-term degrees.

- Many Washingtonians recognize the value of a high-quality credential but want assurance it will pay off in the end. Affordability is not the only issue; so, too, is the credential's value in the work world, especially given the financial and personal sacrifices they make to enroll and graduate.

- FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completion rates in our state are too low and the lowest income families are less likely to complete the application.

- Jobs requiring a college credential will grow faster than the population of high school graduates. To fill workforce needs, colleges must serve more adults beyond the traditional 18- to 24-year-old demographic.

- Colleges face profound financial and human resource pressures that will only become more challenging due to demographic changes.

For further explanation and sources, please see Appendix B.

Overview of Focus Areas and Goals

As detailed in the following pages, this strategic plan focuses on three areas: equitable student success; agile, career-relevant learning; and institutional financial health.

Equitable Student Success	**Goal 1:** Increase access and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college. This includes young adults, working adults, low-income people, people of color, immigrants and refugees, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, rural residents, and single parents. We must be intentional in eliminating inequities in college access and retention for students institutionally marginalized in higher education.
	Goal 2: Improve completion and transfer rates for all enrolled students across all types of programs and credentials — workforce degrees, transfer degrees, certificates, apprenticeships, and bachelor's degrees. We aim to improve completion rates across-the-board for all students and to improve completion rates faster for students of color. Students must also receive necessary guidance and support about how to efficiently transfer to continue their educational journeys.
Agile, Career-Relevant Learning	**Goal 3:** Provide flexible career-training options that are responsive to the needs of businesses and industries, offer Washingtonians access to well-paying jobs and career mobility, and lead to a more resilient and diverse workforce.
Institutional Financial Health	**Goal 4:** Secure resources and develop systemwide strategies to support colleges' financial sustainability and resiliency.

Goal 1: Increase access and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college. This includes young adults, working adults, low-income people, people of color, immigrants and refugees, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, rural residents, and single parents. We must be intentional in eliminating inequities in college access and retention for students institutionally marginalized in higher education.

Objective 1.1: Enroll more diverse students of all ages and backgrounds in our colleges, increasing their access to higher levels of education, higher salaries, and greater financial security.

Strategy 1.1.1: Work with Washington's public and private nonprofit baccalaureate partners, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and nonprofit and community-based organizations on strategies to increase the number of Washingtonians who know about the Washington College Grant and complete either the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid).

Strategy 1.1.2: Work with colleges and K-12 schools to increase participation in the wide variety of dual-credit programs for all students but especially under-represented students of color.

Strategy 1.1.3: Work with colleges to transition more basic skills students into college-level programs with full and strategic use of state and federal financial aid. Improve colleges' understanding and use of the Ability to Benefit option, which is a way for people without a high school diploma to apply for financial aid at both the state and federal levels.

Strategy 1.1.4: Identify and support the adoption of innovative course-sharing technology tools to expand student access to academic and technical programs.

Strategy 1.1.5: Provide guidance to help colleges implement universal design as a means to enhance learning and accessibility.

Objective 1.2: Recognizing that student success depends on the quality of college employees, support colleges in their efforts to attract and retain expert and diverse faculty and staff.

Strategy 1.2.1: Provide data and convene colleges to identify best practices to increase diversity across the ranks of faculty, staff, and senior leadership. Students must see themselves in the people who teach and serve them.

Strategy 1.2.2: Develop a ladder of professional development opportunities that lead to equity-minded leadership positions across our college system. Draw from employees at all levels, from frontline staff to aspiring mid- and senior-level college administrators. As part of this effort, provide training opportunities to help colleges respond to the needs of Black and Brown leadership, adapt to societal challenges, and advance respect for human dignity.

Strategy 1.2.3: Provide systemwide training and collaboration to help faculty and staff achieve their goals within a culture of focused excellence, innovation, and belonging.

Strategy 1.2.4: Provide training to help faculty use student-centered, culturally-responsive and anti-racist pedagogies. Additionally, ensure professional-technical faculty possess diversity, equity and inclusion competencies as required by the college system's updated edition of "Skill Standards for Professional-Technical College Instructors."

Strategy 1.2.5: Help facilitate the intentional recruitment and hiring of Tribal liaisons, Indigenous faculty and First Peoples oral language and culture instructors to create shared teaching and learning environments for students while strengthening government-to-government relationships between Tribes and colleges.

Objective 1.3: Implement actions and policies that produce equitable outcomes.

Strategy 1.3.1: Work with colleges to eliminate inequities in post-enrollment outcomes, including wage, employment, and educational transitions. Using the successful Guided Pathways framework, work with colleges to ensure students of color are equally represented in programs that either result in sought-after skills and higher wages or successful transfer to a university.

Strategy 1.3.2: Use and enhance existing data and reporting systems to create a holistic, representative understanding of racial inequities within our college system and help colleges take effective action.

Strategy 1.3.3: Develop and broadly share a resource bank of best practices in the areas of student services, curricula, hiring, and employment, including guidance on equity audits.

Strategy 1.3.4: Engage college system leaders in government-to-government relationships with Washington's 29 federally recognized Tribes to provide professional training, curriculum development, faculty learning communities, and resources in support of students.

Objective 1.4: Use state-of-the-art online learning tools to enable students to better balance work, college, and life.

Strategy 1.4.1: Help colleges identify the demand for, and outcomes of, various delivery models — such as in person, hybrid, and HyFlex — across our college system and the nation, including both synchronous and asynchronous options. Disaggregate data to identify inequities. (HyFlex classes are delivered both in person and online at the same time by the same faculty member, allowing students to choose to learn in-class or online on any given day.)

Strategy 1.4.2: In recognition that online classes require additional skills beyond those typically required for classroom instruction, provide training to help college faculty teach online classes effectively and equitably. Encourage colleges to help students discover whether they learn better in person or online.

Strategy 1.4.3: Support colleges in bridging the digital divide between students with sufficient knowledge of, and access to, technology and those without.

Strategy 1.4.4: Expand college and student access to open educational resources, including helping colleges overcome barriers caused by third-party vendors.

Objective 1.5: Promote college actions to help meet students' basic needs, including housing, food, child care, and mental health services.

- Strategy 1.5.1: Encourage colleges to participate in regular surveys to measure the causes and prevalence of students' basic needs.
- Strategy 1.5.2: Provide data, insight, and best practices to help colleges deliver, or connect students with, wraparound services and basic needs assistance.

Goal 2: Improve completion and transfer rates for all enrolled students across all types of programs and credentials — workforce degrees, transfer degrees, certificates, apprenticeships, and bachelor's degrees. We aim to improve completion rates across-the-board for all students and to improve completion rates faster for students of color. Students must also receive necessary guidance and support about how to efficiently transfer to continue their educational journeys.

Objective 2.1: Implement research-based strategies that are proven to improve completion rates for all students.

Strategy 2.1.1: Support colleges in implementing the successful Guided Pathways framework as a means to ensure students who enter our college system receive the proper supports that guide them, in a structured manner, through completion and into careers and universities.

- Develop effective partnerships with industry associations, labor organizations, and Tribal enterprises to ensure pathways align to the skills required by employers.

- Ensure that every career pathway — including those in the health care and STEM fields — reflects the full range of relevant credentials offered at the college, such as certificates, workforce degrees, university-transfer degrees, bachelor's degrees and apprenticeships. This enables students to see the broad horizon of professional opportunities in the field and how credentials align with certain careers.

- Research and share data, insights, and best practices to help colleges identify and eliminate barriers for student access and success.

- Identify accountability metrics for college implementation focused on increasing student completions across student demographics.

Objective 2.2: Strengthen and expand transfer pathways with four-year institutions.

Strategy 2.2.1: Continue to inform prospective students about the Direct Transfer Agreement, Major Related Programs, and reverse transfer opportunities.

Strategy 2.2.2: Explore additional transfer partnerships with in-state four-year colleges and universities.

Strategy 2.2.3: Help colleges ensure transfer students receive relevant advising, mentorship, and career guidance.

Strategy 2.2.4: Support academic credit for prior learning efforts to shorten time to credential.

Strategy 2.2.5: Enhance and improve transfer opportunities and outcomes for underserved and marginalized students.

Strategy 2.2.6: Research the success of transfer students at four-year colleges and universities.

Equitable student success metrics

- Enrollment by headcount, FTE, and program type.

- Students enrolled in dual-credit programs.

- Momentum metrics (year 1 math and English completion, first-to-second quarter retention, basic education to college-level transition, and dual-credit to college transition).

- Quarter-to-quarter retention (persistence) rates.

- Annual completion (graduation) rates.

- Annual transfer rates.

- Annual completion plus transfer rates.

- Community and technical college system's share of first-time credentials awarded.

- Ratio of faculty and staff of color to students of color.

- Prevalence of, and success rates in, course modalities.

- Number of community and technical college students who identify with a food/housing need and how many individual students were served.

- Washington state progress toward achieving statewide goal that at least 70% of adults ages 25 to 44 in Washington have a postsecondary credential (according to the Washington Student Achievement Council).

- FAFSA completion rates.

All metrics to be disaggregated by race and other factors related to this strategic plan. See Appendix C for more detailed information about these metrics, including a report-out schedule to the State Board.

AGILE, CAREER-RELEVANT LEARNING

Goal 3: Provide flexible career-training options that are responsive to the needs of businesses and industries, offer Washingtonians access to well-paying jobs and career mobility, and lead to a more resilient and diverse workforce.

Objective 3.1: Respond quickly to the changing needs of students, businesses, and the economy.

Strategy 3.1.1: In partnership with business and industry, provide insight and data to help colleges anticipate workforce needs and provide programs that lead to family-wage careers and upward mobility. Attention will be paid to partnerships with businesses owned by people of color.

Strategy 3.1.2: Enable parents, students, K-12 schools, businesses, and employers to more easily identify which programs are offered across Washington's 34 community and technical colleges.

Strategy 3.1.3: Partnering with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, strengthen opportunities for high school students to complete industry-recognized credentials and/or earn career-technical education credits that apply both toward high school graduation and a college workforce credential.

Strategy 3.1.4: Expand access to college programs that reskill and upskill displaced and incumbent workers, including the Customized Training Program, the Job Skills Program, the Worker Retraining Program, registered apprenticeships, continuing education classes, and the Early Achievers Grant.

Strategy 3.1.5: Support colleges in offering a variety of course modalities and schedules, including online, evening, weekend, and workplace-based options to help students balance college, work, and family obligations. Facilitate partnerships that allow colleges to offer face-to-face classes at offsite locations.

Strategy 3.1.6: Shorten students' time to a credential by supporting alternatives to seat-based instruction, including credit for prior learning and competency-based programs.

Strategy 3.1.7: In partnership with the Washington State Employment Security Department, track student wages, hours, wage progression, retention, and advancement after leaving college.

Strategy 3.1.8: Through formal relationships with Washington's 29 federally recognized Tribes, collaboratively support Tribes' economic, environmental, workforce, and higher education needs to support fast-growing Tribal industries.

Objective 3.2: In collaboration with colleges, help expand Washingtonians' access to quick, fast-track credentials with value in the marketplace.

- Strategy 3.2.1: With industry partners, help colleges create more flexible, short-term credentials that provide immediate value in their own right but also count toward a longer certificate or degree.

- Strategy 3.2.2: Working with colleges and employers, identify ways to encourage workers who have short-term credentials to build up to higher-level certificates and degrees in order to increase skills and earning potential. This strategy also applies to workers who may not have short-term credentials, but do have credit for prior learning (credits that have been awarded for validated skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom).

Objective 3.3: Support colleges in establishing work-based learning opportunities.

Strategy 3.3.1: In partnership with industry and labor organizations, provide assistance in expanding internships, registered apprenticeships, collaborative learning experiences, and employer-sponsored training across Washington.

Strategy 3.3.2: Offer technical assistance to help colleges expand their role in providing the classroom-based instruction element of apprenticeship programs and to ensure — where feasible — those classes confer credits and appear on college transcripts. Additionally, support colleges in offering resources for apprentices.

Strategy 3.3.3: Expand knowledge of, and participation in, internships and other workplace-based learning opportunities offered by Washington's 29 federally recognized Tribes.

Agile, career-relevant learning metrics

- Number of students applying their dual credit career-technical education credits at community and technical colleges and the number of those credits that are applied to community and technical college transcripts.

- Number of students participating in work-based learning.

- Employment rates 18 months after exit (by starting cohort).

- Median earnings (by starting cohort) by career cluster and within in-demand occupations.

- Time to credential in workforce programs.

- Enrollments in workforce program by modality, location, and delivery method.

- Conversion of short-term (one year or less) certificates to higher awards (degrees).

All metrics to be disaggregated by race and other factors related to this strategic plan. See Appendix D for more detailed information about these metrics, including a report-out schedule to the State Board.

Goal 4: Secure resources and develop systemwide strategies to support colleges' financial sustainability and resiliency.

Objective 4.1: Identify forward-looking collaborative strategies that lead to better funding, efficiencies, and savings across Washington's community and technical college system.

Strategy 4.1.1: Expand college access to, and knowledge of, local, state, and federal-level grant opportunities.

Strategy 4.1.2: Build, remodel, and renovate facilities to support teaching and learning spaces that are high-quality and technologically equipped.

Strategy 4.1.3: Identify existing and potential funding strategies to expand and adapt programs for the growing needs of our students.

Strategy 4.1.4: Establish college financial health and stability indicators.

Strategy 4.1.5: Convey to the Legislature the scope and depth of financial stressors on colleges and the impacts of insufficient funding, unfunded mandates, and restrictive provisos.

Strategy 4.1.6: Advocate for the Legislature to provide fully-funded COLAs and pay raises for faculty and staff, who earn less than their peers in comparable states, K-12 education, and the private sector.

Objective 4.2: Support process improvements both within the SBCTC office and within colleges.

Strategy 4.2.1: Support organizational development, change management, and process improvement to ensure policies and processes are relevant, aligned, efficient, and equitable.

Objective 4.3: Strengthen advocacy and community partnerships.

Strategy 4.3.1: Hold the 2019 vision statement at the core of the college system's advocacy work.

Strategy 4.3.2: Continue to build upon and implement the system's strategic advocacy and messaging plan.

Strategy 4.3.3: Continue to engage more people within our college system in advocacy and outreach efforts, including State Board members, trustees, chancellors and presidents, faculty and staff, and student leaders.

Strategy 4.4.4: Create wider partnerships and alliances with the organizations and people we serve: communities of color, business associations, labor organizations, Tribal governments, nonprofit and community organizations, K-12 schools, and four-year colleges and universities. These connections will help ensure we respond to the emerging needs of our students and the employers who hire them.

Strategy 4.4.5: Build and strengthen relations with other state government agencies, the Legislature, Governor's Office, Tribes, and federally and locally elected officials.

Institutional financial health metrics

- Operating funds cash and investments as a percent of operating funds expenditures.

- Operating revenue as a percent of debt.

- Local fund operating margin.

- Tuition (net of waivers) per FTE.

- For the State Board agency process improvement objective: Consider establishing performance metrics in line with Performance Excellence Northwest and/or the Washington State Quality Awards.

- For the advocacy and community partnerships objective: Track progress toward reaching the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework.

All metrics to be disaggregated by race and other factors related to this strategic plan. See Appendix E for more detailed information about these metrics, including a report-out schedule to the State Board.

Appendices

Appendix A: Map of Colleges

1 — Bates Technical College	13 — Green River College	25 — Skagit Valley College
2 — Bellevue College	14 — Highline College	26 — South Puget Sound Community College
3 — Bellingham Technical College	15 — Lake Washington Institute of Technology	27 — South Seattle College
4 — Big Bend Community College	16 — Lower Columbia College	28 — Spokane Community College
5 — Cascadia College	17 — North Seattle College	29 — Spokane Falls Community College
6 — Centralia College	18 — Olympic College	30 — Tacoma Community College
7 — Clark College	19 — Peninsula College	31 — Walla Walla Community College
8 — Clover Park Technical College	20 — Pierce College Fort Steilacoom	32 — Wenatchee Valley College
9 — Columbia Basin College	21 — Pierce College Puyallup	33 — Whatcom Community College
10 — Edmonds College	22 — Renton Technical College	34 — Yakima Valley College
11 — Everett Community College	23 — Seattle Central College	
12 — Grays Harbor College	24 — Shoreline Community College	

Appendix B: Environmental Scan – Local and National Trends

In the future, most jobs will require a postsecondary credential

By 2026, employers are expected to create 373,000 net new jobs, 70% of which will likely require or be filled by employees with a postsecondary credential — such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate.[4]

Washington state is becoming more diverse

According to the U.S. Census, Washington's diversity index was 45.4% in 2010 and jumped to 55.9% in 2020. This means that there is a 56% chance that two people picked at random in Washington state would be from two different races or ethnicities. To put this in perspective, a number closer to 100% would mean that nearly everyone in a population had different racial and ethnic characteristics.[5]

In 2021, nearly 2.3 million Washingtonians — 30% of the state's population — were either immigrants or had a parent who was an immigrant. This places our state among the top quarter of all states with a foreign-born population.[6]

As of July 1, 2022, people of color represented 34% of Washington state's total population[7] and about 50% of community and technical college students.[8]

Immigrant-origin students represent 80% of the overall increase in U.S. higher education enrollment between 2000 and 2021.[9]

COVID-19 exacerbated access and economic insecurity issues for students of color and low-income students

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted college students worldwide, but its effects were, and continue to be, particularly devastating for people of color and those from low-income backgrounds.

The widespread shift to remote learning exacerbated a digital divide between students who have access to modern information and communications technology and those who do not. Washington state generally has higher rates of digital access for students than the national average, but there are significant disparities based on household income and geographic region.

In general, Washington students of color, students with lower household incomes, and students living in more rural areas have lower rates of access to digital tools at home.[10] This lack of digital connectivity affects students' ability to succeed in college, apply for jobs, and access important benefits.

Additionally, many community and technical college students who work in care and service industries — such as assisted living, restaurants, retail, and hospitality — were, and continue to be, vulnerable to job loss and decreased wages. Workers of color are disproportionately employed in these industries.[11]

Students are struggling to meet basic needs

In September 2022, more than 9,700 students from 39 colleges and universities across Washington state participated in the first statewide postsecondary basic needs survey conducted by the Washington Student Achievement Council and Western Washington University. Key findings show stark challenges for many Washington students:

- 38% of students experienced food insecurity in the prior month.

- 34% of students experienced housing insecurity in the prior year.

- 11% of students experienced homelessness in the prior year.

- 49% of students experienced either food or housing insecurity.

- Some student groups were disparately impacted by basic needs insecurity: American Indian/ Alaska Native students and Black students reported experiencing basic needs insecurity at rates 20 percentage points higher than white students.

- Of those needing childcare, two out of three students were unable to afford it.[12]

These findings align with a February 2020 report that found six out of 10 Washington community or technical college students responding to a survey had experienced hunger or housing insecurity over the preceding year, even though most of them worked. In the fall of 2019, nearly 13,550 students from 28 community and technical colleges participated in the #RealCollege Survey from the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple University in Philadelphia.[13]

College students are struggling with mental health issues

In a June 2020 survey by the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. adults reported considerably worse mental health conditions due to COVID-19. Younger adults, racially and ethnically diverse populations, essential workers, and unpaid adult caregivers reported having experienced disproportionately worse mental health outcomes, increased substance use, and increased thoughts of suicide.[14]

Yet mental health services can be hard to find and difficult to afford. According to a September 2022 report by the Washington Student Achievement Council and Western Washington University, 37.6% of Washington college and university students surveyed reported unreliable access to mental/behavioral health services over the preceding year.[15]

There is a direct correlation between mental health and success in college. A 2012 report by the National Alliance on Mental Illness found that among students who dropped out of college, 64% said it was related to their mental health.[16]

The nature of work is changing quickly

The nature of work is changing quickly, with greater use of new technologies, automation, artificial intelligence and "big data."[17] A report by Burning Glass Technologies, a national labor market data firm, stated that the changes from the pandemic "have been so profound that fundamental patterns of how we work, produce, move, and sell will never be the same." The 2021 report predicted five economic patterns that will lead the way as our nation recovers from the pandemic. The following descriptions are excerpted directly from the public report by Burning Glass Technologies:

- **"The Readiness Economy.** The pandemic has shown the weaknesses in health care, cybersecurity, insurance, and a range of other fields that provide social resilience. Roles like cybersecurity experts and software engineers will be in demand, but so will project managers and other organizers of work.

- **"The Logistics Economy.** Anyone who tried to buy a roll of toilet paper in the spring of 2020 knows how supply chains failed under the sudden new demands of the pandemic. Besides new demand for advanced logistics skills, there will likely also be growth in advanced manufacturing, and the Internet of Things will become more critical to creating chains that are both efficient and resilient.

- **"The Green Economy.** Even before the Biden administration's new emphasis on climate policy, the nation's energy system was slowly but steadily shifting to renewables. Ambitious climate goals and incentives are likely to speed the shift.

- **"The Remote Economy.** In at least some fields and roles, the shift to remote work forced by the pandemic is likely to be permanent. A growing dependence on data, software, and networks will drive change, while eventually artificial and virtual reality will play a larger role.

- **"The Automated Economy.** The pandemic won't slow down the adoption of automation and artificial intelligence — if anything it will accelerate the trend. Employers will prioritize automation over hiring back low-value workers. Jobs developing — and driving — automation will thrive."[18]

Modern learners want a customizable experience with a direct tie to income

Today's students want the flexibility to master a customized set of skills that are high value and work relevant. They also want to learn in different ways — online, in person, and hybrid — and at flexible times to accommodate work and family responsibilities.

In their book, "The Great Upheaval: Higher Education's Past, Present and Uncertain Future," authors Arthur Levine and Scott Van Pelt point out that community and technical colleges face increasing outside competition from for-profit and nontraditional institutions that are meeting these demands. These competitors include private businesses, free online courses, and online universities with a competitive, nationwide reach.

The two authors imagine "knowledge age" colleges that are learner centered, outcome based and time-independent, offering a host certificates and credentials grounded in both the "library and the street" — in other words, that teach students both soft and hard skills and attest to job-specific competencies.[19]

In a 2022 survey of high school graduates aged 18 to 30, including in Washington state, respondents had taken advantage of multiple avenues for learning outside of a college or university and saw great utility in doing so. More specifically, almost half (47%) indicated they had taken or were currently taking classes via YouTube, and approximately one-quarter had taken or were currently enrolled in courses to receive a license (25%) or to receive a verified certificate (22%). The research was conducted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in partnership with Edge Research and HCM Strategists.[20]

Many Washingtonians recognize the value of a credential, provided it will pay off in the long run

A 2021 survey of Washington adults suggests that while some do not see the need to get additional education, most see higher education as valuable, but face cost barriers and other obstacles. The survey targeted Washington adults, largely under the age of 35, who had not completed education or training beyond high school. The research was conducted in a partnership with the Washington Roundtable, the Partnership for Learning (the educational foundation of the Washington Roundtable), and Kinetic West. Published in December 2022, the results found that respondents:

1. Recognize the value of postsecondary education and believe they would be better off with a credential.

2. Most frequently cite cost as a barrier to postsecondary attendance.

3. Want access to more hands-on postsecondary learning and opportunities to earn money while they learn.

4. Desire more flexibility in how and when they could access postsecondary education, and want to be able to move through credentialing programs more quickly.[21]

In a presentation on this report, it was explained that "cost" also refers to lost income and the need to work to financially support others. Additionally, respondents thought of a college credential as transactional; they wanted access to programs clearly connected to jobs.[22]

A separate survey conducted in 2022 — this time a national survey of younger people ages 18 to 30 — had similar findings: Respondents were worried about the cost and wanted assurance they would see both social and economic returns on their investments. The survey included high school graduates in seven states (California, Florida, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington) who decided not to go to college or who dropped out. The research was conducted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in partnership with Edge Research and HCM Strategists.

Students in this survey were concerned about college costs — not just in terms of whether they could afford it, but whether all their investments of time, effort, and money would pay off in the end. Many were worried about disrupting their livelihoods to attend college, especially those who were already working.[23]

FAFSA completion rates are low

Although Washington has one of the best state student financial aid programs in the nation, our state ranked #42 in FAFSA completion rates nationally (as of April 2023).[24] For the class of 2022, males and nonbinary individuals were significantly less likely to complete the FAFSA than females. High school students from lower-income families (those who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch) were about 10 percentage points less likely to complete the FAFSA than students from families who earned above the lunch-assistance threshold.[25]

The population of high school graduates will stay flat

According to a 2020 report by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Washington's supply of high school graduates is expected to stay flat between 2026 and 2037.[26] While Washington's high school completion rates have gone up, the population of high-school-aged students dropped overall due to lower birth rates during the Great Recession.

At the same time, Washington's economy is expected to grow. By 2026, employers are expected to create 373,000 net new jobs, 70% of which will likely require or be filled by employees with a postsecondary credential — such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate.[27] To meet workforce needs, Washington state will need to retain, enroll, and graduate more adult college students.

Colleges face financial and staffing pressures

Washington's community and technical colleges are facing a perfect storm of funding and staffing challenges:

- Lower enrollments due to COVID-19 disruptions (a national trend for community and technical colleges).

- Competition for talent, not only from other educational entities, but from the industries our colleges serve. Faculty and staff often earn more working within an industry itself rather than at a college.

- Increasing costs for workforce programs due to the rising costs of consumable materials, the need to replace aging equipment, and overall inflation.

- Students' increasing need for support services, such as mental health services, and help with basic needs such as food, housing and child care.

- The sunsetting of federal emergency relief funds that helped colleges pull through the worst of the pandemic. The pandemic itself may be over, but the ramifications on higher education are not.[28]

Appendix C: Equitable Student Success Metrics

Metric and month reported to the State Board

Enrollment by headcount, FTE, and program type
- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for fall quarter)
- May (for winter quarter)

Quarter-to-quarter retention (persistence) rates
- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Annual completion (graduation) rates (total and also disaggregated by certificate, associate, and bachelor's degrees)
- October only (for prior year)

Annual transfer rates
- April (for fall quarter)

Annual completion plus transfer rates. This metric, based on student cohorts, represents completion of certificates and degrees, transfer with or without a credential, and completion plus transfer.
- February (preliminary for prior year)
- April (final for prior year)

Momentum metrics (year 1 math and English completion, first-to-second quarter retention, basic education to college-level transition, and dual-credit to college transition)
- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Students enrolled in dual-credit programs (total and disaggregated by institutionally marginalized students and by type of dual credit program)
- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Number of community and technical college students who identify with a food/housing need, based on Washington Student Achievement Council surveys, compared to how many individual students were served (data drawn from ctcLink with colleges' permission)

- December for previous year

Ratio of contract faculty and staff of color to students of color

- October for prior year
    - Adjunct faculty to be included in ratio as a "point in time" reference quarterly: August, February and May

Prevalence of, and success rates in, course modalities

- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Progress toward statewide goal that 70% of adults ages 25 to 44 in Washington have a postsecondary credential

- November/December for previous year

FAFSA completion rates

- Monthly
- Comparing against the same month in the prior year

Community and technical college system's share of first-time credentials awarded

- January or February for prior year

All metrics to be disaggregated by race and other factors related to this strategic plan.

Appendix D: Agile, Career-Relevant Learning Metrics

Metric and month reported to the State Board

Number of students applying their dual credit career-technical education credits at community and technical colleges and the number of those credits that are applied to community and technical college transcripts

- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Students participating in work-based learning (including healthcare placements)

- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Employment rates 18 months after exit, disaggregated by length of credential, by race, and by career cluster. Based on student cohorts.

- January every year

Median earnings by career cluster and in-demand occupations. Based on student cohorts.

- January every year

Time to credential in workforce programs

- February for fall quarter of prior year

Enrollments in workforce program by modality, location, and delivery method

- August (for annual and spring quarter)
- February (for summer and fall quarters)
- May (for winter quarter)

Conversion of short-term (one year or less) certificates to higher awards (degrees)

- February for fall quarter of prior year

All metrics to be disaggregated by race and other factors related to this strategic plan.

Appendix E: Institutional Financial Health Metrics

Metric and month reported to the State Board

Operating funds cash and investments as a percent of operating funds expenditures

- February for the prior year

Operating revenue as a percent of debt

- February for the prior year

Local fund operating margin

- February for the prior year

Tuition (net of waivers) per FTE

- February for the prior year

For the State Board agency process improvement objective: Consider establishing performance metrics in line with Performance Excellence Northwest and/or the Washington State Quality Awards.
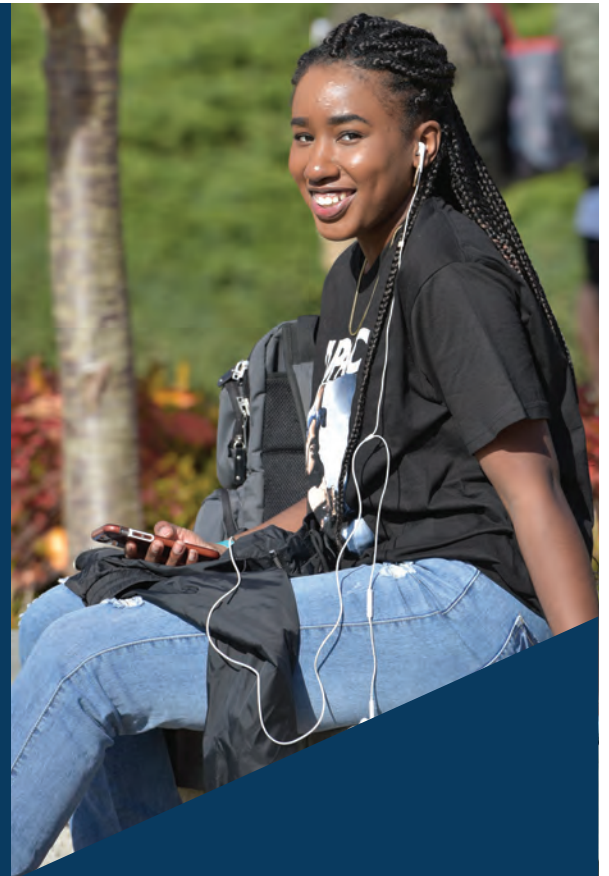
For the advocacy and community partnerships objective: Track progress toward reaching the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework.

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