



# **REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ENGROSSED SUBSTITUTE HB 2158**

**Guided Pathways Implementation**

***DECEMBER 20, 2024***

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# Executive Summary

Since 2019, Washington’s community and technical colleges have used state investments from the Workforce Education Investment Act to implement Guided Pathways — an evidence-based framework designed to increase completion, close equity gaps, and better prepare students for in-demand jobs. This legislative report highlights the progress made and ongoing challenges colleges face in creating structured, student-centered educational experiences. Early indicators show improved math completion, growing credit accumulation among early adopter colleges, and notable retention gains for historically underserved students of color. Colleges aligned Guided Pathways priorities with equity-focused professional development, instructional redesign, integrated advising, and robust career exploration to ensure students are supported throughout their educational journeys. While completion results remain forthcoming, the steady advancement of data-informed practices, mandatory advising models, and inclusive teaching approaches point toward a more equitable and effective postsecondary ecosystem.

## Introduction

The Workforce Education Investment Act established a transformative agenda for Washington’s community and technical colleges, focusing on Guided Pathways to improve student success and meet the state’s workforce needs. Guided Pathways refines every aspect of the student experience — from onboarding to choosing a meta-major and completing key foundational courses — ensuring that all learners, particularly those from historically underserved backgrounds, receive structured, personalized, and culturally responsive support. Over the past year, colleges continued to invest in professional development, data and technology integration, and cross-campus collaborations to scale and sustain these reforms. As colleges gain experience and data insight, the system is turning early successes into long-term strategies that can consistently yield improved student outcomes.

This report details the activities, outcomes, and lessons learned as colleges implement Guided Pathways reforms. It examines the shifts in advising, first-year course completion, retention rates, and instructional practices resulting from this work. The goal is to provide legislators with a clear view of how state investments are shaping campus operations, fostering equity, and contributing to students’ academic and career success. By documenting both progress and remaining challenges, this report informs ongoing policy decisions and supports continuous improvement throughout the state’s community and technical college system.

Implementing Guided Pathways reforms takes several years to yield measurable improvements in key student outcomes such as credit accumulation, retention, and completion of math and English in the first year. While it is still too early to attribute changes in completion rates directly to these efforts, early trends suggest positive impacts on math achievement and retention, particularly for historically underserved students of color.

# Background

Approved by the Legislature in 2019, Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2158 introduced a critical investment in postsecondary education by supporting the implementation of Guided Pathways across all 34 Washington community and technical colleges. The bill, titled the “Workforce Education Investment Act,” supports economic and workforce development by preparing “Washington students for Washington jobs.”

A strategy to increase student completion rates and close equity gaps, Guided Pathways is a student-centered framework designed to increase and diversify the students and communities accessing and earning high-value credentials. The systemic approach focuses on the development of transparent, clearly structured educational career pathways that effectively support each student from aspiration (deciding on a career pathway) to completion of a high-quality postsecondary credential resulting in a family sustaining career that meets the state’s workforce demands.

Guided Pathways is an evidence-based reform effort designed to improve access and credential attainment to meet the workforce demands in the coming decade. Investments support colleges’ work to improve advising, technology integration, data analytics, and curricular redesign to build clear pathways from K-12 to employment or university transfer.

## Elements of Guided Pathways

Guided Pathways is a research-based approach that provides clear, structured, educational experiences for students with four elements: Clarify paths to students’ end goals, help students choose and enter a pathway, help students stay on path, and ensure that students are learning.

Guided Pathways implementation includes:

1. Comprehensive mapping of student educational pathways with student end goals in mind. These must include transparent and clear career paths that are tightly aligned to the skills sought by employers. Pathways must align course sequences to show clear paths for students, alignment with K-12 and university curriculum, and skill sets needed to enter the workforce.
2. Dedicated advising and career counseling that helps students make informed program choices and develop completion plans. Advising services may include processes that help students explore possible career and educational choices while also emphasizing early planning. Advising must be culturally competent and with an emphasis on helping historically underserved, low-income, and students of color navigate their education.
3. Data analysis of student learning as well as program and service outcomes. Data must be used to inform program development, the creation and further refinement of student pathways, and to provide opportunities for early intervention to help students succeed.
4. A student success support infrastructure using programs that the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges finds have been effective in closing equity gaps among historically underserved student populations and improve student completion rates. The student success support program must be based on research or documented evidence of success.

In tandem with Guided Pathways implementation, student success support programs may include evidence-based elements such as:

- A. equity competent academic advising services.
- B. equity competent career development programming.
- C. clear information regarding financial aid and financial literacy.
- D. inclusive curriculum and teaching practices.

## History of funding

2016: “Early adopter” colleges began planning with grant funding from College Spark Washington: Everett Community College, Peninsula College, Pierce College, Skagit Valley College, South Puget Sound Community College, and South Seattle College.

2017 and 2018: With a \$3 million investment (\$1.5 million per year) in the 2017-19 biennial budget, the early adopter colleges – as well as Clark College, Clover Park Technical College, Lower Columbia College, Renton Technical College, Spokane Falls Community College, and Tacoma Community College – received \$100,000 in Guided Pathways planning grants. The State Board established the Student Success Center to coordinate college activities.

2019: With an additional \$2 million from the Workforce Education Investment Act all remaining colleges received \$100,000 planning grants: Bates Technical College, Bellevue College, Bellingham Technical College, Big Bend Community College, Cascadia College, Centralia College, Columbia Basin College, Edmonds College, Grays Harbor College, Green River College, Highline College, Lake Washington Institute of Technology, North Seattle College, Olympic College, Seattle Central College, Shoreline Community College, Spokane Community College, Walla Walla Community College, Wenatchee Valley College, Whatcom Community College, and Yakima Valley College.

2020: With a \$31 million investment from the Workforce Education Investment Act, all colleges received initial implementation funding in 2020.

2021 and 2022: In the 2021-23 biennial budget, the Legislature invested \$75.8 million through the Workforce Education Investment Act to fulfill commitments made in 2019.

2023: Colleges received \$40.4 million to continue the planning, implementation, and scaling of Guided Pathways practices.

2024: Colleges received \$40.7million to continue the planning, implementation, scaling, institutionalization, and continuous improvement of Guided Pathways practices.

## National recognition

The Guided Pathways efforts in Washington were included in two national research studies published by the Community College Research Center in 2023 ([Whole-College Reforms in Community Colleges: Guided Pathways Practices and Early Academic Success in Three States](#) and [Innovating at Scale: Guided Pathways Adoption and Early Student Momentum Among the AACC Pathways Colleges](#)). The article [A Deeper Look at Guided Pathways](#), published in Inside Higher Ed, a national higher education-focused trade publication, explores the studies, noting that reforms take time to implement and the outcomes are not immediately evident. In addition, the Washington Institute of Public Policy published [Guided Pathways: Preliminary Report on Implementation and Student Outcomes](#), providing a deep qualitative analysis of the work Washington's community and technical colleges have undergone in their implementation of Guided Pathways practices.

## Legislation Implementation

The implementation of Guided Pathways legislation demands a cross-functional and collaborative approach that fosters transformative change across colleges. This work is rooted in reimagining how institutions align their systems, processes, and practices to better serve students. Colleges have focused their efforts on building career pathways and developing clear program maps, creating robust career and academic exploration opportunities, enhancing advising and educational planning, and improving progress monitoring. Through a commitment to teaching and learning innovation and the strategic use of data analytics — leveraged through student success software and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems — institutions are driving systemic change to improve student outcomes.

This section outlines the progress, challenges, and promising practices in advancing these critical efforts. The following subsections will provide an outline of summary themes collected from Guided Pathways Implementation work plans, scale of adoption assessments, and other system reports.

## Career paths and program maps

All system colleges have successfully organized their credit programs into meta-majors, often branded as "Areas of Study" or similar. Integration of meta-majors with academic structures, such as aligning advising teams, administrative leadership, and program mapping under defined pathways provides opportunities for deeper collaboration and targeted support for students. Key accomplishments include:

- Development and publication of program maps on websites, catalogs, and other student-facing tools, often in interactive formats.
- Creation of courses specific to meta-majors (e.g., IT 101 for Information Technology meta-majors) and integration of career exploration into foundational courses.
- Integration of meta-majors into website designs and educational planning tools to enhance accessibility for students.
- Faculty, staff, and student collaboration in designing pathways and program maps to ensure relevance and equity.

- Focused equity efforts, such as aligning with K-12 systems and prioritizing underserved populations, including historically underserved students of color, low-income students, adult students, and English language learners.

## Career and academic exploration

Colleges have worked to scale mandatory, structured onboarding experiences, integrating career exploration and meta-major content early and implementing feedback-driven improvements. These efforts have created a stronger, more supportive entry experience for students, guiding them toward informed academic and career choices and setting the foundation for long-term success.

### Mandatory orientation and enhanced onboarding

Many colleges have made orientation mandatory for new students, increasingly embedding meta-major or area-of-study content. Orientations are delivered through various modalities—online, in-person, asynchronous modules—and often leverage technology that students will experience in their classes. Career-related tools and resources are introduced early to help students make informed program choices.

### First-year experience (FYE) courses

A growing number of institutions are developing or requiring first-year experience courses that integrate career assessments and meta-major-specific content. Some colleges offer multiple FYE course sections tailored to different meta-majors or pathways, ensuring students gain relevant, contextualized guidance. Pilot programs have demonstrated positive outcomes, leading to scaling and institutionalization of FYE requirements to improve retention and success.

### Career assessments and exploration tools

Many institutions invested in career assessment platforms (e.g., SuperStrong, Washington Occupation Information System) and integrated these tools into mandatory courses or advising sessions. Career exploration is increasingly woven into the onboarding process, first-quarter coursework, and ongoing advising to help students clarify goals and connect programs of study to career paths.

### Field-specific events and activities

Colleges are organizing pathway-related workshops, panels, open houses, and community-building events tied to meta-majors. Professional panels, faculty showcases, and hands-on activities help students better understand the real-world applications of their chosen fields. These events support informed decision-making, foster engagement, and strengthen connections between students and their academic communities.

## Advising

The actions taken by colleges to ensure that new students enroll in a program-related course during their first term involve a combination of mandatory, well-structured advising sessions; the use of program maps and cohort models; strategic course scheduling; and ongoing improvements in onboarding. Continuous refinement will rely on better data, enhanced faculty-advisor collaboration, increased student support, and a steadfast focus on equity to ensure that every student benefits from early engagement with their field of study.

## **Mandatory advising and early enrollment support**

Many colleges instituted mandatory advising sessions, often through New Student Enrollment or Get Started sessions, to ensure that students discuss and select at least one program-related course in their first term. Advisors — whether professional advisors, faculty, or dedicated success coaches — use program maps and pathways templates to help students understand degree requirements, identify courses that spark their academic interest, and begin building a first-quarter schedule aligned with their goals.

## **Structured program maps and cohort models**

Technical and professional programs commonly operate in cohorts, where students enter a prescribed set of courses, ensuring that first-quarter coursework is inherently program-related. This default structure helps learners stay on track and familiarizes them early with program faculty and content. Program maps, both digital and printed, serve as visual guides for students and advisors, clearly identifying recommended first-term courses beyond math and English. These tools reduce guesswork and ensure uniform, equity-focused guidance.

## **Intentional course scheduling and placement**

Colleges are revising schedules, adding more sections of high-demand introductory courses, and shortening open enrollment periods to help new students secure a spot in key program-related classes. Improved placement processes (e.g., guided self-placement for math and English, or Integrated Basic Education for Adults co-enrollment models, and corequisites) allow more students to start program courses sooner with fewer prerequisites and more just-in-time support.

## **Educational planning**

Colleges have made significant strides by integrating educational plan development into mandatory advising, first-year courses, and accessible technology platforms. Through continued investment in technology, strategic hiring, consistent training, and regular process review, institutions are poised to improve the percentage of students completing education plans early in their academic journeys. This commitment to continuous improvement ensures that Guided Pathways funding is driving scalable, sustainable progress toward robust and equitable educational planning for all first-term students.

## **Mandatory advising and early engagement**

Many colleges have instituted mandatory advising sessions for new students before and during the first term. Students are introduced to program maps and guided through the process of identifying both core program courses and general education requirements early on. Entry coordinators, navigators, or advisors meet with students at intake to ensure they leave initial sessions with at least a short-range plan. Transitioning students from entry advisors to program or faculty advisors creates a support continuum.

## **Integration with first-year experience (FYE) and college success courses**

Embedding education plan creation as an assignment or a required activity in a first-year success course has proven effective. Students complete their initial plans as part of these courses, reinforcing the importance of proactive academic planning and linking it to broader student success strategies. Advisors are increasingly brought into classrooms to help students directly, ensuring that academic planning is introduced within the curriculum rather than solely in advising offices.



## **Technology adoption for systematic planning**

Colleges are implementing or enhancing the use of student success and degree planning tools (e.g., EAB Navigate, Starfish, ctcLink – Washington’s community and technical college system’s centralized PeopleSoft ERP application – Academic Advisement Requirements). These technologies help advisors and students visualize course pathways, schedule classes more effectively, and keep records of completed and pending requirements. Integrating these tools allows for the development of dynamic educational plans that can be easily updated, tracked, and referenced by advisors and students, reducing confusion and guesswork.

## **Clear, accessible program maps and advising resources**

Publicly accessible program maps on college websites and in catalogs provide students and advisors with a blueprint of recommended course sequences. This is particularly common in professional-technical pathways, where structured programs often simplify educational planning. The standardization of program maps ensures consistency in advising conversations, improving the likelihood that students have a clear, term-by-term plan by the end of their first quarter.

## **Progress monitoring**

Colleges are using Guided Pathways funds to solidify a continuum of advising support that monitors student progress – ranging from mandatory first-term meetings to checkpoint advising, sign-off requirements for subsequent enrollment, and emerging automated alerts. These strategies are designed to ensure at least 80% of credit students receive proactive guidance, stay aligned with their educational plans, and progress efficiently and equitably toward their academic and career goals.

## **Checkpoint advising and subsequent-term requirements**

Colleges are increasingly introducing structured advising checkpoints – such as at 15 or 30 credits – where students meet with an advisor to assess their progress. Some institutions require advisors’ sign-off before a student can register for classes, ensuring ongoing support, early intervention, and consistent guidance. This model helps students stay on track, navigate prerequisites, and handle unexpected hurdles (e.g., failing a course, personal challenges).

## **Targeted communication and early alert systems**

The adoption of early alert mechanisms allows faculty and staff to flag students who struggle academically or show signs of disengagement. Advising and retention teams then provide timely, holistic support. Targeted campaigns, such as emails and text messages triggered at key points in the term, help ensure students are aware of advising resources, upcoming registration deadlines, and next-step milestones. This ongoing communication contributes to higher engagement and smoother progress toward completion.

## **Caseload and pathway-specific advising models**

Institutions have moved toward caseload advising, where each student is assigned a specific advisor who often specializes in a particular pathway or area of study. This model builds consistent relationships, reduces confusion, and enhances the quality of guidance. Assigning advisors or success coaches to specific programs ensures students receive contextualized information about required courses, scheduling patterns, internships, and career options relevant to their field of study.

## **Preliminary steps toward automated registration alerts**

While not universally implemented, some colleges are exploring or piloting technologies that send automatic alerts when students register for courses outside their educational plan. These tools help advisors intervene before students invest time and money in classes that do not advance their degree goals. Ongoing work includes conducting research on student success software, integrating degree planning tools into ctcLink, and developing consistent protocols for alert-based interventions.

## **Teaching and learning**

Colleges have leveraged Guided Pathways funds to significantly advance efforts to improve instruction in program-related foundation courses. By fostering robust professional development communities, analyzing disaggregated student data, integrating high-impact teaching practices, and embedding equity into program design, institutions are building stronger, more student-centered learning experiences. The ongoing challenge is to scale these efforts institution-wide, align them with Guided Pathways goals, and maintain momentum despite resource constraints — ultimately ensuring that all students benefit from high-quality, equity-focused foundational instruction.

## **Professional development and faculty learning communities**

Teaching and Learning Academies (TLAs) and similar faculty-driven initiatives are central in advancing evidence-based, equity-minded pedagogies. Colleges report that TLA steering committees, reading circles, faculty institutes, and retreats have been instrumental in disseminating best practices and supporting reflective teaching. Faculty contracts and professional development requirements increasingly emphasize inclusive, culturally responsive teaching techniques.

## **Data-driven instructional improvements**

Faculty are increasingly using disaggregated student outcome data to guide instructional improvements, adjusting teaching methods, curricula, and early-alert interventions to better support historically underserved students. Regular program and discipline review cycles, now integrated into annual or multiyear assessments, ensure continuous refinement of foundational courses, while curricular revisions shorten program lengths, align courses with meta-majors, and eliminate unnecessary electives. By incorporating career-focused content, contextualized skill-building, and transparent learning outcomes into these core courses, colleges enhance students' understanding of why each class matters — ultimately improving engagement, persistence, and alignment with their academic and career goals.

## **High-impact teaching practices and instructional design support**

Colleges are investing in instructional designers — either as permanent staff or specialized consultants — to help faculty redesign courses, adopt open educational resources (OER), implement universal design for learning, practice transparency in learning and teaching, and embed culturally responsive, anti-racist pedagogies. These efforts often coincide with experimental or cohort-based initiatives such as course-based undergraduate research, co-requisite models, supplemental instruction, and dedicated tutoring sessions in foundational courses. Some institutions are also developing new introductory or contextualized STEM and allied health courses to support early skill-building, career exploration, and increased student engagement and success.

## **Integration of support services and instruction**

Many colleges now link foundational courses with wraparound academic supports – such as embedded tutoring, academic learning centers, supplemental instruction sessions, and bridge or summer programs – to help students who might otherwise struggle. Advising and faculty collaborations, sometimes facilitated by early-alert systems or case management models, ensure that students receive timely intervention, holistic advising, and resource referrals early in their academic journey.

## **Data analysis**

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges worked with a group of stakeholders from across the system to develop a request for proposals for a comprehensive student success tool compatible with ctcLink, the community and technical college system's centralized PeopleSoft ERP application. This tool will support the entire student lifecycle, enhancing engagement, persistence, retention, and completion rates across our diverse institutions. The tool should help its users provide timely, targeted, and equitable support that fosters student belonging and empowerment and facilitates seamless communication between faculty, staff, and students. Our goal is to use this tool to create an inclusive, supportive, and effective educational environment that enhances student success and prospects through the following functional requirements:

### **Student goal planning and progress**

System functionality must support the autonomy of the student in planning and tracking educational and career goals. Degree planning is a critical component of the Guided Pathways framework, as it helps students map out a clear and structured path to completion. This ensures students can make informed decisions about their educational journeys. The college must also be able to monitor student progress to plan effective interventions and report on student outcomes.

### **Communication**

The system will allow users to effectively communicate with broad audiences, select groups, and individuals, via multiple modalities (text, email, etc.), that support student care teams with advising, enrollment, retention, and completion. Effective communication within the Guided Pathways framework ensures that students receive timely and relevant information, helping them stay informed and engaged. It also facilitates the coordination of support services, ensuring that students receive the guidance they need at each stage of their educational journeys.

### **Case management**

Advising within the Guided Pathways framework requires personalized guidance and support. The product will allow for holistic student support teams to provide a personalized experience by supporting multiple forms of scheduling activities, case notes, and early alerts. There will be an intuitive dashboard that will enable students and employees to see all information regarding their educational goals.

### **Accessibility and equity**

All third-party software applications and web content purchased on behalf of the community and technical college system must comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA technical standards.

## Data and analytics

The system will provide robust and secure data management and analytics capabilities that allow users to make data-informed decisions about promoting student success. Data and analytics within the Guided Pathways framework are essential for tracking student progress, informing decision-making, and enhancing equity by identifying and addressing gaps. These may include monitoring the progress of interventions, campaigns, and measuring effectiveness. They also support predictive modeling and improve teaching and learning by providing insights into student performance and engagement.

## Client support

The proposed solution for client support services for the successful integration of a comprehensive two-way data integration into ctcLink must detail how the vendor will meet these requirements and support the sustainable operation of the integrated system.

## Outcomes

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges supports colleges by providing professional targeted technical assistance and training on equity-focused high-impact practices, executive coaches to support change leadership and management, and learning opportunities, workshops, convenings, and retreats for colleges to highlight and share their emerging and promising practices. Highlights include the 2023-24 Executive Leadership Retreat, which convened chancellors, presidents, and executives in instruction, student services, institutional effectiveness, and equity to align strategic goals and advance coordinated pathways reforms. The annual Assessment, Teaching, and Learning Conference provided a two-day forum for faculty and teaching professionals to share data-informed instructional strategies, foster continuous improvement, and cultivate a culture of evidence-based teaching.

In addition to large systemwide events, quarterly math retreats brought faculty and staff together to improve first-year math completion rates by revising placement processes, rethinking curriculum and pathway designs, and incorporating innovative teaching practices. Complementary efforts included structured conversations between math departments and Basic Education for Adults teams to break down institutional barriers, targeted convenings for rural-serving and technical colleges to address their unique challenges, and a series of career exploration gatherings. Monthly virtual “lunch and learn” events highlighted promising practices from Washington and other states, while communities of practice focused on critical topics like Building Thinking Classrooms, implementing math corequisites, strengthening teaching and learning centers, assessing student affairs initiatives, and improving first-year experience courses.

## Credit accumulation

For early-adopter colleges, first-time full-time students are increasingly achieving credit milestones. Compared to 2019, more full-time students now complete 15, 30, and 45 credits in their first year, indicating that structured supports and clearer pathways are helping students advance academically.

## Math in the first year

Since 2019, the percentage of first-time full-time students completing a college-level math course in their first year has risen by five percentage points, and for first-time part-time students by two percentage points. Black students have experienced notable gains, with completion rates up six percentage points for full-time and five percentage points for part-time students. Reforms in math placement, curriculum redesign, and increased student support appear to be contributing to these gains. Students enrolling in pre-college math are also more likely to complete college-level math within their first year, and many are now successfully enrolling directly into the required course with appropriate support.

## English in the first year

Systemwide, about half of first-time full-time students complete English in their first year, a rate that has remained steady. However, early-adopter Guided Pathways colleges are performing better: the first cohort reached a 60% completion rate by 2022, and the second cohort reached 53%. Disaggregated data show that Black students, both full and part time, have seen modest but steady improvement. For example, full-time Black students increased their first-year English completion rate by two percentage points since 2019, while part-time Black students showed a nearly 10-point increase. American Indian and Alaska Native part-time students have also posted an eight-point gain in first-year English completion since 2019.

## Retention

### Fall-to-spring retention

Overall fall-to-spring retention improved from 64% to 68% between 2019 and 2023 for all students, both full and part time. Black part-time students, in particular, benefited significantly, with a 10-percentage point increase (from 47% to 57%). Latino students and American Indian/Alaska Native students also saw gains of two to six percentage points in retention rates during the same period.

### Fall-to-fall retention

Fall-to-fall retention rates have remained relatively stable across the system, but American Indian and Alaska Native students are demonstrating faster gains. Full-time students from these populations improved their fall-to-fall retention by four percentage points (45% to 49%), and part-time students increased by 12 points over the same timeframe.

While it will take more time to understand which specific Guided Pathways strategies drive these improvements, the early data suggests that reforms are advancing equity and supporting success, especially among historically underserved student groups.

## Lessons Learned

Guided Pathways implementation efforts experienced several challenges since the passage of HB 2158 in 2019. First, the impact of the shift to remote operations in response to COVID-19 drew attention away from implementation, as did the resulting cultural shift of offering more hybrid and online options for students across the colleges. In addition to offering online classes, colleges also developed, maintained, and refined online support services from intake, placement, and orientation through advising, educational planning, and tutoring. Colleges are infusing the lessons learned from serving students experiencing historic barriers through the pandemic in new modalities into ongoing Guided Pathways implementation and student success initiatives.

Second, Guided Pathways, as a collection of transformative practices, requires strong and stable leadership to ensure consistency and minimize disruptions. Community and technical colleges experienced significant turnover throughout organizational charts. The first half of the decade introduced new chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, and key administrators at every college in the system. Paired with staffing shortages in key areas like advising and financial aid, change efforts faced a variety of disruptions and challenges. With more individuals in permanent leadership positions, colleges are institutionalizing Guided Pathways practices in their strategic frameworks. They integrated Guided Pathways work throughout governance councils and advisory committees that function as central hubs to align Guided Pathways priorities with institutional planning, recommend policies, and propose improvements. Colleges have not simply appended Guided Pathways concepts onto existing structures; rather, they have embedded Guided Pathways priorities into the core missions, visions, and strategic goals of their institutions. Many strategic plans explicitly name retention, completion, and equity as central outcomes.

## Next Steps

Washington's community and technical colleges made significant strides in their early Guided Pathways implementation efforts, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Maintaining legislative investments in Guided Pathways work ensures they can continue to deepen their efforts where it matters most: advising and progress monitoring, areas that colleges which have been later to implement Guided Pathways paces are working on in the current year and beyond. Continuous improvement efforts are also already underway, showing that colleges are learning as they go and wasting no time putting lessons into action.

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges will continue to provide leadership, technical support, professional development, and planning activities that address areas of need identified by colleges:

### Ongoing updates for program pathway mapping

- Faculty leaders are collaborating with advising and enrollment services to update program maps, co-develop simplified course sequencing, and improve scheduling practices to better meet student demand.

## Data driven equitable career and academic exploration

- Ongoing efforts focus on closing equity gaps by ensuring that onboarding and early exploration tools are inclusive, culturally responsive, and accessible to students from all backgrounds.
- Colleges are examining enrollment and retention data to identify where support structures can be strengthened to better serve low-income, historically marginalized, and underrepresented student groups.
- Departments such as advising, instruction, student affairs, and career services are increasingly collaborating to streamline the onboarding experience and career exploration.

## Innovation in advising services

- Support to continue streamlining and standardizing onboarding, orientation, and advising experiences. Many colleges are considering adding advising sessions during orientation itself, ensuring students register with a plan in hand and do not delay enrollment in critical courses. Further, colleges are exploring team-based or co-advising models, where professional and faculty advisors collaborate to guide students, review first-quarter course selections, and set them up for early success.
- Investments in wraparound services, such as navigators, peer mentors, and coordinated handoffs from entry advisors to faculty advisors, further support students as they move through their academic journeys.

## Increased educational planning

- Professional development for advisors, faculty, and staff will focus on interpreting program maps, using student success software, and understanding evolving degree requirements.
- Hiring additional staff advisors, developing ongoing advising committees, and engaging peer advisors and student workers will help meet student demand and ensure consistent, high-quality guidance.
- Adapting to non-traditional and transitional pathways by formalizing institutional barrier removal for adult learners, transitional students, and other students who have been traditionally underserved in the community and technical college system.

## Building infrastructure for progress monitoring

- Colleges plan to better use data analytics to understand who benefits from mandatory advising and where there are gaps. Disaggregated data analysis will help measure the impact of new technologies, identify equity gaps in student progress, and inform more targeted interventions.

- Upcoming priorities include launching or improving student success software, exploring automated registration alerts, and developing stable infrastructures that allow advisors to easily track, update, and review student educational plans. Enhanced technological tools will facilitate earlier detection of off-track behaviors, timely adjustments to schedules, and more efficient advisor-student communication.

## Teaching and learning

- Institutions plan to expand their teaching and learning centers, add full-time instructional designers, and develop more faculty cohorts or communities of practice focused on student-centered, equity-driven pedagogy. Training opportunities, including reading circles, book clubs, workshops, peer observations (teaching triangles or squares), and discipline-based professional learning communities, will continue to evolve and respond to emerging instructional challenges (e.g., AI tools, evolving transfer requirements).
- Faculty will continue to use data to identify “gatekeeper” or “predictive” courses and develop strategies – such as co-requisites, tutoring, and targeted advisement – to mitigate equity gaps and improve student outcomes.
- Ongoing initiatives include embedding anti-racist frameworks, culturally relevant content, and inclusive assignments across more foundational courses. Colleges intend to expand their participation in state or national DEI initiatives and ensure that all instructors receive training in these areas.

## Conclusion

Washington’s Guided Pathways implementation remains a long-term endeavor, requiring patience, sustained investment, and a willingness to adapt as lessons emerge. Although it is too early to attribute gains in completion directly to these reforms, early improvements in math and English completion rates, retention, and credit accumulation suggest that integrated pathways, enhanced advising, and culturally responsive practices are having a positive impact – especially for historically marginalized students.

As colleges refine their approaches and the State Board continues to provide leadership, technical assistance, and professional development, Guided Pathways reforms promise to further close equity gaps and help students navigate clear routes to high-quality credentials and meaningful careers. With legislative support, institutions will build on these foundational changes, institutionalizing effective practices, strengthening data use and technology solutions, and continuing to prioritize equity as they advance Washington’s talent pipeline and economic vitality.





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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges