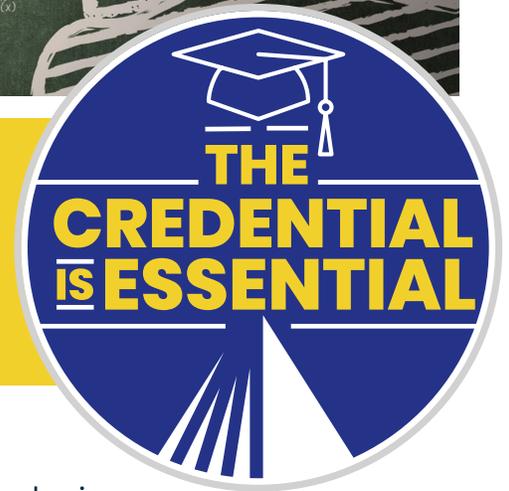


PATH TO 70% CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT: RESTARTING AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



The spring of 2020 was a defining time in Washington state.

As Washingtonians, we adapted to the rapid escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We entered a period of unprecedented economic disruption. A much-needed public conversation about race spread across our nation, exposing opportunity for collective action and lasting change.

The Washington Roundtable and Partnership for Learning are committed to playing a collaborative and productive role as we move forward, together. We will draw on our experience in state education and economic policy as well as learnings from across the country and around the globe. We will ground our work in research, focused listening, and action for impact. In doing so, we will pursue an agenda that supports diversified and inclusive economic recovery. We will aggressively pursue the policy and system changes necessary to reach our goal that, **by the high school class of 2030, 70% of Washington students complete a post-high school credential by age 26.** Previous research indicates just 41% of Washington's high school class of 2017 is expected to meet that benchmark. The estimated credential attainment rate is even lower for Washington's Black (31%), Hispanic and Latinx (30%), and Native American (18%) students.

In this report we seek to share lessons of the Great Recession; shine a light on those individuals who are most vulnerable in the economic wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (namely, people of color, young workers, and those without a post-high school credential); and begin to examine policy options and opportunities to build a better Washington. We focus specifically on using education as a catapult for those furthest from opportunity and as a driver of economic recovery.

JULY 2020



ECONOMIC LESSONS FROM THE GREAT RECESSION

As Washington seeks to recover from the COVID-19-induced recession, previous patterns of recession and recovery offer three lessons:

#1

People of color, young adults, and those with only a high school education are disproportionately impacted during periods of economic downturn.

#2

Workers who complete a post-high school credential—such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate—fare far better during downturns and benefit more in recovery.

#3

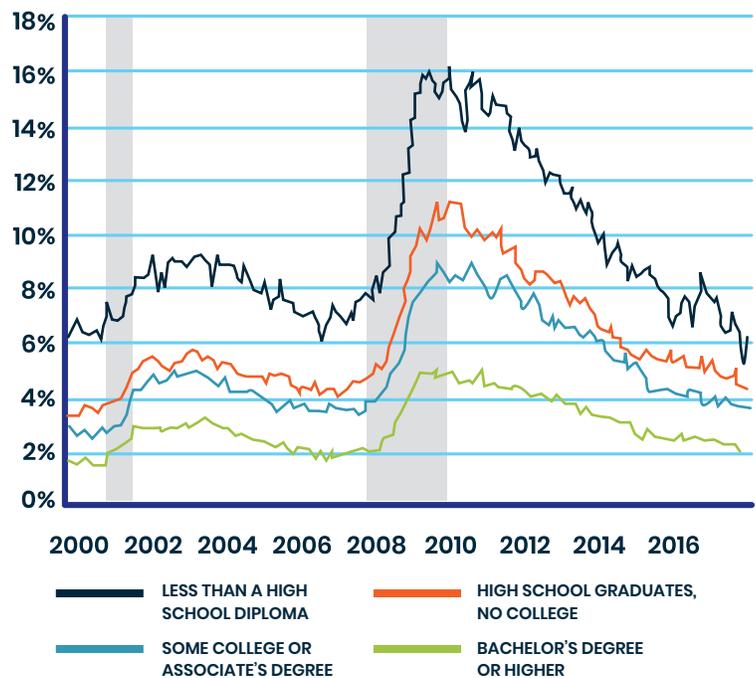
Postsecondary enrollment grows in times of recession, but it is credential completion that matters.

The Great Recession had a disproportionate impact on many communities of color. The U.S. unemployment rate for the general population peaked at 10%, whereas unemployment was higher among Black workers (peaking at 16.8%) and Hispanic and Latinx workers (peaking at 13%). By comparison, the peak unemployment rate was 9.2% for White workers and 8.4% for Asian workers nationally ([Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018](#)).

The Great Recession also had a disproportionately negative impact on younger workers, which extended years into the nation's recovery. U.S. unemployment among young people age 18 to 24 reached almost 20% compared to the overall peak of 10%. More than five years after the stock market collapse, unemployment among younger workers remained high at 16.2%. Even once early-career workers found jobs, they continued to earn lower wages, resulting in lower lifetime earnings ([Economic Policy Institute, 2013](#)).

Consistent with historical employment patterns, workers with post-high school credentials fared far better during the Great Recession and in recovery. The peak unemployment rate across the country for workers with a high school diploma or less was more than two times the peak rate for workers with a bachelor's degree or better ([Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018](#)). These data indicate that education beyond high school—specifically completion of bachelor's and advanced degrees—is important and valuable for all workers, likely even more so for people of color and young workers.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES:
PEOPLE 25 YEARS AND OVER, BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT,
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED, 2000-2017

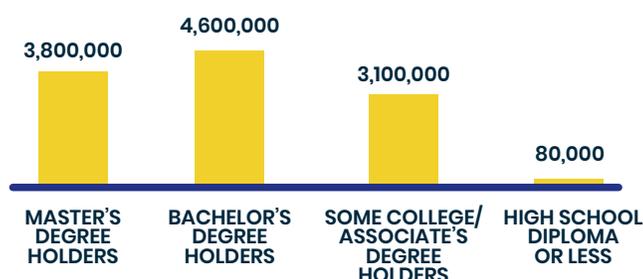


NOTE: SHADED AREAS REPRESENT RECESSIONS AS DETERMINED BY THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH

SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

The Great Recession intensified a shift, begun in the second half of the 20th century, toward job creation in industries that employ credentialed workers—such as healthcare, consulting, and business, financial, education, and government services. Those industries accounted for 28% of the nation’s workforce in 1947. That percentage grew to nearly half of the workforce 70 years later. (*Georgetown University, 2016*).

U.S. JOB GAINS FOLLOWING THE GREAT RECESSION



SOURCE: GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, 2016

Recognizing the benefits of postsecondary education, millions of Americans enrolled in college during the Great Recession to better prepare themselves to enter or reenter the workforce. College enrollment grew nearly 19% between 2006 and 2011, with increases in undergraduate enrollment accounting for 2.8 million of a 3.2 million increase (*Census Bureau, 2018*). Such enrollment growth is encouraging, but data consistently confirm it is credential completion that matters. The average weekly salary for bachelor’s degree holders in 2019 was 50% higher than that of workers with some college but no degree. It was 67% higher than those with a high school diploma but no college.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	AVERAGE WEEKLY SALARY 2017	AVERAGE WEEKLY SALARY 2018	AVERAGE WEEKLY SALARY 2019
MASTER’S DEGREE	\$1,401	\$1,434	\$1,497
BACHELOR’S DEGREE	\$1,173	\$1,198	\$1,248
ASSOCIATE DEGREE	\$836	\$862	\$887
SOME COLLEGE, NO DEGREE	\$774	\$802	\$833
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA NO COLLEGE	\$712	\$730	\$746
NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	\$520	\$553	\$592

SOURCE: BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS: 2017, 2018, 2019

Far too many students who enrolled in postsecondary education during the recession and early stages of the recovery failed to complete a credential. The six-year credential completion rate for students who began postsecondary education in fall 2009 dropped more than 3 percentage points compared to completion for the class that enrolled in 2007, bottoming out at just under 53%. Students who delayed entering college for a few years (began postsecondary age 21-24) saw a decline of more than 7 percentage points in graduation rates from 2007 to 2009, while adult learners (began postsecondary age 25+) saw a more than 4-point drop (*Higher Education Today, 2020*).

COVID-19-INDUCED RECESSION EMPHASIZES ECONOMIC INEQUITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly ended an economic expansion that lasted more than 10 years. U.S. economic growth peaked in February 2020, followed by the filing of more than 40 million unemployment claims in a 10-week span. The overall U.S. unemployment rate in May rose to 13.3%, more than three times the rate in January 2020 (*Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020*). The benefits of economic growth and opportunity were uneven before the COVID-19 pandemic, and many communities of color, young workers, and those with a high school diploma or less are again bearing the brunt of this new recession.

- **56% of Black households and 60% of Hispanic and Latinx households reported employment loss due to the pandemic; compared to 47% of Asian and 44% of White households**
(US Census Bureau, Georgetown University, 2020)
- **23.2% of workers age 20 to 24 filed for unemployment in May 2020, compared to 11.5% of workers age 25 to 54**
(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020)
- **15.3% of workers in the U.S. with only a high school diploma were unemployed in May 2020, a rate more than two times the unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's degree or higher**
(Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020)
- **68.3% of workers claiming unemployment in Washington state did not have a postsecondary credential, a 14 percentage point overrepresentation compared to non-credentialed workers in the general population (54.3%)**
(Employment Security Department, Weekly Unemployment Claims Data, May 30-June 6, 2020 and US Census Bureau, 2020)¹

These data reinforce the economic shift in favor of jobs for credentialed workers, again demonstrating the correlation between education attainment and job security, which has been magnified by the pandemic. The data also shine a bright light on the need to break down barriers to postsecondary education for those furthest from opportunity, namely, Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and Native American students and workers.

The Washington Roundtable and Partnership for Learning remain committed to our goal: **By the high school class of 2030, 70% of Washington students will complete a post-high school credential by age 26.**

In pursuing this goal, we seek to change two realities:

- **Not enough Washington students are earning credentials. A third of students in the high school class of 2006 completed a credential by age 26; that number increases to an estimated 41% for the high school class of 2017.**
- **Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and Native American students are earning credentials at much lower rates than their Asian and White peers.**

WA STATE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2017	CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE 26 (ESTIMATED)
ALL STUDENTS	41%
ASIAN	62%
BLACK	31%
HISPANIC & LATINX	30%
NATIVE AMERICAN	18%
WHITE	44%

SOURCE: KINETIC WEST, 2020

To reach the 70% goal, Washington must nearly triple annual growth in credential attainment year-over-year (*Kinetic West, 2020*), and make dramatic improvements in how it supports students—particularly Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and Native American students—on their best-fit pathways to a credential.

¹Washington state experienced a large number of fraudulent claims in the early months of the pandemic. Fraud prevention methods applied by ESD have led to a decrease in claims. State data in this report are from May 30 - June 6.

OPPORTUNITY: REDUCE BARRIERS TO CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT AMIDST THE PANDEMIC AND IN RECOVERY

ADDRESSING K-12 LEARNING LOSS AND THE “COVID-19 SLIDE”

School building closures and social distancing requirements put a severe strain on students, families, and educators throughout the spring of 2020. This is particularly true for students matriculating through K-12 schools. Preliminary national estimates of the “COVID-19 slide” indicate that students could return to school in fall 2020 with only 70% of learning gains in reading from the prior year relative to a typical school year. Students may experience even greater learning loss in math, returning with less than half of the gains made during a typical school year ([NWEA, 2020](#)).

Recent research suggests that learning loss is expected to be greatest for Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and low-income students, who are less likely to have access to high-quality remote instruction. It is estimated that Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and low-income students with access to low-quality remote instruction, could experience increased achievement gaps of 15% to 20% ([McKinsey, 2020](#)). Unaddressed, these effects are likely to extend beyond the academic year and lead to long-term educational and earnings losses.

States across the country are planning to pursue various strategies to address learning loss, including proactively prioritizing standards, preparing for hybrid learning models, addressing technology and connectivity gaps, accelerating school model reform, and developing diagnostics assessments so educators can use data to target student learning ([Kinetic West, 2020](#)). Teachers will need support, data, and time for collaboration. Schools and districts will need to be able to assess individualized student learning loss and provide targeted remediation and acceleration opportunities to ensure students return to at least grade-level standard by the end of the next academic year.

In support of OSPI’s [Reopening Schools Workgroup](#), Washington Roundtable and Challenge Seattle partnered with Kinetic West to [conduct research and interviews](#) with education leaders and researchers from around the U.S. and the world on how to safely restart schools during the COVID-19 crisis.

These best practices helped inform OSPI’s [Reopening Washington Schools 2020: District Planning Guide](#) released June 11.

COMMITMENT FROM K-12 OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (OSPI)

Excerpt from OSPI’s [Reopening Washington Schools: 2020 District Planning Guide](#)

“There has never been a bigger moment to examine our education system and improve our practices to further close opportunity gaps. This is a moment to reconsider and shift past practices that have contributed to racial inequality and a lack of equitable opportunities for so many of our students. I trust your first priority will be to safely open schools, but I also know you are committed to using this moment to build more transformative systems for our students.”

–Superintendent Chris Reykdal

OSPI HAS MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMITMENTS FOR THE 2020–21 SCHOOL YEAR:

- SUPPORT STUDENTS FURTHEST FROM EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE
- INVEST IN CONNECTIVITY AND HARDWARE
- PREPARE FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY IN 2020–21
- LEVERAGE LOCAL EXPERTISE AND PROVIDE TRAINING

ANTICIPATING POTENTIAL POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES

Predicting enrollment of incoming students with a high degree of accuracy is challenging for postsecondary institutions across the nation in even the best of times. Upheaval from the COVID-19 crisis has added significant volatility to that process, driven in large part by the desire of prospective college students, especially recent high school graduates, for traditional on-campus experiences (*Niche, 2020; Carnegie Dartlet, 2020*).

Statements from higher education leaders in Washington state and nationally, as well as surveys of prospective students and higher education practitioners, indicate that significant numbers of recent high school graduates and other prospective students may be altering their plans to enroll in postsecondary education this fall.

National polling in April 2020 suggests that enrollment at four-year postsecondary institutions could decline by 20% in 2020-21 as students change their plans in response to the pandemic. Students of color may be feeling the impact more deeply, with nearly two-thirds (64%) saying their plans are being affected by COVID-19, compared to 44% of White students (*Simpson Scarborough, 2020*).

Washington Roundtable and Challenge Seattle supported a joint effort by the state's two- and four-year colleges and universities to engage Boston Consulting Group in examining how postsecondary institutions in the U.S. and internationally are preparing for the 2020-21 school year. Through that process, Washington's institutions aligned on *a set of shared principles and baseline checklists* for reopening to ensure students and faculty can return safely and with confidence.

Washington's four-year institutions anticipate enrollment could be down between 10% and 20% compared to 2019. Of course, each institution serves a different mission and demographic population, so even anticipated drops in enrollment may be felt differently institution by institution and campus by campus.

The state's postsecondary institutions are planning a menu of options to bring students back safely and confidently this fall. Intense collaboration among the state's postsecondary institutions as well as their commitments to safety, robust learning experiences, and contingency planning position them to serve students well in the coming year and throughout the pandemic.

COMMITMENT FROM WASHINGTON'S POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

"Across all higher education institutions in the state of Washington, we are working together to share our thinking on our decision-making process and contingency planning as we prepare for different possible scenarios going forward, taking into account:

- Government requirements to ensure we are following health and safety protocols
- Healthcare capacity measures in terms of testing, personal protective equipment, case and contact investigations
- Ways to protect the at-risk and vulnerable among our students, staff, faculty, and community
- Operational and financial feasibility to ensure we are able to flexibly action on plans should conditions shift
- Effective use of resources for students and the state while delivering on the mission of higher education
- Support for social and emotional needs across all student populations
- Equitable impact on student outcomes

We further pledge to continue working together to flesh out any outstanding items that require further collaboration and partnership."

–Higher Education Re-Opening Work Group

RESTARTING AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Spring 2020 dealt Washington students, families, educators, and communities a set of unprecedented challenges. With those challenges come opportunities to address systemic inequities, innovate, and provide a stronger foundation for Washington's young people. In building toward the future, it is vitally important that our state and our schools take clear steps to ensure and maintain education quality and rigor through the pandemic phase, address inequities, improve outcomes, and increase credential attainment.

PREPARE FOR ACCELERATION.

- Diagnose individual student learning loss using high-quality diagnostic tools and target academic and non-academic interventions and instruction.
- Communicate student learning expectations and current diagnoses to families in culturally relevant ways that meet their needs to support their children.
- Support students in meeting rigorous grade-level learning standards and expectations.

EMBRACE INNOVATION.

- Give schools and districts flexibility to innovate to better serve their students, allowing for adjustments to engrained structures such as the school calendar, master schedule, and teaching and learning practices.
- Expand partnerships with community-based organizations, especially those supporting communities of color, to better facilitate continuous learning.
- Conduct asset mapping to assess technology and connectivity needs and pursue solutions that ensure equity in learning.

REDUCE BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT.

- Prioritize and promote college-going behaviors as schools shift to new operating and learning modalities (i.e., in-class vs. remote learning) in response to the pandemic.
- Streamline postsecondary admissions processes and increase flexibility to maximize students' ability to enroll and matriculate during the pandemic.
- Protect postsecondary access by maintaining affordability for low-income students.

INNOVATE TO IMPROVE POSTSECONDARY RETENTION, PERSISTENCE, AND COMPLETION AMIDST UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF THE PANDEMIC.

- Preserve student supports, including guidance and wraparound services, particularly for those hit hardest during the pandemic and those furthest from opportunity.
- Deploy strategies to bring students back to school if they have previous college experience but no credential, especially if they are currently out of work.

PREPARE WASHINGTON STUDENTS FOR WASHINGTON JOBS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMY.

- Increase alignment of postsecondary systems with workforce needs coming out of the recession.
- Define, quantify, and grow industry-recognized credentials that have potential to get students into family-wage jobs faster.
- Support career-connected learning and innovate to ensure work-based learning opportunities are accessible during the pandemic.

Our state's education systems and schools adapted in response to unprecedented challenges in the spring of 2020. Those experiences were bumpy at times, with many lessons learned. The road ahead will continue to be new. The Washington Roundtable and Partnership for Learning are committed to playing a collaborative and productive role in helping schools and systems make up for pandemic-related setbacks, knock down barriers to credential attainment, and support diversified, inclusive recovery and growth. Please join us in that effort.