

# Our Washington State Strategy

Factsheet

November 2022

## Overview

Everyone should have access to the opportunities they need to design the future they want. That core belief drives the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's work around the world and in our home state of Washington, where we work at the local, regional, and state level.

Across the state, we focus on education, which we believe is essential to giving young people control over their own lives today and into the future. Nearly 90 percent of Washington's high schoolers say they want to continue their education after high school. But today, only 50 percent of Washington's high school graduates complete postsecondary programs. Together with the local schools, colleges, and organizations that know their communities best, we believe we can help close that gap.

Our Washington State team will work with local and regional partners to help students see a clear path to success in the careers they choose, with an emphasis on young people who face the highest barriers including Black, Latino, and Indigenous students; students from low-income backgrounds; and rural students. That begins with helping students take the next step in their education journeys after high school—whether that's enrolling in a trade school, apprenticeship program, or two- or four-year college.

**We plan to support locally led collaborations across Washington state that help students continue their education beyond high school and achieve their aspirations.** We're committing approximately \$75 million over the next four years for this work, which builds on our local investments in education over the last 20 years while expanding to all corners of Washington state.

### Our Approach

- Starting in early 2023, the foundation will issue an open invitation for **regional collaborations who meet select criteria to join a learning network** to explore solutions that help more students pursue their postsecondary aspirations. Local organizations that are part of a regional collaboration will have the chance to receive funding for their programs, along with technical assistance to enhance their efforts.
- After learning from this early work, we'll **go deeper with about 3-5 regions in 2024**—providing additional technical assistance and grants to deepen support for community-identified solutions. Community groups will design these programs, focusing on evidence-based practices that research shows can improve student success. We will also help these regions build their own capacity to access and share quality data and information about how local students are doing, what barriers they face, and what programs help them advance on their education pathway.
- At the same time, we will **explore statewide solutions** that help all students attain college and career pathways after high school. For example, we will work with partners to help more students and their families complete the FAFSA or WASFA form to receive financial aid—along with advocating at the federal level for continued simplification of the FAFSA process.
- Through all this work, we will **bring education funders together** to find collective ways for our resources to go further—and we'll invest in ways that elevate **student perspectives and student voice**, so communities are following the lead of our young people's aspirations.

## FAQs

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### Why is attaining postsecondary education important?

Enrollment in education past high school is declining in Washington state, but it's shown to be one of the best drivers for social and economic mobility and security. In fact, data from the Washington Student Achievement Council confirms that nearly 70% of jobs in our state require a postsecondary credential, which includes apprenticeships and two- or four-year degrees. The gaps are especially stark for low-income communities and first-generation college students.

### How was the strategy developed?

Our Washington State team spent nearly a year developing this statewide strategy with guidance and input from more than 200 educators, researchers, district leaders, and other experts in the field, as well as parents and community members. The strategy was also deeply informed by our recent investments in local education improvement networks and COVID-19 response collaborations with school districts in Washington, in addition to national programs the foundation supports such as [Accelerate\(ED\)](#), [Postsecondary Value Commission](#), and [Value Data Collaborative](#).

### Proof Points

- [Nearly 90%](#) of Washington's high schoolers say they want to continue their education after high school.
- Just [61%](#) of Washington students enroll in a [postsecondary program](#) right after high school—lower than the national average of 69%. We hope to raise this to 70% by 2035.
- While [70%](#) of jobs in our state require a [post-high school credential](#), only 50% of Washington's high school graduates complete postsecondary programs.
- Data from the National Student Clearinghouse indicate that [postsecondary enrollment decreased 10.7% in Washington](#) between spring 2020 to spring 2022. The national decline was 7.4%.
- On average, [62%](#) of Washington students complete a [dual-credit class](#) in high school. That drops to 54% for students from low-income backgrounds, 57% for Latino students, and 43% for Native students.
- The new [Washington College Grant program](#) is one of the most generous in the country, making millions of dollars of financial assistance available to students annually.
- Washington currently [ranks 48th in the country in FAFSA completion](#).

Learn more at [local.gatesfoundation.org](http://local.gatesfoundation.org).

