



## Who we are

The College Promise Coalition (CPC) is an unprecedented partnership that brings together advocates for Washington state's public and private four and two-year colleges and universities alongside students, families, faculty, alumni, education supporters and leaders in business and labor to advocate for higher education opportunity and access for Washington's students and to urge policymakers to make higher education a top priority in our state. Founded in 2011 in response to dramatic state cuts to higher education funding, the coalition is entering its sixth year of fighting to ensure that access to an affordable, quality education remains an option for all Washingtonians.

Using the strength of our collective voice, the College Promise Coalition advocates for increased investments in proven strategies that retain students, lead to degree completion and strengthen pathways for historically underserved populations, transfer students, veterans, and adult learners.

## The Problem

We recognize that academic success and economic strength hinges on investments in education being made across the entire education pipeline – early learning, K-12 and higher education. Having strong colleges and universities is critical to providing Washington students with the skills they need to be successful in today's economy.

Yet despite best intentions, as a state we are still falling short when it comes to providing access to higher education for all Washingtonians. In 2013 the Washington legislature adopted an educational attainment goal of **at least 70% of adults ages 25-44 possessing a postsecondary credential or degree by 2023**. This means a four-year degree, a two-year degree or completion of any number of certificate, certification and license programs that prepare or enhance student's career readiness.

But today we are at just **51%** of adults reaching this goal. And if you look at just Washington students we're even further behind, with only *31% of students graduating from Washington high schools going on to receive a post-secondary credential*. And current data on credential attainment trends show that we are not yet on track to meet the 2023 adopted goal – doing everything we can to move the needle and make real progress towards achieving our higher education attainment goals is CPC's overarching goal.

## Our 2017 Priority

After years of cuts, recent years' budgets have begun to reverse this trend and provide greater stability. The 2015-2017 budget continued the reinvestment in higher education.



Now in 2017 we have an opportunity to build on previous investments to allow more students to be served and to strengthen Washington's competitive economic advantage by bolstering certificate and degree production and increasing student success and educational quality.

Our highest priority this year for making progress towards achieving our state's higher education attainment goal is securing the additional \$100 million per year needed to fully fund the Washington State Need Grant (SNG), our state's largest financial aid program. For over forty years the SNG has been providing assistance to the lowest-income undergraduate students in the state helping them be able to pursue degrees, gain new skills or train for current or new careers. And unlike other need-based student aid programs, the SNG can serve everyone from traditional post high school students to adult learners seeking anything from a certificate to a baccalaureate degree – this broadness and flexibility has made Washington's SNG program a national model in how to administer need-based access programs successfully.

But for years now, the Need Grant has been underfunded. Each year since 2009, at least a quarter of eligible students did not receive the grant due to lack of state funds severely undermining the efficacy of the program. Today, there are over 24,000 eligible students unable to receive grants due to lack of funding. Securing the additional \$100 million per year needed to fully fund the program would allow the program to serve all 93,000 eligible Washington state students. Ensuring eligible students are able to access financial aid will help boost enrollment, completion and help us address the state's skills and opportunity gaps - which is why CPC's shared top priority for the 2017 legislative session is fully funding the State Need Grant.

Expanding the Need Grant and continuing strong investment in other state financial aid programs is an essential component in improving educational attainment, by joining forces to amplify our shared agenda we can make a real difference.

We also recognize the need to increase the availability and accessibility of all types of higher education in a variety of disciplines to ensure that Washingtonians are ready for the jobs of the future. This includes expanding capacity to support student completion and fill skill gaps in high-demand fields such as STEM, teacher preparation, healthcare and priority workforce programs. Directing resources towards programs with proven success in increasing graduates' scope and depth of knowledge, skillsets and experiences is also necessary to enable them to adapt to a constantly changing economy - ensuring that once they enter the workforce, they are able to remain in it.