



Cradle Through College Coalition Statement of Principles

Advance equity at every step of the education continuum

Coalition Principles:

1. Invest in education as a continuum from quality early learning through higher education;
2. Closing opportunity gaps and improving educational outcomes requires transparency, stronger accountability and a commitment to innovation—in addition to more funding;
3. The present use of local levies to fund basic education is unfair and inequitable—the current practice must end; and
4. Increased State revenue will be necessary, and must lead to improved educational outcomes.

Coalition's Vision

Our vision is for education in Washington, from early learning through higher education, to become the envy of the nation. Early learning should fully prepare our youngest learners for kindergarten; K-12 should set students up for success in postsecondary education to earn a college degree or career credential; and higher education should be accessible to all who wish to pursue it. We see a future where Washington's knowledge intensive economy is powered by homegrown talent.

Our vision sees inequities erased at all levels, and all zip codes, not just the affluent ones, becoming great communities for children.

Our vision sees caring communities in which children and families in poverty receive the help they need to meet basic needs and achieve their full human potential.

Background

Washington State faces challenges of an historic nature, and our legislature will soon make critical decisions with lasting impact on our shared future. Those decisions can bend the arc of history toward equity and prosperity for coming generations of Washingtonians, or keep us on the present path that has obscured that chance for far too many.

There is indisputable evidence that student success across our entire education continuum falls short for our children and our economy. We know there is an underinvestment in quality early learning, and that thousands of our youngest students are not kindergarten ready. We lag the nation in K-12 per pupil investment, and during the Great Recession, State support for higher education decreased dramatically. Yet, 70% of jobs in Washington will require some type of postsecondary credential by 2020¹.

Washingtonians are known for developing solutions to some of the planet's most complex problems. Our education system should reflect that same spirit of innovation and commitment to excellence. We have an obligation to do everything in our power to ensure that our children are set up to succeed. This is especially true for students of color who are consistently over-represented in the opportunity and achievement gaps. Our focus must be on the students suffering from poverty and the daily impacts of institutional racism and implicit bias.

¹ (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013)



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Principles

As a diverse, multi-sector, statewide coalition representing the education continuum, we ask all state policymakers to adhere to these principles to which we collectively agree:

1. **Invest in education as a continuum from quality early learning through higher education.** In 2015, the Legislature made great strides in considering education policy and funding as an entire continuum. This is the correct way to invest in education—not as silos competing for resources.

The Early Start Act was passed and funded in 2015 to ensure that students get off to a good start. The Legislature must accelerate progress in closing the school readiness gap and preparing kids for positive life outcomes. In 2017 the Legislature should fund the expansion of the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program to provide quality preschool to more children from low income families.

On the other end of the continuum, access to quality higher education must become a heightened priority. The Legislature must invest in both excellence *and* access. Keeping tuition affordable is key to the State's support of higher education. The 2015-2017 biennium budget protected the State's obligation to students with the College Bound Scholarship, but no significant new investment was made in the State Need Grant. That lack of support left over 24,000 eligible students unable to receive aid. The State Need Grant should be fully funded.

This coalition is also committed to protecting the needs of the whole child and family; not just through education. For example, children and their families need to have healthcare, secure housing and food—important examples of basic needs that must not be sacrificed in a state budget battle. A hungry child cannot learn. The education continuum cannot be funded by cutting or compromising health and human services.

2. **Closing opportunity gaps and improving educational outcomes requires transparency, stronger accountability and a commitment to innovation—in addition to more funding.** There is a fundamental premise to which we must agree: high need students, disproportionately students of color and predominantly low income, require a higher level of support to realize success. It is a critical tenet of racial and social equity and is true not only for students in the K-12 system, but for students enrolled in postsecondary institutions as well.

When we consider how the State allocates K-12 funding, it is important to acknowledge that concentrated poverty puts many students at a further disadvantage. A school with a 10% poverty rate faces different challenges than a school with an 85% or 90% poverty rate. The Legislature should review and improve how K-12 funding is weighted and allocated for factors such as poverty or other proxies of poverty. Right now, the lion's share of basic education funding from the state does not consider poverty as a factor when calculating appropriations to districts. This flies in the face of indisputable research showing the challenged felt by children in poverty.



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Transparency and accountability for results should both be strengthened in the K-12 funding system. The Legislature has gone to great lengths to create the prototypical school funding formula with the intent to increase transparency, but that has not happened. Parents, communities and the public deserve to understand how every dollar invested is contributing to improved results for students. Today, it is impossible to track how investments lead to results across the continuum.

Public 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education have received less state funding since the Great Recession, and their operating budgets have felt the squeeze for some time. In particular, community and technical colleges, serving a more diverse and economically challenged population, need a boost to their operating budgets to strengthen student advising and supports. We know that stronger advising support at CTCs leads to credential completion or student transfer to bachelor degree granting institutions. The Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges Student Achievement Initiative is a good example of how the State uses funding to incentivize achievement of meaningful outcomes such as postsecondary persistence and completion.

High poverty schools should be granted greater flexibility in how they use their funds to develop innovative solutions that fit their student populations and communities. Many students require additional instructional time to meet standards and high need students deserve the most effective teachers. Learning can be effectively extended outside the school day and during the summer. Many students benefit from wrap-around social services such as mental health counseling and housing provided by well-structured community and school partnerships. Dual-language instruction, strong use of early warning indicators for dropout prevention and re-engagement programming, family engagement and increased guidance counseling are other examples of effective, innovative strategies that will boost achievement, graduation rates and contribute to postsecondary success.

- 3. The present use of local levies to fund basic education is unfair and inequitable—the current practice must end.** Providing funding for basic education must be done in a manner that is fair and equitable. All students deserve to attend schools that are amply funded regardless of zip code or local property values. The current levy system penalizes poor and rural districts due to their low property tax base. A new funding system should correct this inequity. The State has a mandate to provide for a uniform funding system for all schools across the state that is both fair and equitable.

Any McCleary solution needs to work well for students in all communities across the state. Addressing inequities should mean closing gaps while maintaining and raising funding levels, not creating a winner vs. loser dynamic between communities. A comprehensive and equitable funding solution should benefit all Washington students.

When the State assumes the full cost of basic education, the compensation system for educators is an issue that will be confronted. It is important that our compensation system attracts and retains a skilled educator workforce. For example, we believe the compensation system should include provisions that compensate educators fairly, addresses regional cost of living differences that exist across our state, increases starting pay for new teachers, offers differential pay to incentivize teaching high demand subjects and/or teaching in high poverty and rural schools.



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4. Increased State revenue will be necessary, and must lead to improved educational outcomes.

The four-year budget outlook from the nonpartisan Economic and Revenue Forecast Council reveals that natural projected revenue growth will be insufficient to cover the increased education spending needs in K-12 alone. With additional resources also needed in early learning and higher education, increased state revenue is a necessary ingredient to achieve the outcomes we desire.

The way money is allocated matters. While the need to increase revenue is unavoidable, funding must be targeted to improve results for students.

Conclusion

Now is the time for all of us to work together to develop solutions guided by these principles.

This historic moment calls for leadership from the Governor and the Legislature. The compromises necessary to reach a *McCleary* “grand bargain” will be difficult for everyone involved, but it is the right thing to do for the future of our State. We encourage State legislators to work across the aisle, and with the Governor, to find common ground and put our children first.

No more delays—the next generation is here.

Join us: www.c2ccoalition.org/join
Questions? Contact: info@c2ccoalition.org