

EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY



Never have public investments in education and opportunity been more essential. A rapidly changing economy and growing inequality of wealth and income demand a public education system that provides all Washingtonians the opportunity to meet their goals.

The state has a fundamental role in providing an excellent education to all. High quality early learning programs can help level the playing field so that all children from different economic and social backgrounds can come to kindergarten ready to learn. A world-class K-12 education system should be available to all students, whatever their individual needs or circumstances. Community and technical schools can open up high-paying employment opportunities and gateways to further education. And institutions of higher learning can offer advanced education to all students who want it.

This chapter describes our shared efforts to ensure education and opportunity for all in the state. It includes goals, measurable outcomes, and spotlights on key issues.

Broadly available education and opportunity is fundamental to the future of our state.

GOALS

Invest in Early Learning

- Children in the state will have access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs.
- Parents will be supported in their efforts to prepare children for school.
- Childcare and preschool settings will be safe and educationally enriching.
- Children will enter kindergarten socially, emotionally, and cognitively ready to succeed in school and life.

Provide a High-Quality Education to All Students

- Students will learn to read with comprehension, write skillfully, apply mathematical concepts, and understand social, physical, and life sciences.
- Schools will provide highly qualified teachers, safe buildings, updated textbooks and equipment, and opportunities for educational enrichment.
- Schools will provide services and resources that address individual students' needs.
- Students will graduate from high school having planned and prepared for further education, workforce training, apprenticeships, or jobs.

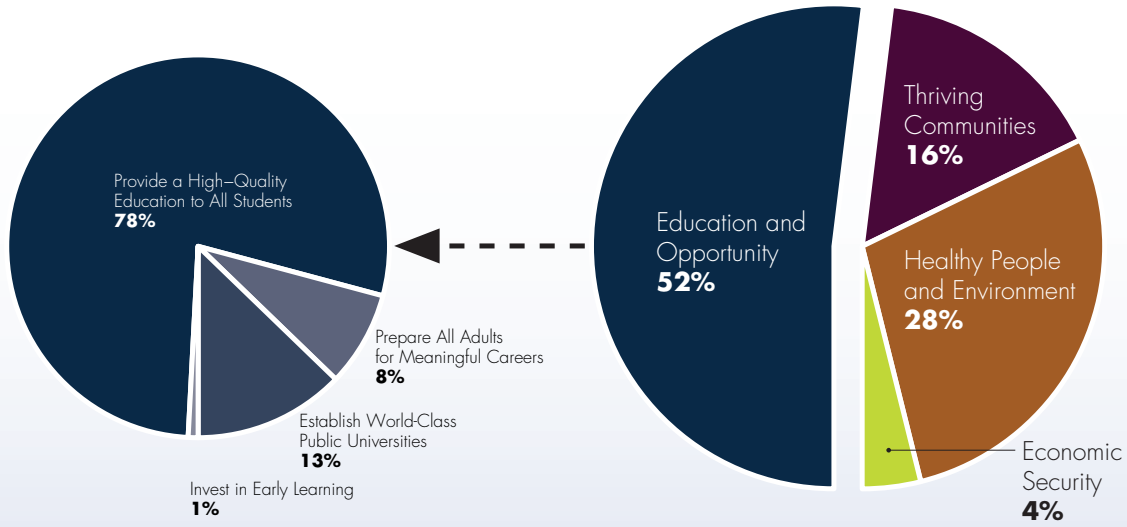
Prepare All Adults for Meaningful Careers

- Community and technical education will bridge the gap between high school and well-paying careers.
- Education and training programs will be matched with workforce demands.
- Workforce training will be available for adults to learn skills for stable, well-paying jobs in the local economy.

Cultivate Opportunities for Higher Education

- Students will have access to high-quality affordable post-secondary education.
- Students will enter higher education programs prepared to excel and complete a degree on time.
- Washington's colleges and universities will offer top-notch research, and economic and cultural opportunities for communities.

Education and Opportunity in the State Budget



State general fund plus only. Source: BPC analysis of LEAP data.

Education and Opportunity

2007–2009 Operating Budget (in millions)

	GENERAL FUND PLUS	OTHER STATE SOURCES	FEDERAL	OTHER
Invest in Early Learning	139	0	192	3
Provide a High-Quality Education to All Students	13,652	0	1,395	152
Prepare All Adults For Meaningful Careers	1,440	3	54	1,058
Cultivate Opportunities for Higher Education	2,214	13	17	4,467
Education and Opportunity	\$17,445	\$16	\$1,658	\$5,680

Important Changes in State Spending for Education and Opportunity

Invest in Early Learning

- In 2006, the state consolidated early learning and child care programs in different agencies into a new Department of Early Learning.
- In 2007-09, funding for state-supported preschool and child care for lower income families was increased. Pilot projects to improve the quality of early learning programs were put in place.

Provide a High-Quality Education to All Students

- Spending on K-12 education grew well below growth in the economy from 1995-97 to 1999-01. Factors included slower enrollment growth and reduced pension contributions.
- In 2000, voters passed two initiatives to increase education funding. One provided additional state dollars to school districts to use on quality improvement initiatives and the other provided teacher salaries with cost-of-living adjustments. School funding rose in 2001-03 as a result, but in 2003-05 these efforts were put on hold.
- In the current biennium, investment in public schools is close to the same level it was in 1999-01, as a share of personal income.

Prepare All Adults for Meaningful Careers

- In 2003-05, state funding for community and technical colleges and universities was reduced and tuition rates were raised to partially offset the loss.

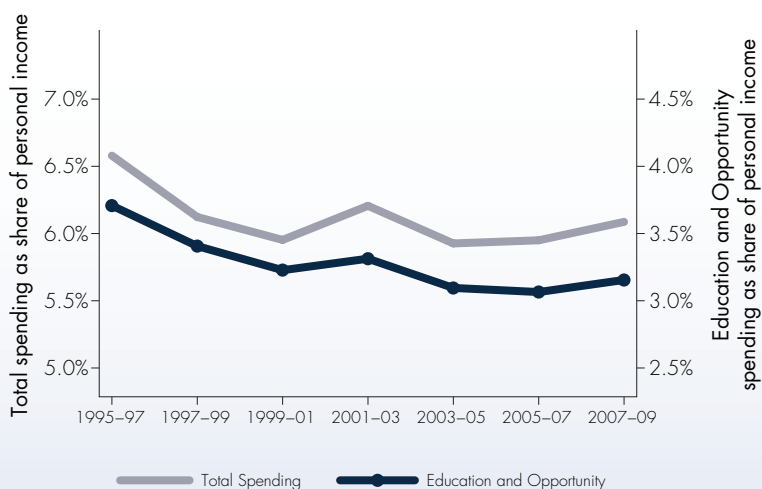
and

- Financial aid was increased in 2005-07 and 2007-09.

Cultivate Opportunities for Higher Education

- Significant new investments were made in 2007-09, including Opportunity Grants and increasing enrollment in high-demand fields.

Education and Opportunity Spending in Context



Note: General Fund Plus only. BPC analysis of LEAP data.

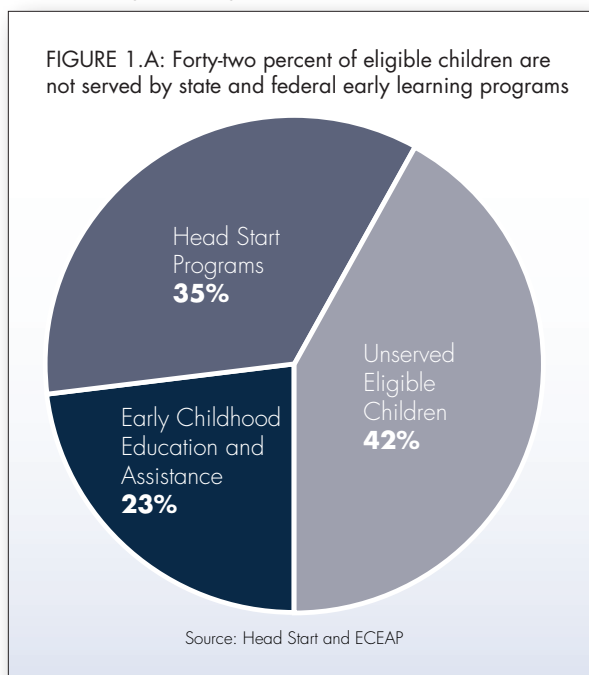
SPOTLIGHT ON:

Kindergarten Readiness

Less than half of children entering kindergarten in Washington State are adequately prepared for school.¹ The effects of starting school at a disadvantage are lasting. Children who enter kindergarten with limited word reading skills are the most likely to develop later reading difficulties and require remedial education.²

Children who attend high quality early learning programs are more likely to be ready for the social, emotional, and academic requirements of kindergarten. Such programs have been shown to reduce referral rates to special education, lower the incidence of grade retention, and improve test scores.³ Children from lower income communities who attend high quality early learning programs are more likely to finish high school and go to college.⁴

Currently, families bear most of the costs of early childhood education and child care. In Washington, care for an infant and a preschool child represents up to 30 percent of median family income.⁵ High quality programs that have low student-to-teacher ratios can raise the costs even more. State and federal efforts such as Head Start and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program are designed to meet the preschool needs of lower income families. However, funding is insufficient to provide services to all eligible families; 42 percent of the poorest children in the state are unable to take advantage of these programs (Figure 1.A).



Since 2001, the Bremerton School District has worked to expand early learning opportunities to all students before they enter kindergarten. They have significantly increased the percentage of students who enter school with basic literacy skills and have saved considerable money that would have been spent on remedial education.⁶

SPOTLIGHT ON:

High-Quality Teachers

High-quality teachers bring unique skills and talents to the classroom. They also have common attributes: a mastery of their subject matter, an understanding of how children learn, and a broad repertoire of teaching methods that meet the diverse needs of students.

The state is taking steps to encourage high-quality teaching. In 2007, the State Legislature passed a law providing a \$5,000 annual bonus to teachers who have National Board Certification. Close to 2,000 teachers in the state are board certified, a distinction that requires them to master their subject matter, work closely with parents and communities, and stay abreast of professional theory.⁷

Nationally, schools that serve children in poverty tend to have fewer highly-qualified teachers, including fewer teachers with expertise in their teaching field. An additional \$5,000 bonus is available for board certified teachers in Washington State who teach in high-poverty neighborhoods.

To build on these investments, we must provide better salaries and more resources for professional development.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

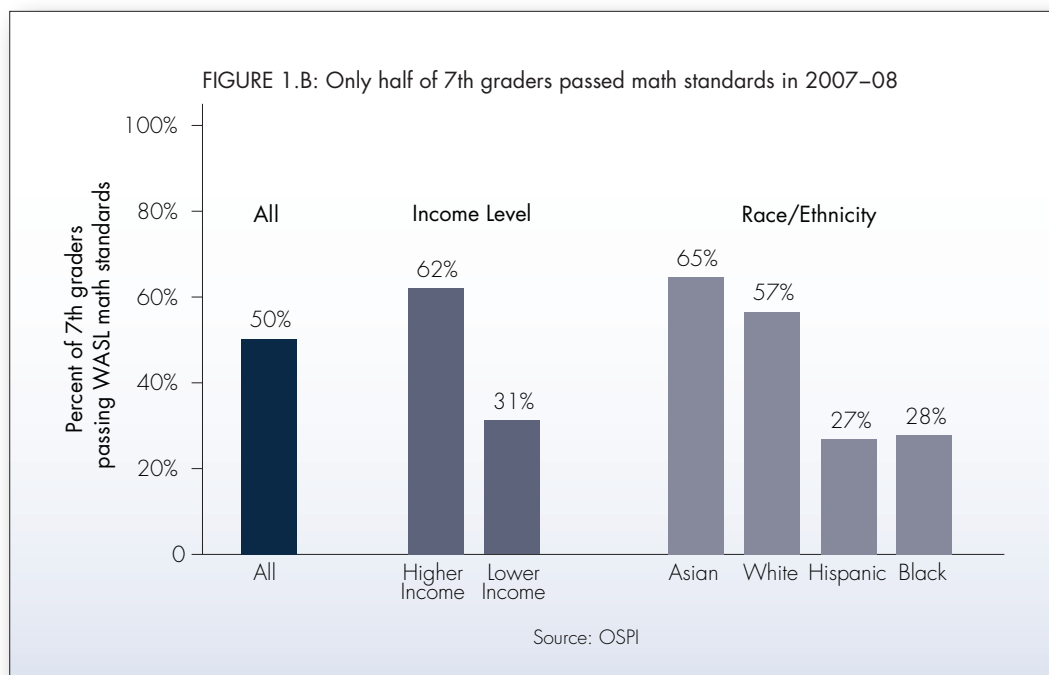
Math and Science Education

Proficiency in math and science can be a prerequisite for success after high school. Students who pursue degrees in math and science are better prepared to enter growing industries and attain jobs that pay a livable wage with opportunities for advancement.

Washington State is struggling to provide students with a high-quality education in these areas. In 2007-08, only half of 7th graders passed the math section of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, and scores were even lower for students of color and students from lower income families (Figure 1.B). In post-secondary education, 45 percent of students in 2006 who went directly from a state high school to community or technical college were required to take remedial math classes.⁸

Until recently, high school graduation requirements have not reflected the importance of math and science. In recognition of this problem, the State Board of Education approved a plan in 2008 to change graduation requirements to include three years of math and three years of science. In addition, math and science curricula are being revamped to provide a more rigorous course of study.

Now that students are required to meet higher standards, they will need to be given the resources that will allow them to succeed. These are investments that will benefit the state economy. Currently, employers in Washington State's technology-based economy have difficulty meeting their needs for workers with mastery of math and science.⁹



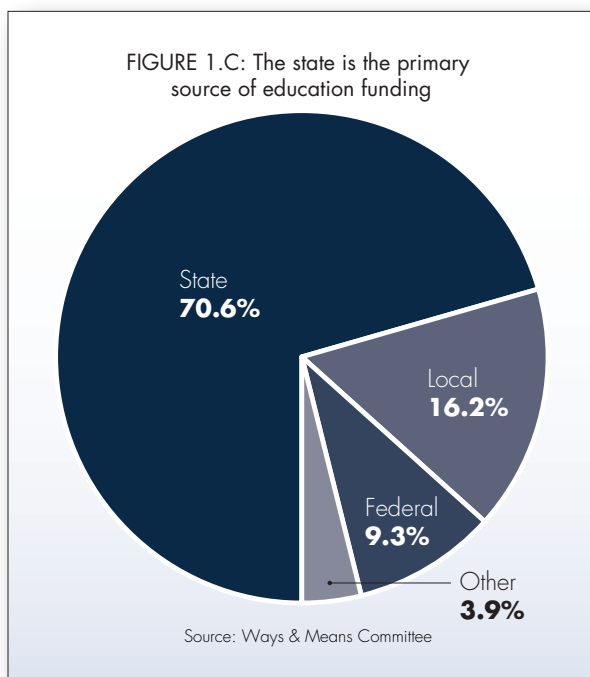
SPOTLIGHT ON:
Accountability

Accountability for educational success starts with students and families, but is shared by all Washingtonians.

In particular, the state, which provides over two-thirds of school district funding (Figure 1.C), has a constitutional mandate to educate all students. Under instruction from the State Legislature, the Washington State Board of Education is developing policies to identify and assist those schools most in need of dramatic improvements in student achievement.

A well-designed plan would hold all stakeholders responsible for the quality of the education system. Rather than enacting punitive measures on individual schools, the focus would be on removing barriers to success such as inadequate resources. Strategies that have proven successful in high-performing schools would be more broadly applied.

An accountability plan needs accurate and in-depth data so that the state can better understand why some students succeed where others struggle. Washington State is a leader in national efforts to improve education data. For example, policymakers and parents can compare the performance of students in various schools in the state by demographic groups and over time. But some key data elements are still missing. For example, information about teachers cannot currently be matched with student demographic and performance data.



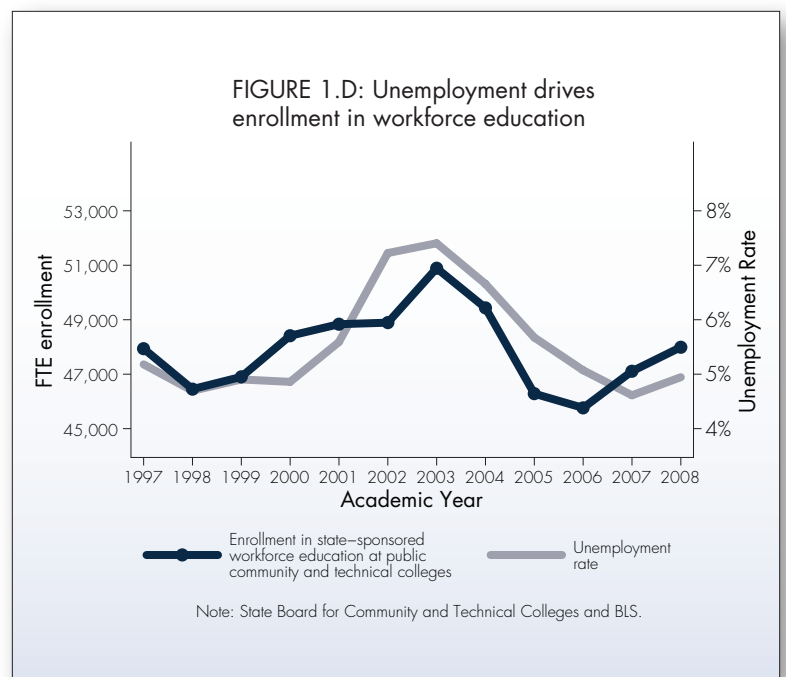
SPOTLIGHT ON:
Opportunity Grants

Completion of one year of post-high school education and a credential can lead to a significant boost in earnings. More limited training programs can help workers find jobs and develop basic skills, but not necessarily lead them to higher wage positions. There are thousands of adults who would benefit from these programs.

Employers would also benefit from a sustained investment in worker education. A recent survey of Washington firms found that the highest vacancy rates were for jobs that required more than a high school diploma, but less than a baccalaureate degree.¹⁰

Despite a growing recognition that worker education is important to the state’s economic future, there has not been a corresponding growth in enrollment. Over the last decade, enrollment in workforce education programs at Washington’s community and technical colleges has risen and fallen along with the state unemployment rate (Figure 1.D). The recent economic downturn has again increased demand and need for worker training programs.

A survey of adult workers showed that the number one barrier to pursuing further education is financial limitations.¹¹ In 2006-07, the state extended “Opportunity Grants” to 843 lower income workers, most of whom were parents. The program was a success—73 percent of the grantees completed a full year of school.¹² In response, the program was expanded statewide.



More can be done to extend the benefits of education and training to workers. Many workers who would benefit most from the Grants are unable to attend full-time because of family responsibilities, and yet the Legislature has limited the funding available for part-time students. In addition, workforce education programs are not available in all communities and are not integrated fully with other necessary supports.¹³

SPOTLIGHT ON: The Achievement Gap

A persistent educational achievement gap exists among Washington students based on race and family income. The gap is seen in elementary school test scores and persists all the way through high school and beyond. African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students and students from lower income families are more likely to drop out of school and less likely to enter college than white, Asian, and higher income students.¹⁴

Admission to college does not necessarily close the gap. Nationally, only 54 percent of entering college freshman from families with incomes below \$25,000 in 1995-96 had completed their degrees six years later, compared to 77 percent for those from higher income families (Figure 1.E). Fewer than half of Hispanic and black students completed degrees compared to over two-thirds of whites and Asians.¹⁵

Washington State has been proactive in developing programs that help all students prepare for college. Navigation 101 provides students with adult mentors who can help them identify career goals and develop an educational plan to achieve their dreams. Running Start gives students the chance to begin taking college courses while still in high school. This allows them to take more challenging courses, get a head start on college without paying tuition, and ease into college life.

Affordability remains a significant barrier for many students, but Washington State is moving forward here as well. In 2007, a new College Bound Scholarship was enacted. Students from lower income families will be notified in the 7th grade that the state will pay the full cost of tuition at any public college or university in the state if they pledge to graduate from high school. This program aims to provide early encouragement to students who would not otherwise have opportunities for college education.

