



## Invest in a high-quality education for every child from cradle to career

As legislators make hard choices this session to fulfill their paramount duty to amply fund education, we encourage them to support a cradle-to-career continuum that maximizes our K-12 investment.

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Over the past five years, more than 400,000 children have entered Washington's K-12 system. During that same time frame, the Washington state Legislature has struggled to discern the best paths toward fulfilling its "paramount duty" to amply fund basic education. While much of the public dialogue has focused on current K-12 costs, there is a parallel conversation occurring related to the higher, long-term costs for our entire state of not investing in a high-quality education for every child — from cradle to career.

Let's start at the beginning. Poverty, family trauma and other barriers create an opportunity gap that can be observed in six-month-old babies. If not addressed, this gap widens before the child reaches kindergarten. This year, roughly half of our state's kindergartners started school with the key skills they need to be successful, and that number is lower for children of color and from low-income families.

State and local education dollars have the greatest impact when they are invested in the early years, so that children start school with the basic skills they need to be successful. High-quality early learning is proven to lead to decreased K-12 costs for special education and remediation, stronger math and reading skills, and increased high school graduation rates.

Strong K-12 students and high school graduates are no longer enough in today's world, however. Learning must continue at the postsecondary level. Studies have shown that a college degree leads to higher lifetime earnings, reduced risk of unemployment, better health, more stable finances, better relationships, more civic engagement, and general increased life satisfaction; these benefits typically are partially passed on to children.

The College Success Foundation has witnessed these effects firsthand through its statewide mentoring and counseling. An analysis of foundation programs and impact determined that for every dollar invested in a student, there was a 700 percent increase in benefits to that student (lifetime earnings) and a 1,500 percent increase in benefits to the community (decreased social services, incarceration costs and increased revenue).

Over the past 17 years, the foundation has learned that supporting students emotionally and academically (particularly low-income, first-generation students), is critical to their educational success. But none of this matters if the student cannot afford to attend college.

For 24,000 potential college students in Washington state, the opportunity to attend college remains elusive or extremely challenging, as the State Need Grant — our state's primary need-based funding for college — lacks the funds to allow these eligible students to receive needed financial support.



Gabriel Campanario/The Seattle Times

Aubrieann Hale is a foundation alumna studying for a social-work degree at Central Washington University. In addition to her financial-aid package, Aubrieann works two part-time jobs — one as a CSF peer mentor — and receives a student loan. "If I didn't have the State Need Grant, there is no way I'd be the first in my family to attend college and earn a degree. It's so important to me to get my degree in social work so that I can help better my community and those who really need help, like I did," she said. "My parents make very little money and struggle with illness, so I would be at such a loss if it weren't for financial aid allowing me to pursue my dream."

As legislators make hard choices this session to fulfill their paramount duty, we encourage them to support a cradle-to-career continuum that maximizes our K-12 investment. This includes continued funding for high-quality child-care supports for our most vulnerable families with young children, our state's preschool program and the State Need Grant. It's the right thing to do for our youth and a smart investment in our state's future.

We have an opportunity to do the right thing for Aubrieann and every child growing up in Washington state. And we will all benefit from more successful schools, stronger families and more self-reliant adults prepared to contribute to a robust economy.