

OUR  
COLLEGES,  
OUR  
FUTURE

2021-22 Legislative Storybook  
and Policy Recommendations



PREPARED BY  
**COMMUNITIES FOR OUR COLLEGES**  
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## WHO WE ARE

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Communities for Our Colleges is a student-of-color-led coalition to invest fully in Washington's community and technical colleges, and transform them into true community institutions by and for students, faculty, and staff. Our mission is to advance racial and economic equity in higher education.

## CONTENTS

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Introduction	....01
Student Stories & Policy	....02
Recommendations	
Acknowledgements	....09



# INTRODUCTION

Our student-centered coalition is grateful to the legislators who have begun the process of transforming our Community and Technical Colleges into more accessible and welcoming places for students from Black, Indigenous and People of Color backgrounds.

This report uses the stories of CTC students to illustrate that a cost-free system combined with aggressive outreach programs and improved wraparound services can rescue the CTC system from declining enrollments. Student testimonies and research data document how these programs will help thousands of students improve their lives while the CTC system gains strength.

## ***CTC Enrollments: A challenge and an opportunity***

Washington's Community and Technical College enrollments are in decline, especially among BIPOC students. This presents an opportunity to fill the CTCs with students from historically disadvantaged communities. A substantial outreach program to BIPOC communities is needed. For outreach to succeed, the effort to make CTC campuses welcoming places needs to continue. Tuition forgiveness and wraparound services need to be strengthened.

# Recommendations for action by the State Legislature and the U.S. Congress

## 1. The cost of college

Washington State's student aid system is among the most generous in the nation, but enrollments are in decline and low completion rates remain stagnant at just over 40%. Pandemic impacts are leaving classes unfilled. We join with others at the state and national level asking that the CTC system be made cost free.

**Recommendation:** That Washington State institute a system of cost-free community and technical colleges for all students. That this commitment should be undergirded by the implementation of reliable long-term resources.



**Sequoia Dolan, Bellevue  
Community College**

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"If college was completely free, I would only have to worry about managing to pay my other expenses [besides school], like my car, wifi, and electricity. And then...just get a part-time job and spend most of my day studying-- **won't have to worry about having to pay debt.**"

-Ramiro

"Everyone should be given an opportunity to go to college, not just single parents. Free community college would end a lot of injustice. When there is increased opportunity to go to school, there is increased opportunity to have something to look forward to. Right now, the situation is 'if my parents don't save money, I can't go to school.' **It shouldn't be that way.**"

-Sequoia





Available childcare options around me require full-time employment. But I cannot work full-time because I am a full-time student at YVC. This is the reason I am looking for childcare in the first place. During my time at YVC, I received \$500 in additional funding for expenses outside of tuition, **but when one book alone costs \$300, I have to survive the rest of the quarter on \$200 alone.**

Wraparound services must be equitable.

-Xochilt

I am currently a student at Everett Community College completing my associates degree. I am also a mother. This means I have to be very creative to go to school. **While WAFSA covers most of my tuition, attending college comes with other expenses and difficulties that are often unseen and therefore unmet.** For example, because childcare is not within my budget, I can only take classes at times when other family members are available to take care of my children. Coordinating transportation is also hard. Because parking permits are expensive, I have to go to college an hour early so I can find street parking. Sometimes, when a class ends late or the walk back to my car is far, I exceed the 2-hour parking limit by a couple minutes and have to pay a ticket for it.

-Dulce

## 2. Wraparound services

Even if cost-free, colleges will continue to be inaccessible for many because personal circumstances compel them to work to support themselves or their families. State data, national studies, and student testimonies emphasize how personal emergencies, transportation challenges, food insecurity, housing crises, and medical costs force students to abandon or delay their studies. Access to childcare is frequently cited as a barrier to low-income parents.

**Recommendation:** That the U.S. Congress and the State Legislature create a robust aid program to provide resources for ancillary aid to students, including childcare, food, transportation, and medical care. A special emphasis needs to be placed on access to childcare services.



**Dulce Estrada, Everett Community College**

### 3. Outreach

Research done by the Washington Student Achievement Council shows that many potential students don't know that financial aid exists, don't think that they are eligible for aid, or think that the application forms are too complicated. The same report documents that, in 2020, the utilization rate for Washington's student aid system 49th worst in the nation.

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"I feel blessed by the support I receive from the state. At the same time, this support only came after persistently fighting for it. I should not have to prove that I need help. It was draining, and I know not everyone has the time, resources, or effort to reach out to administrators time and time again. It shouldn't be so difficult to learn about support systems already available for people in difficult situations. **We shouldn't have to try so hard to get people to listen to us and get the help we need.**" -Sequoia



**Ramiro Huerta,**  
**Yakima Valley College**

"When I went to ask my question about financial aid because I received a bill of over \$5000 to pay, they just told me to talk to this person and gave me a sticky note. I talked to that person, but they didn't respond. After that, I didn't know what to do. The administration didn't respond, so I just kept calling around. When they said they couldn't help me, I just stopped there, not knowing what to do. **If I could have gotten more information, like at YVC, the situation would look very different for me.**" -Ramiro

Our coalition conducted a summer outreach effort to share information about access to Washington CTCs. Our team visited hundreds of sites in both Eastern and Western Washington. By careful targeting, we were able to share information about the costs and benefits of the CTC system with thousands of BIPOC students on their home ground. The state should replicate this effort on a broad scale.

**Recommendation:** That the State substantially increase resources for culturally appropriate outreach to BIPOC communities, including assistance with aid systems. Such a system would include the provision of intensive academic counseling and mentoring and detailed data collection and accountability procedures for campuses to follow and enforced by the State Board for CTCs.

"Right now, a lot of students quit their education because they cannot focus. They can't continue because these students have limitations with English or technology. Many transitional students who are working so hard to complete their requirements to be a college-level student and start their careers do not receive financial help through COVID-related grants. It would mean a lot to have faculty and departments that work to support these students. **We need to continue funding and outreach to give these students the opportunity to continue their education.** Free college might be one step to make this happen." -Dulce

## 4. Counseling

Counseling needs in the CTC system fall into two categories: 1) Help to navigate the challenges and complexities of the system; and 2) A need to deal with the mental health needs of students and staff.

In 2019 the Legislature directed the creation of a task force to look at CTC counseling needs (HB 1055). The resulting report used surveys and student testimonies to document an extensive need for counseling throughout the CTC system.

SB 5194 directed resources to the CTC Board to develop a maximum of eight pilot mental health programs. Over twenty CTCs applied for grants, but available funding can serve less than half of these applications.

Clearly, much more needs to be done to meet the mental health needs of the CTC system.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this report, outreach to bring students into the system and counseling to guide them through the system is vital to bringing students into the CTCs and to help them succeed with their educational careers. These outreach efforts will need to be supported by increased mentoring, navigation, and academic counseling services.

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*"Sorry, I can't help you'*

*'Sorry, I can't do anything'*

These are the words I am told most often when I reach out for support in completing my college education. **It should not be so difficult to learn how to navigate classes, placement tests, and financial aid**, especially for students who speak English as a second language. " -Xochilt



**Xochilt Lopez, Yakima Valley College**

“On paper, my future is promising. I have good grades, a good job, and I’m involved in extracurriculars. But I’m also living through a lifelong battle with my mental health, and every day is a balancing act for me to continue to work toward my goals. I pay for all of my schooling out of pocket, without any assistance. This year I lost my health insurance. Now, **I have to choose between investing in my future and investing in my health and well-being, when the two are deeply intertwined.**” -Sunshine

**Recommendation:** That the Legislature expand counseling pilot programs to include at least half of the CTC’s. That the HB 1055 committee on counseling continue its work and expand its focus to include recommended staffing levels and standards for navigation, academic counseling, and mentoring.

## 5. Assessment and placement inequities

Student testimonies point to the inequities and non-completion impact of placement and assessment policies. An in-depth study of practices featuring Highline Community College done by the Roadmap Project raise questions about the processes and tools used to require that some students enter basic education and language classes before entering credit earning classes. (2) Communities for our colleges will work with legislative committees, community partners, and state agencies to analyze and mitigate discriminatory impacts of college placement policies.

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For all people who want to learn English in college, it’s hard. During my time at YVC, I had to unexpectedly stay for one more year because I was mis-informed that I was able to take my classes for both my ESL program and major at the same time. **I tried to get help, I tried to understand what was happening, but all I was told was “I’m sorry, I can’t do anything.”** - Xochilt

## 6. Faculty conversion from part to full-time

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The relationship between teachers and students is symbiotic. When you’re constantly having to bring in new cycles of teachers, you never have a base of people who know the campus well enough and know the community well enough to really provide students the best experience. A lot of community colleges are not putting teachers on tenure track anymore. When something like a pandemic happens ... instead of technically firing the teachers, they just don’t rehire the part-time teachers. And **it’s these teachers that help students personally trying to achieve their dreams.** -Isaac Tchao



About seventy percent of the CTC faculty is part-time. Earlier reports from our coalition point to the need for a stable, more full time, and racially diverse CTC faculty. (3) In 2012, the Legislature responded with resources to convert two-hundred part-time faculty to full time. They also provided resources and policy directives aimed at bringing greater diversity into CTC faculties that are predominantly white.

While grateful to the response to this issue, much more needs to be done. As this issue is discussed with students it evokes anecdotal evidence that some colleges are reducing offerings for language, basic education, and ethnic studies programs as they respond to overall enrollment declines.

Our coalition believes that this is exactly the wrong approach. As the CTC system reaches out to enroll more BIPOC students, the need for these classes will increase. While the analysis of the equity implications of placement practices may result in a lessening of an emphasis on Basic Education and Language classes, many students still will need them. They should not be the first things cut from the curriculum.

In addition, the system needs to use the opportunity for expanding full-time positions to bring greater diversity into the faculty ranks.

**Recommendation:** That the Legislature expand the resources for faculty stability by expediting conversions to full-time positions among faculties serving Basic Education, Ethnic Studies, and Language Programs. Additionally, we recommend that the CTCs work with BIPOC communities to assure that greater diversity comes into CTC faculties.

## 7. Pay equity for part-time faculty

While our coalition will continue to press for more faculty conversions to full-time, we are aware that, in the near future, most of our teachers will be part-time. We are concerned that these teachers are not compensated fairly.

The racial equity consequences of these conditions are palpable. One of the major challenges for BIPOC students is the need for mentoring and guidance from their instructors. Part-time instructors, forced to scramble together jobs to make a living wage, are challenged to form the relationships their students need to thrive in a challenging and often intimidating college system.

### *What the faculty say:*

From a survey by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce:

- Part-time faculty members report consistently low compensation rates per course;
- Lag far behind their peers with similar credentials;
- Experience little in the way of a career ladder (i.e., wages do not increase with length of service); and
- See consistently different levels of pay based on the type of institution that employs them. (4)

**Recommendation:** That the Legislature provide resources to the CTC State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to study and make recommendations for achieving pay equity for part-time faculty.

## 8. Equity focused curriculum

The current nationwide opposition to equity-based curriculum needs to be addressed strategically through reasonable legislative actions with an informational-driven attitude rather than tactics that fuel divide among individuals.

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**“Racial justice in our community and technical colleges is not just about tuition.** It is also about receiving support from faculty and creating safe spaces for all students to learn. With the pandemic and transition to remote learning, I found it difficult to reach out when I faced problems at school. **Our CTCs must be better at facilitating safe spaces for students of color to reach out for help, whether that be financial, emotional, or academic.** Racist curriculum needs to be addressed, too. I am forced to sit through racist teachings and learn through racist textbooks. Even if it is state-funded, is my college education really ‘free’ if it comes at the cost of my emotional health?” -Sequoia





**Thank you to the students who contributed their stories to this storybook and provided images:**

Dulce Estrada

Ramiro Huerta

Xochilt Lopez

Sequoia Dolan

Mashaal Shameem (photographed by Lance Allegro)

Isaac Tchao

**To our partners:**

American Federation of Teachers Washington, AFL-CIO

The Washington Bus

Equity in Education Coalition

Faith Action Network

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Washington's

Community & Technical Colleges

Mi Centro

Communities of Color Coalition

CAFE: The Community for the Advancement of Family Education

Latino Community Fund of Washington

Northwest Education Access

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