

# Cradle Through College Coalition

## *“Time to Advance Equity—Every Step of the Way”*

### Coalition Statement of Core Principles

1. State investments must be made cradle through college
2. Strong accountability for results
3. Encourage innovation and spread of best practices
4. Additional funding is needed

### Introduction

The bills for the *McCleary* ruling are now overdue. The Supreme Court is demanding increased investment and revenue restructuring in the K-12 system and has issued a ruling holding the legislature in contempt for failure to respond quickly enough to the court’s finding of unconstitutionality.

Progress on *McCleary* cannot be achieved simply by adding money. The only true measure of whether the state will ever meet its paramount duty must be the measure of what actually happens to the children of our state. Does the increased investment accelerate student achievement? Does the increased investment close opportunity gaps and dramatically increase post-secondary attainment for students of color and low income students? These are the priorities that must guide all new investment.

New strategies are needed which will combat the negative effects that poverty and institutional racism have long had on learning. This is a time in our history when we must break with business as usual if we are to deliver the promise of opportunity to all of Washington's children. Having a high-quality educational system, cradle to college, for each and every student regardless of their ZIP code or race is not only the measure of our state’s leadership, it is increasingly the major determinant of Washington State's economic prosperity.

There is consensus recognizing the importance of early learning, early brain development and prenatal health, yet access to early learning is not considered a part of basic education. Similarly, higher education—from community colleges to four-year research institutions—is more important to the State’s STEM-intensive economy than ever, but is not considered “basic” either. The old definitions are clearly out of date. It is projected that by 2018, two-thirds of the jobs in Washington State will require some form of postsecondary education, yet our state has unwisely continued to scale back on investments in access and support for higher education. Recent data on the chance that a Washington student will be in college by age 19 shows Washington as one of the nation's education laggards—Washington ranks 47th of all states.

On the revenue side, state tax revenue growth remains relatively weak despite marked employment increases and solid gains across diverse sectors. Given that the economy is gaining strength after the great recession, the fact that state agencies are making plans for further cuts to higher education and early learning is just more evidence of our state’s structural revenue problems.

Thankfully, in democracies, we have a choice. There is a different way forward!

We do not have to be a state that turns its back on its children. We do not have to accept opportunity gaps for low income children and children of color as a permanent condition. We can invest additional funding wisely and responsibly. **Please** consider joining the “Cradle Through College Coalition” and the fight for educational equity and a positive economic future. Organizations, institutions, coalitions and individuals are all welcome!

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## *“Time to Advance Equity—Every Step of the Way”*

### Key Coalition Principles

1. **Investments must be made cradle through college.** Investments in quality education must span cradle through college, meaning that early learning *through* postsecondary (technical, two-year, four-year) education must be supported. Education does not start in kindergarten and does not end at high school graduation. Pitting one part of education against another, which has happened historically, must be rejected. Each year in a student’s life is critically important.

The state must continue to make progress toward building a strong early learning system—especially for lower income children—and must meet demand for higher education as well, for both quality operations and for access. Funding for the Washington State Need Grant as well as the College Bound Scholarship must keep pace with student demand.

An equitable cradle through college system approach must be embraced and the needs of the whole child and family must be addressed. For example, children and their families need to have healthcare and secure housing—important examples of basic needs that must not be sacrificed in a state budget battle. Bottom line—education must not be funded by cutting health and human services.

2. **Strong accountability.** Strong accountability is essential, especially to close opportunity gaps. All state dollars invested in education—cradle to college—must be prioritized to eliminate racial, ethnic, and income level disparities. This point is critical to emphasize because Washington’s opportunity gaps are persistent and large. If new money is invested without a change in strategy, we will not see the necessary improvement in achievement for students of color or low income students.

Accountability should be viewed as a reciprocal relationship between the state and education institutions; the state cannot simply demand performance without additional resources. However, local administrative flexibility over state resources should be calibrated to results obtained and actual gap closure. The existing budget allocation systems for schools lack those necessary safeguards. Strong local performance certainly deserves recognition and increased flexibility, but the converse is also true: the public must have confidence that the tax dollars invested will get the intended results.

As new dollars are added across the continuum, cradle through college, it is critical that the state be clear on expected results. Children need to be ready for kindergarten, and students need to graduate from high school and be supported to go on to earn a college degree or career credential. The state needs to be clear—much clearer than it ever has been—on the goals and objectives it expects to achieve as a result of enhanced education investments. The Washington Student Achievement Council has developed a 10-year plan to increase educational attainment in Washington and the State Board of Education has established overarching system goals from kindergarten readiness to postsecondary attainment. Every dollar invested must contribute to improved results for students.

The present K-12 prototypical funding formula “allocation” system focuses only on system inputs. It needs to be revamped so that the money provided achieves the intended purpose. Money should be carefully invested for a specific purpose with progress monitored. For example, money for parent

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engagement should go to engaging parents and families. Likewise, money allocated for a stronger college/career counseling function should be spent on that.

Higher weights should be included in the K-12 school formula for student supports for high poverty schools. Teacher pay should be dealt with comprehensively and head-on by the State. Instructional excellence in high-need schools should be incentivized.

Accountability in our higher education institutions must focus more strongly on degree attainment and credential completion, especially for students of color and for those who are the first in their family to attend college. 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.

3. **Encourage innovation and spread of best practice**. The state must do more to create a culture of innovation in education. We need to find ways to incentivize and spread effective practices from cradle through college. Learning can be effectively extended outside the school day and all summer. Well-structured community and school partnerships can help boost student success through expanded learning opportunities, as can dual-language instruction. Strong use of early warning indicators for dropout prevention and re-engagement programming can help increase graduation rates. Colleges and universities should be incentivized to collaborate with local school districts and industry sectors.

As part of the overall cradle through college investment strategy, the state should provide additional resources to fund critical innovations and best practice adoptions that can help the state better serve its increasingly diverse student population.

Schools whose students live in concentrated poverty must have a stronger set of tools and resources if we are to expect them to close gaps and meet their students' needs. Community based organizations, Housing Authorities and community health providers should be engaged as partners in student success.

4. **Additional funding is needed**. We cannot make the level of progress our students deserve without additional funding. Structural deficits have developed at all levels of government because the state's tax system is out of date given today's spending patterns and community needs. The burden of additional funding should be broadly distributed to avoid penalizing any given sector of our tax base. In addition, to comply with the Supreme Court's *McCleary* order, we need to shift responsibility for K-12 funding to the state and away from local levies.

### **The Cradle Through College Coalition—Who are we?**

We are individuals and organizations who feel a strong sense of responsibility for the future of the children of the state of Washington.

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We are asking the Governor and the legislature to make the 2015 session the time that we chart a new course. We ask for the enactment of a results oriented cradle through college investment strategy that spurs innovation and leads to dramatically greater student success. We must provide all students with an equitable educational system that offers greater opportunities to each and every child in Washington State.

We ask YOU to join the undersigned in our efforts to help our state change the course of history for the children of Washington. We welcome your ideas and your energy!

### **Supporters:**

Equity in Education Coalition

Road Map Project

League of Education Voters

OneAmerica

*[more signatories being added...]*

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