Integrated Student Support Services: State Policy Considerations

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Preface

Many of our students face a number obstacles on their way to earning a college degree. They have little money and often lack family resources. They may be the first in their families to go to college. The demands of jobs and children may complicate their lives. At times, they may confront whether to buy books or food. Finding evidence-proven methods to improve student outcomes, persistence, and completion by addressing these external barriers—and more—is the new imperative for our colleges.

This is why Achieving the Dream undertook the Working Students Success Network, a three-year initiative generously supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Lumina Foundation, MetLife Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Four states and 19 colleges adopted an approach that relied upon integrating student support services, building students' financial literacy, and ensuring they were aware of and used all the benefits and resources available to them and their families to keep on track to complete their credentials. This required colleges to reach beyond the campus to connect with state and local agencies, financial entities, nonprofits, and policy movers and shakers.

The initiative showed that academic and nonacademic barriers can fall when colleges provide more holistic, integrated student supports and create a culture that actively engages all faculty and staff in the student support framework. And, because of the scope of WSSN, it also demonstrated how and why college leaders must engage in broader policy advocacy, even when doing so is outside their education comfort zones.

Achieving the Dream and our policy partner, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) worked with WSSN states and colleges to understand their particular policy contexts and develop strategies to advocate for changes to support students. This toolkit and the assessment tool reflect what we have learned from the WSSN experience. The tool can jumpstart colleges' consideration of their policy environment in light of their students' experiences and determine how they will address issues. The toolkit also provides a full description of WSSN, an overview of state and national policy environments, and case studies developed by CLASP showing how WSSN advocates approached policy issues in the four states.

Our communities and states are relying on us to improve the economic well being of our students and their families. We believe the lessons of the WSSN initiative and this policy toolkit will help light the way.

Dr. Karen A. Stout
President & CEO

INTRODUCTION

From 2014 to 2017, Achieving the Dream (ATD) worked with community colleges and community college systems in Arkansas, California, Virginia, and Washington on the Working Student Success Network (WSSN) initiative. Its goal was to strengthen the success of low-income, working students by developing and better integrating college services and processes.

WSSN built on earlier initiatives, including the Working Families Success Network and the Center for Working Families, which sought to serve "non-traditional" college students more holistically through integrated academic and nonacademic services. The colleges developed strategies across three critical pillars affecting student success–education and employment advancement, income and work supports, and financial services and asset building. They provided the services in carefully planned sequences to improve students' academic, employment, and short-term financial stability, while laying a foundation for students' long-term economic mobility.

As an important part of the initiative, ATD partnered with the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) to work with each of the state system partners on state public policy goals that complemented the college-level innovations. The case studies provided within are a result of the work of CLASP with the four states. This overview of policy and lessons learned as well as the policy assessment tool are ATD's reflection of this state level work in a broader context.

Finding New Ways Of Serving Students

Given the demographics of community college students, and by extension all the nation's students, postsecondary institutions and systems can no longer operate in their traditional ways. Today's typical student is no longer of the middle class and entering college immediately upon finishing high school. Most students' lives, especially those of community college students, do not revolve solely around school. These students are employed. Over one-third are over the age of 24. Many are parents. A large proportion have low incomes and are juggling child care, transportation, food, and housing expenses, the latter two of which have risen steeply and become a significant burden for college students.

Public perceptions of college students and their needs, however, have not evolved. Likewise, embedded in the minds of policymakers is a traditional picture of higher education's mission as largely focused on teaching and learning. To some extent, this is true for college staff, as well. As a result, shifting the paradigms around social, economic, and workforce issues is difficult, both at the campus and policy levels. Yet, if we are to achieve the levels of postsecondary and economic success necessary for individual, family, and state prosperity, addressing policy in these areas is critical.

The WSSN initiative responded to this reality by taking aim at the myriad systemic barriers impeding low-income student college completion. WSSN sought to change institutional practices to ensure that more students would succeed and show that state policies can affect whether such innovations take root and expand to scale. State policies on postsecondary budgets, financial aid access, childcare subsidy eligibility, and transportation and housing assistance are critical to student success. That is why the odds of changing outcomes for students partially depend on supportive state policies.

With this in mind, the WSSN state policy work brought together state agency managers, institutional leaders, state advocates, and national policy experts to develop strategies to effect change in the three key pillars:

For more information about how to implement the WSSN approach on your campus, see ATD's Integrated Student Support Services in Action: A Guide to Implementing the Working Students Success Network Approach

1. Education and employment advancement—

education, job readiness, training, and placement;

2. Income and work supports—

access to student financial aid, public benefits, tax credits, and free tax assistance; and

3. Financial services and asset building—

financial education and coaching linked to affordable products and services to help families build self-sufficiency, stabilize their finances, and become more economically competitive.

Identifying Policies Linked To WSSN Goals

CLASP began by developing a comprehensive list of policy options that could impact students under each of WSSN's key areas. It vetted and expanded the list with the help of the WSSN state policy advisory board, which included policy experts from across the three pillars. Then, CLASP worked with each state to identify the policies that related to the specific state context, budget, and priorities. Finally, CLASP and states developed action plans to guide their policy agendas.

Here is a snapshot of policies that could produce opportunities for advocacy within each of the three pillars:

Education And Employment Advancement

Increase support for career advising and counseling

Expand funding for career and guided pathways programs

Help colleges steer students eligible to use the Ability-to-Benefit provision in federal law to access federal financial aid

Facilitate data sharing between colleges and workforce development partners

Improve outcomes-based funding formulas to increase resources for low-income students

Optimize and encourage use of federal programs such as SNAP Employment & Training to further support low-income students

Income And Work Supports

Leverage states' flexibility to expand eligibility for federal programs such as TANF and SNAP to extend assistance to eligible low-income college students

Do not create new obstacles to eligibility, such as denying Medicaid to people who are unable to comply with work requirements

Expand access to child care subsidies for students

Encourage colleges to establish food pantries on campus

Expand access to housing subsidies for low-income students enrolled in college

Reduce verification requirements and allow data sharing between colleges and public-benefit agencies

Financial services and asset building

Provide state funding for financial education programs and coaching services at community colleges

Ensure state financial aid programs are based on need

Extend state aid to formerly incarcerated students

Provide incentives for savings programs among college students

This is a sample of where brainstorming about policies to help working students might lead. State policymakers are beginning to recognize that addressing the needs of low-income students and the community colleges that serve them are a critical investment in state economic growth. The WSSN initiative has highlighted some of the major policy changes that can make a difference, from increasing financial aid and assistance for working students to expanding current career pathways and workforce legislation, to easing student access to basic housing, food, and transportation benefits.

You will find more ideas about how to advocate effectively for education and social policy reform in the State Policy Assessment Tool where we help college leaders assess their current state policy environment as it relates to low-income students as well as examine how those policies (or lack thereof) impact different groups of students. That tool is followed by four state case studies that discuss how the four states included in the WSSN initiative pursued this work.

Lessons Learned

Changing institutional policies to better serve low-income students can take significant effort on the part of a college, its leadership and staff. However, those changes are within the institution's control for the most part.

Working in the state policy environment can be more of a challenge because so many factors are not within a college or system's control. This reality, along with the fact of limited public resources for colleges and community college systems, make it imperative that the policy work we do to improve the context within which colleges serve low-income students, be strategic, long-term and flexible.

Many of the over-arching lessons coming out of the policy portion of the WSSN initiative are common sense, but they provide a context for thinking about the policy strategies states might adopt to achieve forward momentum.

Prioritize policy issues strategically.

Colleges or systems will typically have multiple policy areas around which advocacy is organized, most often with securing adequate funding leading the pack. Working on too many policy areas can result in both spreading leadership and staff time too thin and weakening advocacy on key issues. Policymakers can be confused, as well, about the college or system's priorities. Prioritize the agenda to focus on the college's top issues but also consider which ones are likely to gain traction either because they connect to other issues under consideration or they already have legislative support on which to build.

Build capacity to promote a state policy agenda.

Community colleges and systems often have limited capacity to work on state policy. However, they can expand that capacity by collaborating across colleges in the system and by re-imagining who can be involved in state policy advocacy work. Engaging faculty, staff, and students in the college's state policy agenda is a way to draw in the larger campus community and has the potential to place those constituents most affected by policy decisions in front of their representatives. Having a "deep-bench" of advocates also helps create continuity over the long-term. This is critical given the amount of turnover that occurs in state legislatures and administrations.

Connect with other organizations on areas of common concern.

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A key lesson of the WSSN work was the importance of building relationships with other community-based organizations that are working on issues affecting low-income individuals. This is just as true in the policy environment. Rather than having an issue be about something a particular college wants, the issue becomes about a group of stakeholders who are trying to improve the education, financial stability, and career opportunities for low-income students.The strength of numbers of diverse advocates suggests the broad impact the issue has on the community and state.

Plan for the long-term, but be prepared to move on short-term opportunities.

Changes to state policy rarely happen quickly or even in one legislative session. As such, colleges and systems need to prioritize issues and develop a legislative agenda they can work on over time. Policymakers often need significant education on how policies impact low-income college students even when legislative or regulatory proposals aren't even on the table. Having issues identified and policymakers made aware of those issues allows colleges to be prepared to jump when legislative opportunities to move part of the agenda crop up.

Use lessons learned in other states.

State policy is particular to each state (and often state policymakers resist being told how other states do things). Nevertheless, colleges can learn from the experiences of other state systems regarding how they were able to achieve important policy changes, whether it was through messaging, connecting certain policy issues with other issues or organizations, or determining the order to best pursue issues (i.e., once we were able to change "x," the rest fell into place).

State policymakers and staff have a lot on their plates and limited time to address our issues. Consequently, it is critical to be prepared, focused, and ready to act when opportunities present themselves. Many of the policy areas that can help colleges serve low-income students entail technical changes, but policymakers need to see that these changes will not only help current students, but also improve the well-being of their communities and states.

Working Student Supports State Policy Assessment Tool

For community college students, making ends meet can be a struggle, even when they have jobs. Uncertainties about childcare, transportation, food, or housing—many of which students experience simultaneously—can upend their budgets, time, and focus. For these students and their families, programs, such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid, are necessary safety nets for meeting basic needs. To help students stay in college, many higher education institutions are being more proactive in identifying institutional and state policies that can stand in the way of student success. As they work to improve campus policies and practices, they are also sharing what they learn to help influence state policies to better support student success.

Achieving the Dream created this policy assessment tool to help in that effort. The tool is built on lessons from the Working Student Success Network (WSSN), an integrated student support services strategy to help low-income students achieve financial stability and upward economic mobility, and work by CLASP. It is designed to help higher education leaders look at state policies affecting specific types of students, identify the gaps and possible policy implications, and use institutional and state data when available to inform proposed solutions. This tool is a first step in a process that includes gathering information from other state level advocates as necessary to complete the responses, understanding the implications of policy, and identifying strategies that can achieve results.

The tool is divided into two parts, which can be used independently or together. The first part is an assessment of your state's policy environment as it relates to low-income students. The assessment offers a series of questions to help you quickly identify those policies that are already in place, those that need improvement, and those that currently do not exist in your state. The questions are not meant to be exhaustive but rather to serve as a starting point to guide conversations with other organizations and advocates within your state. There will be nuances and complexities to these policy issues relevant to your state context. You may need to add other policy or funding options unique to your state (i.e., funding for career pathways for adult students or guided pathways, outcomes based-funding or state directives for food pantries on campus) as you and your team answer questions and discuss how your college is affected by state policies. The second portion of the tool is organized around types of students and their situations. It asks for policy information and data that will lead your team to more insights about how policy affects success for working students. The tool is intended to help you identify what policies to prioritize based on gaps in the current policies and the impact changes could have for the students you serve.

Teams can use the tool differently depending on the state situation. For best results and to use the tool as an effective discussion aid, plan to devote a minimum of one hour to complete each section of the assessment tool. Teams should include people from human services and workforce development. If that is not possible, plan to gather information from these sources and other state level policy advocates in order to fully complete the assessment. Take good notes to support a rich and forward-looking team conversation with consideration of the state context and policy work to undertake over the long term. Following the tool is a set of guidelines for next steps.

State Policy Assessment Tool: Questions To Consider

The following assessment tool is intended to provide colleges, systems, and states with a quick means of assessing the state policy environment with regard to policies that help or could potentially help colleges better serve low-income students. The questions included in the tool are not intended to be an exhaustive list and there is room for additional items in each policy area. If you do not know the answer to a question, leave it blank and then create a list of policies that need further research.

Policy Area: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities. However, college students may be ineligible for SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption such as by working or having parenting responsibilities. In addition, SNAP Employment & Training (E &T) provides funds that states may use to offer individuals who receive SNAP benefits with employment and training programs that help them obtain and retain employment.

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Has your state created a system to increase knowledge and use of the exemptions to the student restrictions on SNAP eligibility, including eligibility for individuals receiving work-study?			
Has your state taken advantage of flexibilities in the federal rules to expand the number of students who may qualify for exemptions to the student restrictions for SNAP eligibility?			
Does your state use SNAP E&T funds to provide wrap-around services for students receiving SNAP?			
Has your state taken steps to ensure that part-time students who are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) do not lose their benefits due to the time limitations? (ABAWD is a person between the ages of 18-49 who has no dependents, is not disabled, and can only receive SNAP for three months in a three-year period if he or she does not meet certain work requirements.)			
Other policy questions relevant to your state?			

Policy Area: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is a block grant that gives states flexible funds to provide cash assistance and other supports to help needy families care for their children and achieve self-sufficiency. While TANF may be used for a very broad range for services for needy families, adults who receive cash assistance are generally required to participate in work-related activities, and there are limits on how much full-time education and training can be counted toward the federal work participation rate.

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Does your state allow TANF recipients to meet their participation requirements by attending college? If so, does it allow college attendance to count as a stand-alone activity beyond 12 months?			
Has your state adopted policies and practices that will connect TANF recipients to robust and tailored career pathways to help parents receive the training and credentials they need to obtain jobs?			
Has your state developed TANF scholarship funds that can be used to provide last-dollar aid to low-income students? (Note: using TANF to support scholarships for middle-class students is not recommended.)			
Other policy questions relevant to your state?			

Policy Area: Workforce Training

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Does your state provide assistance in helping to connect TANF or SNAP recipients with training and education?			
Does your state provide funding to help individuals earn credentials in high demand occupations as part of a career pathways program?			
Does your state use the set-aside provisions under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to leverage capacity at community colleges to prepare workers for jobs?			
Other policy questions relevant to your state?			

Policy Area: Financial Aid & Education

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Does your state utilize the Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) provision, which allows students to access federal financial aid?			
Does the state provide resources to increase rates of students who complete the FAFSA form?			
Does the state provide needs-based financial aid?			
Is eligibility for needs-based aid extended to part-time and independent students?			
Does the state have programs designed to provide incentives for savings among students, such as the prize-linked savings account?			
Does your state provide financial aid for students who lack a high school diploma or GED and are enrolling in a short-term certificate program?			
Does the state provide any funding for financial coaching or financial literacy at community colleges?			
Other policy questions relevant to your state?			

Policy Area: Access to Benefits

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Is information about student eligibility for benefits available through state websites and other easily accessible means?			
Does your state offer training to college personnel to understand how students can access or become eligible for public benefits?			
Has your state expanded Medicaid?			
Other policy questions relevant to your state?			

Policy Area: Child Care

The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program pays for child care subsidies to eligible low-income households with parents who are working or are participating in an approved work activity at the time of application CCDBG is not an entitlement and in most states, only a small share of those who are eligible for child care subsidies receive benefits.

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Does your state allow participation in SNAP E&T to be included as a priority for child care subsidy?			
Does your state allow students to qualify for child care subsidies?			
Other policy questions relevant to your state?			

Policy Area: Housing, Transportation, and Food

Questions To Consider	Yes	Needs Improvement	No
Does your local government (city or county) provide subsidies toward housing for students?			
Does your state provide subsidies toward transportation for students?			
Does your state provide support for colleges to offer food pantries on campus or partner with community food banks?			

Student Characteristic Assessment Tool: Identifying Policy Gaps

This assessment tool is designed to help you think about what gaps in policy exist, changes that could be made, and how much of a priority a state policy change is to your college or system given the impact it will have on students.

If you decided to use the assessment tool above to look at your state policy environment regarding support for low-income students, your work there can be used to inform your answer here (although this tool can be used independently if your team feels that starting from the student perspective is more helpful). The table below is intended to facilitate that work.

Student Characteristic Assessment Tool

The first column

The first column identifies the characteristics of certain student groups community colleges typically serve. These are not meant to be exhaustive and there is room in the table to add additional groups that your college or state may serve. The intention is to identify groups of low-income students that represent a significant part of your student population and then determine how well your state's current policies serve that group of students.

The second column

The second column asks you to determine if you have any institutional and/or state level data that would be useful in informing policy decisions that do or could impact this group. That could include, but not be limited to:

- Percentage of students that fall into this group;
- Persistence and completion rates for this group;
- Common length of attendance for the group;
- Average income and use of financial aid; or
- Other relevant information

The third column

The third column asks you to identify policy areas that could have an impact on this group. You can use the policy areas in the state policy assessment part of the tool to help you think through what policies may apply—regardless if you filled out that assessment tool.

The fourth column

The fourth column asks you to identify what the gaps are between how current policies work for this group and how they potentially could work if enacted or improved. Here again, the state policy assessment part of the tool may be of assistance as gaps will most likely exist for those policies you identified as needing improvement or that currently are not in place.

The final column then asks you to determine how important this policy area is to work on.

NEXT STEPS

Now that you have completed the state policy assessment and student characteristic tools, your team should be in position to:

Identify policy areas that you need additional information about and develop a strategy for gathering that information.

Identify additional institutional or state level data that would be beneficial to have to further develop policy positions, and put together requests to gather that data.

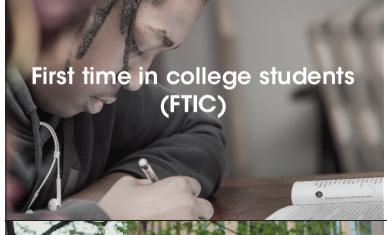
Seek additional input from other organizations and advocates working in these policy areas.

Develop a state policy priority agenda for your college or system.

Educate and build support from other community college leaders and advocates in the state.

Draft briefs and other materials to help legislators or other policymakers understand the issues and impact on students, communities, and the state.

Finally, as is always the case with policy and policymakers, remember that the environment is constantly changing and as a result so will your policy agenda, priorities, and strategies.

Student Characteristics	**State or Institutional Level Data** (if available)	**State Policies with Possible Impact**	**Gaps** (between state policy & student impacts)	**Current or Future Policy Priority** (high, moderate, low)
				
				
				
				
				
				

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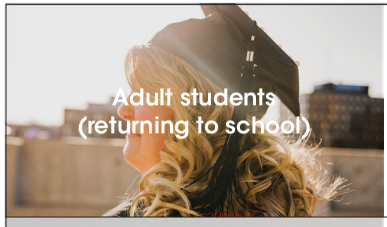				
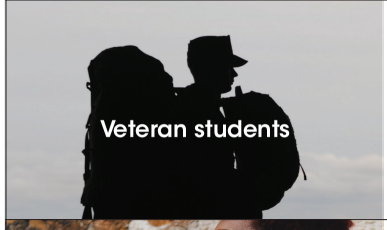				
				
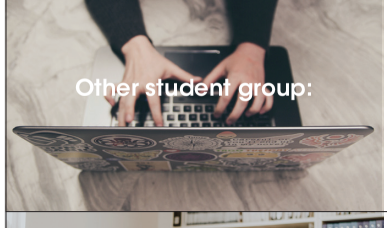				
				
				

Developing State Policy Agendas To Help Serve Low-Income Students: Four Case Studies

In the following pages, you'll find policy case studies from the four states that participated in the Working Students Success Network initiative. These are not meant to represent success stories, although there are successes here. Rather, they capture how states worked with the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), an Achieving the Dream (ATD) partner on this initiative, to design their policy agenda within the three pillars of WSSN. Their experiences hold lessons for other states undertaking new strategies to help their low-income working students cross the completion finish line.

However much expertise state partners brought to the table, they received invaluable help from CLASP as an intermediary. CLASP brought its national experience as an anti-poverty advocacy organization to state education leaders already carrying full plates and who might feel daunted by the task of working on policies outside their traditional domain. It helped state partners strategize, served as a sounding board, and connected existing postsecondary stakeholders with other stakeholders. Having a partner who can help navigate different policy arenas is essential to advancing holistic policies that support low-income working students.

Achieving the Dream wishes to thank CLASP senior policy analysts Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield and Wayne Taliaferro for providing these case studies.

ARKANSAS

Embedding integrated services into a new outcomes-based funding model

Arkansas does not have a community college coordinating body that sets policy. Rather, the state's 22 community colleges are represented together through a nonprofit association, the Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC). ACC provides professional development and lobbies on behalf of the community colleges. The national anti-poverty organization CLASP, worked with the ACC as the state partner to develop an agenda guiding the policy work of the four colleges participating with ACC in the WSSN project:

- College of the Ouachitas (Malvern);
- East Arkansas Community College (Forrest City);
- North Arkansas College (Harrison); and
- Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (Helena-West Helena).

Arkansas' community colleges are well versed in working with low-income students and have experience providing integrated services through work with the Center for Working Families, a predecessor initiative to ATD's Working Students Success Network (WSSN). With major foundation funding, the ACC Center for Student Success is rolling out a robust Career Pathways Initiative. The colleges' committed staff use Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds and strong advising to address the comprehensive needs and success of low-income student parents.

The director of the Center for Student Success, who spearheaded ACC's WSSN efforts, was already familiar with policies across the three pillars of the policy agenda. Therefore, Arkansas took advantage of its participation in WSSN to focus mainly on embedding the existing framework into state policy.

The Arkansas Agenda

The main factors influencing the Arkansas partner's design of the policy agenda were Arkansas' constrained higher education budget, its new outcomes-based funding approach to achieve equity goals, and ACC's strong existing career pathways infrastructure. To achieve the education and employment advancement pillar policy goals, ACC and the colleges needed to collaborate across postsecondary education and workforce training systems. State shifts in financial aid programming also required partners to collaborate across these systems to scale support to more adult students.

The WSSN partners found a particular challenge in meeting the income and work supports pillar policy goals.

The chart below shows the policy priorities the ACC identified to pursue within the three key pillars of the WSSN approach.

Pillar	Policy Priorities
Education and Employment Advancement	Work with community colleges, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), and political leadership as the state establishes a new outcomes-based funding formula, including incentives to better serve disadvantaged students.
	Expand adoption of policies at colleges that enable use of the Ability-to-Benefit provision that allows students without a high school credential enrolled in career pathways programs to qualify for federal financial aid.
	Expand state funding for the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, which provides important infrastructure for colleges to provide integrated support services to career pathways and WSSN students.
	Expand to more colleges the Accelerating Opportunity Arkansas programming that combines postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) training for GED students.
	Enable data sharing with community colleges on unemployment insurance (UI) wage records at least once annually.
Income and Work Supports	Maintain access for low-income parent students to state financial aid (Go Opportunities Grant, Workforce Improvement Grant, and Lottery Scholarship).
Expand definition of and eligibility for career-focused training in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).	Preserve and/or expand access by student parents to child care subsidies, particularly for career pathway's students.
Explore use of work-study funds to expand SNAP access.	Advocate for maintaining the Medicaid expansion.
Invest state funds in new programming at colleges that use SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) match funding that enables "able-bodied" individuals to maintain eligibility by enrolling in college training.	Support efforts to establish a state earned income tax credit (EITC).
Financial Services and Asset Building	Maintain/expand funding of Aspiring Scholars Matching Grant, the state's 529 match savings program.

CLASP and ACC worked on building the skill of state community college leaders to advocate for policies outside the usual education categories that support the WSSN agenda. Overcoming their "outsider" status was a challenge for leaders in some cases. Therefore, ACC played a key role in bridging this gap, making connections across bailiwicks and facilitating necessary conversations to move the agenda. CLASP provided policy expertise to empower and sustain the agenda.

Selected Initial Outcomes

CLASP coordinated efforts to inform and advise ACC on strategies for each of the pillars of the agenda and build the capacity of state leaders and relevant staff to be strong advocates. Naturally, these strategies evolved over time as budget and legislative cycles unfolded and a new governor took office, but the agenda's overarching goal was to sustain efforts to help working students over the long term. Given its role as an independent lobbying entity for the state's community colleges, ACC was in a unique position compared to other states to advocate for items on the agenda beyond traditional agency parameters.

Below we highlight some initial outcomes and continuing progress from Arkansas' WSSN state policy agenda.

Education and Employment Advancement Policy Agenda

- **Work with community colleges, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, and political leadership as the state establishes a new outcomes-based funding formula, including incentives to better serve disadvantaged students.** After the state issued a new outcomes-based funding formula, community colleges advocated for the formula to consider their mission (serving older students, underserved students, etc.). This will help achieve greater equity.

- **Maintain funding for career pathways.** Thanks to a mix of advocacy, legislative backing, and evidence of effectiveness, ACC succeeded in maintaining funding for Arkansas' Career Pathways Initiative, which is funded by TANF dollars and geared toward low-income parents.

- **Maintain access to state financial aid for low-income parent students (Go Opportunities Grant, Workforce Improvement Grant, and Lottery Scholarship).** Money from the need-based Go Opportunities Grant and Workforce Improvement Grant was diverted to support Arkansas' free college plan—Arkansas Future or ArFuture—which provides two tuition-free years of college for students who pursue high-demand, high-need career and technical training. Time will tell if this first step toward free college will help students with the greatest needs, which go beyond tuition.

- **Enable data sharing with community colleges on unemployment insurance wage records at least once annually.** The state workforce agency and state public colleges are developing a memorandum of understanding to track student outcomes. Next year, Arkansas will have its first yearly data match.

Income and Work Supports Policy Agenda

- **Support efforts to establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).** The state passed a low-income tax cut instead of the EITC. While not ideal, the compromise will still benefit low-income working students.

- **Expand student access to SNAP.** States have the flexibility to change the definition of career-focused training in the SNAP program to expand student eligibility and access to SNAP benefits.

- **Preserve and/or expand parent student access to child care subsidies, particularly for career pathway's students.** Child care for student- parents continues to be a major need. Unfortunately, limited resources and high demand constrain the availability of subsidies.

- **Advocate for maintaining the Medicaid expansion.** ACC recognizes the importance of student access to health care and supported state efforts to expand Medicaid in 2013 under the Affordable Care Act. Given the political environment, the expansion remains vulnerable, so ACC continues to advocate for maintaining it.

Lessons Learned

As other states develop policy agendas to address the needs of low-income working students and complement integrated service delivery at the institutional level, it is important to keep several lessons in mind. These obstacles and lessons learned ultimately affected outcomes but also served as strong blueprint lessons for scaling this work. In particular:

Brace for budget crunches.

In Arkansas, the constrained budget environment paired with a changing gubernatorial administration meant recalibrating strategy to realistically gauge short- and long-term goals, such as expanding child care subsidies and investing in need-based state financial aid. The latter was eliminated to create the ArFuture program.

Be patient and resilient.

Administrative changes (local, state, and federal), new initiatives and priorities, and financial imbalances all have real implications for long-term policy strategy. During the course of the WSSN grant, Arkansas' political climate shifted as a new governor and political party transitioned into leadership in 2015. Likewise, the policy agenda of state leadership and legislatures changed. Resilient strategies for the WSSN policy agenda require foresight and strong contingency planning. In addition, policy success is not linear and takes time.

Follow through on implementation.

While ACC largely focused on a legislative strategy, it also identified a policy implementation that needed college-sector attention—increasing the take-up of the Ability-to-Benefit provision to help lower-skilled students on career pathways establish eligibility for federal Title IV financial aid. Arkansas colleges have been slow to implement this federal provision that increases postsecondary access for low-income working students. This underscores the importance of not only securing state public policy changes but also working to fully implement both federal and state changes.

Find experts to help.

Asking overburdened education leaders to think about a new set of policies outside of their traditional domains can be a heavy lift. ACC used CLASP staff to help state partners strategize, serve as a sounding board, and connect existing postsecondary stakeholders with other stakeholders. CLASP expertise helped Arkansas partners confidently navigate the different policy arenas at play in advancing holistic support for low-income working students.

CALIFORNIA Putting the emphasis on students' basic needs

Some aspects of WSSN are not new to California community colleges, which have a history of providing integrated services and working with low-income student parents. So, while they were committed to tackling all three pillars of the project, the WSSN partners decided to put the greatest policy focus on the income and work supports pillar.

The 114 community colleges and 72 community college districts across California are overseen by the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). While the chancellor's office is a strong bully pulpit on behalf of the system, the chancellor gives flexibility to colleges and districts, and they exert a great amount of local control.

The CCCCO worked in partnership with seven community colleges to participate in the WSSN project:

- Cabrillo College (Aptos);
- Cañada College (Redwood City);
- East Los Angeles College (Los Angeles);
- Los Angeles Harbor College (Los Angeles);
- Los Angeles Southwest College (Los Angeles);
- Skyline College (San Bruno); and
- Porterville College (Porterville).

During most of the initiative, the CCCCO housed the WSSN work in the office of the vice chancellor for student services and special programs under a dean who oversees an array of state-funded programs that support low-income students. These programs, which reflect existing legislative, regulatory, and education efforts, were already providing services and supports linked to the focus areas of the WSSN pillars. They include:

Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)—a state-funded program that offers academic and support counseling, financial aid, and other support services for disadvantaged students;

California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS)—California's implementation of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Some CalWORKs funds are used for job placement, child care, curriculum development and redesign, and post-employment skills training.

Cooperating Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program—provides support services to single heads of households who participate in CalWORKS.

In the project's last six months, the chancellor's office transferred the WSSN policy work to the CCCCO Student Success Center.

The California Agenda

The California WSSN partners focused the bulk of their policy attention on matters relating to the income and work supports portion of the initiative with an emphasis on food security. After national studies exposed the extent of hunger among college students, California made food insecurity a central issue, and the Legislature passed a bill to address it. In the education and employment advancement pillar, the focus was on trying to influence new and existing funding streams to include strengthening career advising and counseling. The chart below shows the policy priorities the CCCCO identified to pursue within the three key pillars of the WSSN approach.

Pillar	Policy Priorities
Education and Employment Advancement	Expand policies related to increasing access to career advising and counseling.
Income and Work Supports	Expand low-income student access to CalFresh—California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
	Provide better information to students about potential benefits eligibility Explore broader use of SNAP Employment and Training funds to provide wrap-around supports.
	Encourage colleges to provide emergency grants to particular populations.
	Include an increase in Cal Grant C program in the state budget Enable data sharing between community colleges and public benefits agencies.
Financial Services and Asset Building	Explore feasibility of changing law around prize-linked savings to provide incentives for savings by students.

The CCCCO and CLASP a national anti-poverty organization, worked to strengthen community college leaders' capacity to advocate for policies in benefit areas outside the traditional education sphere. The CCCCO used its network to act as a liaison and build relationships between college, financial, and social services systems.

Selected Initial Outcomes

The CCCCO's policy agenda evolved over time. The overarching goal was to develop state-level change agents and campus leaders who can sustain a strategy of advocating for legislative and administrative policies that will support low-income working students in the short and long term. CCCCO staff working on the public policy portion of the grant focused on disseminating information about recent policy changes and influencing campus activities rather than pursuing large legislative changes. Here are some highlights of the work.

Education and Employment Advancement Policy Agenda

Expand policies to increase access to career advising and counseling.

An initial challenge facing CCCCO staff was logistical. It had to identify various points of contact in different departments in order to know where to direct efforts to increase services among multiple workforce development initiatives. Near the end of the WSSN initiative, the 2017-18 California state budget provided $150 million in one-time grants to seed the expansion of the state guided pathways framework across the California community colleges over the next five years. As the money was distributed, it provided needed resources to strengthen career advising and counseling services offerings. Technology improvements are also making a difference. Some colleges are using the new online course management system called CANVAS to provide more effective student advising services. Both of these developments will increase student access to advising and counseling.

Income and Work Supports Policy Agenda

Expand low-income student access to CalFresh/SNAP.

Taking its cue from the political interest in abating college-student hunger, the CCCCO focused more of its public policy efforts on educating colleges about CalFresh and connecting more low-income students to benefits. Federal law restricts students enrolled in college at least half time from applying for SNAP benefits unless they meet one of several exemptions, including participating in specified employment programs. However, a 2015 California law expanded student eligibility for CalFresh by designating certain educational programs as employment training programs for the purposes of CalFresh. In 2017, the California Department of Social Services (DSS) released an All County Letter that provided guidance to county offices about how to implement the legislation and identify more students who may be eligible for CalFresh.

> CCCCO promoted the All County Letter to help colleges understand how the new CalFresh rules expanded eligibility for some low-income students, and also how students eligible to participate in the Federal Work-Study program were eligible for CalFresh. The CCCCO held regional CalFresh enrollment trainings with 80 community colleges that featured local county DSS representatives and helped build closer relationships between the colleges and CalFresh administrators. As the WSSN grant wound down, the CCCCO developed a primer on food and housing insecurity and a CalFresh enrollment toolkit. The CCCCO was also able to secure $2.5 million in state funding to distribute the primer and toolkit across the CCC system so administrators could promote CalFresh enrollment services to students and start campus food pantries.

Provide better information to students about potential benefits eligibility.

The vast majority of low-income community college students in California qualify for free student fees (California's term for tuition) through California's Promise program (formerly the Board of Governor's fee waiver), but they still face challenges covering living expenses. As a result, the CCCCO included student public benefits education and access in its WSSN public policy agenda. The chancellor's office developed easy-to-understand information for students, faculty, and staff across multiple platforms and is conducting a system-wide basic needs survey to gather best practices on benefits access. The CCCCO developed a basic needs/mental health fact sheet and is also planning a system-wide basic needs convening. Just as the WSSN colleges integrated public benefits information into their student success courses, the CCCCO is developing a module in CANVAS to educate students about benefits.

Include an increase in the Cal Grant C program in the state budget.

A large portion of California state financial aid is provided through the Cal Grant programs. One of these programs, Cal Grant C, targets students in occupational and technical training programs at community colleges or vocational schools. The Cal Grant C Access Award for students attending community colleges and pursuing certain occupational training programs leading to high-wage, high-quality jobs increased from $547 to $1,094. Because securing additional funding for financial aid is rarely an easy task, this success was one of the larger wins over the course of the WSSN project.

Explore broader use of SNAP Employment & Training funds to provide wrap-around supports.

SNAP E&T funds can be used to support a variety of education, training, employment, and related support services for SNAP recipients—in essence combining training for employment with income and work supports. Prior to the start of the WSSN initiative, California had begun piloting CalFresh Employment & Training programs (SNAP E&T) in general locations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is advocating for broader usage of the SNAP E&T program, including the piloting of an ambitious program in Fresno. The CCCCO included expanding use of CalFresh E&T to more counties on its WSSN agenda. Given that California's social service programs, including CalFresh, are administered at the county level, expansion of this strategy was challenging. Over the course of the grant, more Cal Fresh E&T programs were seeded, and the Fresh Success program was created to help community colleges and community-based organizations effectively start and manage CalFresh E&T programs in partnership with their counties.

Financial Services and Asset Building Policy Agenda

Explore feasibility of changing law around prize-linked savings to provide incentives for savings among students.

As part of WSSN, a handful of colleges worked with financial partners to develop vehicles to provide incentives for savings, including prize-linked savings (PLS) programs, which had been identified through the help of Prosperity Now at the beginning of the project. These initiatives give savings accountholders the opportunity to win prizes when they make deposits. To enable PLS programs, states must change anti-gambling and gaming laws to allow credit unions or banks to hold private lotteries. Given the steep learning curve around changing the rules barring prize-linked savings and no concrete experience with colleges running into this barrier, the CCCCO opted not to pursue this agenda item. With more capacity and greater experience encouraging community college students to save, this may be a policy change the CCCCO could pursue in the future.

Lessons Learned

The obstacles California encountered and the lessons learned ultimately affected outcomes but also served as strong blueprint lessons for scaling this work. For other states developing policy agendas, here in particular is what to keep in mind.

Making a substantial new policy change in a college system as large as California's is easier if the policy addresses a challenge that has already captured the attention of high-level stakeholders. However, the recent state legislation and research about student basic needs was only beginning to break through near the start of the WSSN project. Therefore, many of the most substantive goals and achievements in CCCCO's policy agenda were related to helping colleges better understand the need to address student basic needs.

Learn how far state agency managers are able to push the envelope.

Agency staff are bound by compliance regulations and agency missions. State partners and their state system colleagues have a steep learning curve in finding their sphere of influence, increasing their comfort in tangential policy issues beyond higher education policy, and mobilizing state players in those spaces. Ongoing policy training and added capacity can help strengthen their advising and strategy role.

In pursuing new policy areas, base knowledge matters.

California's already comprehensive set of supports for particular low-income students meant CCCCO staff came to WSSN work with a deeper understanding of means-tested benefit programs, such as the CalFresh. This made it easier to develop and implement the income and work supports portion of the policy agenda. Without base knowledge, partners need to learn about why and how these policy changes are significant for low-income college students.

Context matters in determining what you can support and achieve.

The CCCCO was thoughtful about how its proposed WSSN policy priorities would fit into the chancellor's existing policy pursuits and available resources. This was the case in both the income and work supports and education and employment pillars. Because of recent large increases to dedicated funding streams for workforce, adult education, and equity in the community colleges, the CCCCO did not seek significant, costly policy changes. Instead it focused on influencing college-level decision making and priorities and building upon work already underway, such as expanding access to CalFresh and expanding CalFresh E&T.

Show how the WSSN policy work can complement guided pathways efforts.

Policymakers need to see the importance of providing integrated services and increasing student financial stability as they pursue policy innovations that encourage colleges to develop pathway maps and adopt structured scheduling and other guided pathways components. Pursuing a multi-pillar advocacy strategy reflects the complexity of addressing the challenges today's students face. Going forward, those continuing this work in the CCCCO will need to determine how to frame it so institutions can see how it fits with their goals.

Changing newer programs can be easier than altering well-established programs.

Leadership in the CCCCO initially sought to provide emergency grants to students participating in the EOPS program. In researching this possibility, they found that EOPS regulations limit the ability of colleges to provide money to students on an emergency basis. Instead, the CCCCO opted to focus on foster youth. At the time, the CCCCO was implementing WSSN, the state Legislature was enacting Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Education Program (CAFYES)—a supplement to the EOPS program for current or former foster youth. Under CAFYES, the CCCCO could make emergency assistance for food and housing an allowable use, so it wrote that into the WSSN guidelines.

Pace yourself when working on completely new policies.

As a corollary to the second lesson, above, a lack of base knowledge will make introducing something new quite challenging. After initial discussions with Prosperity Now and state advocates, CCCCO identified the prize-linked savings rules as a potential policy change that would complement efforts to increase student financial stability. But the CCCCO had not advocated for policy change within the financial services and assets sphere before, so it ultimately decided it did not have time to pursue this policy change. Now that the WSSN colleges have more concrete experience with financial coaching and helping students build assets, the CCCCO would likely find it easier to advance policy agenda items in this area.

Consider using an intermediary.

Getting up to speed on something new eats up time. The CCCCO and state partners turned to CLASP for help devising their public policy agendas and action plans and to connect with other stakeholders. Being able to confidently navigate different policy arenas is essential to advancing policies that will support low-income working students holistically.

VIRGINIA

Using professional development to shift the college culture

The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) oversees 23 colleges across 40 campuses in both urban and rural regions. For the WSSN initiative, and under the direction of the VCCS assistant vice chancellor for academic and student services, it partnered with four colleges:

- Danville Community College (Danville)
- Eastern Shore Community College (Melfa)
- Northern Virginia Community College (Annandale)
- Patrick Henry Community College (Martinsville)

VCCS has traditionally focused on supporting students academically. While recognizing the importance of nonacademic support issues such as housing and food insecurity, VCCS had not integrated these supports into its core mission, letting colleges tackle them on an ad-hoc basis. Recently, however, the system has turned more attention to centralizing and streamlining services to address comprehensive student needs.

The Virginia Agenda

To shift paradigms and center policy areas within the WSSN three-pillar frame, VCCS had to revisit its understanding of the state's policy levers, budget and political climate, and stakeholder and system relationships. Managing this complexity was a challenge. For example, under the education and employment advancement pillar, the state's desire to increase attainment, particularly by increasing pathways to more workforce credentials, might not signal an equal desire to fund and maintain support for other parts of the WSSN agenda. Nevertheless, designing policy strategy requires considering and maneuvering within all these contexts, and VCCS embraced the opportunity.

The chart below shows the policies VCCS set out to pursue within two of the three key pillars of the WSSN approach. Because of budget cuts and other factors, it had to put pursuing policy changes in the financial services and asset building pillar on hold.

Pillar	Policy Priorities
Education and Employment Advancement	Provide incentives for increasing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates.
	Increase access to state financial aid for community college students, who tend to apply and enroll late.
	Expand colleges' adoption of policies that enable use of the federal Ability-to-Benefit provision to allow students without a high school credential who are enrolled in career pathways programs to qualify for federal financial aid.
Maintain or expand funding for career pathways programs that integrate services.	
Establish or expand policies related to increasing access to job readiness training by integrating soft skills into credit and noncredit programs.	
Promote job quality initiatives by working with the state's workforce board to identify which credentials are high wage and high demand, and attach funding model to that logic.	
Work toward data sharing across colleges, employers, and workforce development partners, and between NC and VA.	
Income and Work Supports	Expand definition of and eligibility for career-focused training in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
	Create system to inform colleges about the ability to use state work-study funds to expand access to SNAP
	Increase campus awareness of college student SNAP eligibility
	Develop Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) scholarship funds to be used to provide "last-dollar" aid to students with unmet need
	Increase use of Benefits Bank by colleges

The national anti-poverty organization, CLASP helped VCCS coordinate strategies for each of the pillars of the agenda. Naturally, these strategies evolved over time as budget and legislative cycles unfolded, and a new governor was elected in 2017. VCCS's overarching goal was to build college leaders' capacity and agency to sustain a strategy of legislative and administrative level policies to support low-income working students over the short- and long-term.

Given this context, some agenda items were more difficult than others to advance beyond the institutions participating in the project. For instance, some colleges made progress in having financial aid offices offer more financial services and promote the use of the state's Benefits Bank, a centralized resource to connect students with public benefits. However, at the state policy level, scaling these kinds of supports became less of a priority given the state's difficult budget circumstances. By the end of the 2017 legislative session and at the beginning of the 2018 fiscal year, the state's colleges faced significant budget and enrollment losses resulting in end reductions in both state funding and tuition revenue.

Such a crisis meant further de-prioritization of some policies on the WSSN agenda—at least in the short-term—particularly for policies beyond the education and employment pillar that are the most unfamiliar to higher education stakeholders.

Selected Initial Outcomes Education and Employment Advancement Policy Agenda

Increase access

Increase access to state financial aid. Virginia invested in a new workforce training grant, the New Economy Workforce Industry Credentials Grant, which reduces the cost of these credentials and also provides incentives for success by providing reimbursement upon certification.

Increase guidance and support

Increase guidanceand support for implementation of the restored federal Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) provision. VCCS officials are making efforts to understand the federal ATB provision that potentially would allow students to access Pell grants for career pathway programs. However, because the system does not oversee adult basic education, bridging pathways from ATB implementation to the Virginia colleges will take some more time and understanding.

Establish or expand policies

Establish or expand policies to increase access to job readiness training by integrating soft skills into credit and noncredit programs. In an effort to bolster workforce goals, the VCCS state board meets quarterly to reassess training programs based on the state's labor market outcomes and demands, and this has included a focus on soft skills. Also, following a board task force recommendation, colleges are now working to implement a standardized soft skills curriculum into workforce training programs.

Income and Work Supports Policy Agenda

Increase campus awareness of student public benefits eligibility

- After a push to raise awareness among financial aid administrators to understand their role as being akin to financial services advisors, the state's community colleges have succeeded in making a cultural shift. This shift has led to increased investment in professional development so financial aid administrators can help connect students to resources and public benefits.

- At the same time that financial aid administrators were redefining their roles, they were learning about student eligibility for SNAP and other benefits. They increased use of the state Benefits Bank, a nonprofit, online public benefits screening and referral service, and also were able to send students directly to state agencies.

Expand access to SNAP to students

States have the flexibility in SNAP to expand the definition of career-focused training so that more students are eligible for benefits. VCCS is creating guidance to help colleges demonstrate how using SNAP as a temporary resource supports long-term student success.

Develop TANF scholarship funds

Develop TANF scholarship funds to be used as "last-dollar" aid to students with unmet need. In response to a tough budget climate, VCCS was unable to accomplish this goal, but VCCS is partnering with the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education on a major fundraising push to address this need.

Lessons Learned

States developing policy agendas to address the needs of low-income working students and to complement integrated service delivery at the institution level should keep several important lessons in mind.

Policy success takes more than simply effective advocacy.

The state policy environment matters. The governance of the state system matters. Just as importantly, funding matters. Virginia's higher education budget and enrollment losses meant that some WSSN agenda strategies had to be shifted from advocacy for immediate outcomes to long-term, sustainability strategies.

For long-term policy strategy, be prepared for evolution in policy and budget cycles.

The uncertainties of administrative changes (local, state, and federal), new initiatives and priorities, and financial imbalances have real implications for this work. During the final course of the WSSN grant, Virginia's impending statewide election diverted attention away from the agenda to the budget and the unknowns of an electoral transition. Informed foresight and strong contingency planning will give your policy agenda resilience. Also, policy movement is not linear and takes time.

Don't underestimate the learning curve involved with working on something new.

After initial discussions, VCCS staff decided not to explore policies in the financial services and assets area because it had not advocated for policy change within this sphere before, would have a steep learning curve, and was limited by the two-year time frame. Now that the WSSN colleges have more concrete experience with financial coaching and helping students build assets, it would likely be easier for VCCS to advance policy agenda items in this area.

Accept help from your friends.

Given their heavy workloads, education leaders may not have time to think about a new set of policies outside of their traditional education domains. CLASP staff helped the VCCS state partners devise their public policy agendas and action plans and connected postsecondary stakeholders with other stakeholders. Being able to confidently navigate different policy arenas is essential to advancing the policies that will support low-income working students holistically.

WASHINGTON STATE Building a sustainable advocacy agenda for low-income student success

The Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) participated in the WSSN with the following four community and technical colleges.

- Big Bend Community College (Moses Lake);
- Clark College (Vancouver);
- Highline College (Des Moines); and
- Walla Walla Community College (Walla Walla).

The SBCTC coordinates Washington's system of 34 public community and technical colleges, providing oversight of the college system, allocating state operating and capital funds, and overseeing policy development. It located the WSSN work in its student services section. Washington has one of the country's most centralized community college systems.

The SBCTC system has robust programs and supports for low-income working students. These include connecting SNAP recipients with education and training through the Basic Food Employment and Training program (BFET, the state's SNAP Employment and Training program), which SBCTC runs in partnership with the state's Department of Social and Health Services. It has also expanded student aid for nontraditional populations, including through the Opportunity Grant program, which focuses on training low-income adults for high-demand, high-wage jobs and provides up to $1,000 for books and supplies and $1,500 to colleges for wrap-around supports. These programs are examples of the state's dedication to integrated-service type models. They integrate financial supports with education and training to place students on an educational pathway that leads to a good job.

Washington had a special circumstance in the state that influenced how SBCTC and the colleges participated in the WSSN initiative. A 2012 state Supreme Court decision known as the McCleary case found that, under the state's constitution, the Legislature had been underfunding K-12 basic education for years and had to make it up. This required the state to shift substantial education resources to the K-12 system. As a result, the SBCTC did not include any high-cost items on its WSSN agenda.

The Washington State Agenda

Given its strong student-support history and the state's fiscal reality, SBCTC policy staff focused on centering policy areas within the WSSN three-pillar frame and building judiciously on a strong foundation. Within the income and work supports portion of the agenda, this meant building upon the state's long-standing commitment to providing financial aid and supports to nontraditional students. Within the education and employment advancement area, it meant trying to bolster funding for existing programs, such as the state's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program, which integrates adult education and ESL with occupational training.

The SBCTC worked with the CLASP, a national anti-poverty organization, to strengthen community college leaders' skills in advocating for workforce and social policies outside their usual education zone. CLASP also provided policy content expertise and helped SBCTC develop the following action plan of policies to pursue within the three key WSSN areas.

Pillar	Policy Priorities
Education and Employment Advancement	Continue to fund and expand the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program.
	Expand or maintain funding for career pathways programs.
	Align and expand access to navigators/career counselors to increase collaboration in serving students and reduce silos.
	Enable data sharing across colleges, employers, and workforce development partners.
Income and Work Supports	Make Basic Food and Employment Training (BFET) participants a priority for Working Connections Child Care program subsidies.
	Increase the Work First (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program education and training time limit to two years.
	Maintain the one-time FY17 allocation for Work First work study into future years.
	Increase funding for state Opportunity Grants.
	Expand college adoption of policies that enable use of the Ability-to-Benefit provision, which allows students without a high school credential who are enrolled in career pathways programs to qualify for federal financial aid.
Financial Services and Asset Building	Explore protections for students against predatory consumer lending.

Selected Initial Outcomes

While the SBCTC's policy agenda evolved over time, the board and colleges continuously worked on the overarching goal of building capacity among state-level change agents and campus leaders to sustain their advocacy for legislative and administrative-level policies that will support low-income working students over the short- and long-term.

Education and Employment Advancement Policy Agenda

Continue to fund and expand the I-BEST program

Continue to fund and expand the I-BEST program. Although the system faced a tight budget due to a drop in enrollment and the McCleary decision, the SBCTC secured an increase in funding for I-BEST, which has popular support among legislators and is one of the highly effective ways the system serves low-income working students.

Enable data sharing

Enable data sharing across colleges, employers, and workforce development partners. The SBCTC is recognized as a leader in data analysis of its students across the range of its institutions' educational options. An initial policy goal was to enable data sharing across colleges, employers, workforce development partners, and the state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Unfortunately, state law bars DSHS from sharing data with third parties, including SBCTC. As at the national level, some state legislators are opposed to data sharing. This ultimately led SBCTC to put aside its goal of achieving greater data sharing.

Increase guidance and support

Increase guidance and support for implementation of the restored federal Ability-to-Benefit provision. As a means of increasing postsecondary education and training financing options for those without a high school diploma, the state has sought to implement the most recent federal Ability-to-Benefit provision, which allows those in certain career pathways bridge programs to access federal financial aid. Because this change could be made without legislative action, the SBCTC was able to act unilaterally and create a workgroup to develop best practices, as well as a webpage to advise staff on how to implement it.

Income and Work Support Policy Agenda

- Make BFET participants a priority for Working Connections child care subsidies. Washington is one of the few states that require low-income postsecondary students to combine schooling with 20 hours of work per week in order to qualify for the state's largest subsidized child care program, Working Connections. This requirement has drawn the attention of both local and national advocates, who say it as a barrier for low-income working students and should be eliminated. Due to budget constraints, the SBCTC did not believe eliminating the work requirement during WSSN's two-year time period would be possible, as it would spark a demand the state could not meet. Instead it chose to focus on expanding the preference groups for Working Connections child care beyond Work First (TANF) participants to include BFET participants. SBCTC wasn't able to achieve this policy.
- Maintain the one-time FY17 allocation for Work First work study into future years. Washington has a robust state work-study program that augments federal work-study dollars since demand is higher than the supply of federal funds. By using TANF funding for work study, the program further supports low-income working students. The Legislature maintained this allocation.
- Increase funding for Opportunity Grants. Instead of expanding funding for Opportunity Grants, the legislature chose to level-fund the program. This was largely due to the state's fiscal constraints.
- Increase Work First's education and training time limit to two years. SBCTC had sought over many years to extend the state's TANF vocational education time limit from 12 to 24 months. It largely succeeded in 2017 due to multi-year advocacy by human services and anti-poverty advocates.

Financial Services and Asset Building Policy Agenda

Explore protections for students against predatory consumer lending. Despite financial services and asset building policies being new to the SBCTC, colleges were able to provide access to financial literacy and coaching and build relationships with local credit unions. The SBCTC felt that predatory consumer lending could be a barrier to financial stability for students. Ultimately, the SBCTC opted not to pursue a change to predatory lending practices after identifying more important priorities in the other two pillars and not having sufficient time to familiarize itself with the policy area to determine what specific policy change would be most significant to its students.

Lessons Learned

Recognize that some things are beyond advocacy control.

Washington's WSSN policy agenda included some items that had been priorities for SBCTC over a few years. Even keeping the state's existing budgetary and policy environment in mind, it was impossible to know exactly how much the McCleary decision would influence legislators. Thus, once SBCTC moved many cost-related items in the agenda from the proposal stage to the Legislature, so, too, did control over priorities move into the hands of elected officials. Some of them had different goals than what the state board identified.

Centralized systems can draw on a deeper bench of policy staff.

SBCTC has several policy associates who work across different policy areas, so work on advancing the agenda was divided among several individuals. This gave them greater capacity to advance a spectrum of policies across the three key pillars. State systems that don't have as much capacity can team with advocates outside of state government to provide additional assistance in moving policies or developing an agenda that reflects the capacity of its staff.

Connect WSSN policy work and guided pathway efforts.

Washington-state based foundations recently invested in support for guided pathways at several community and technical colleges and the state Legislature allocated $3 million for guided pathways pilots. Policymakers need help in seeing how providing integrated services and increasing student financial stability relate to policy innovations that encourage other guided pathways components, such as pathway maps and structured scheduling. Pursuing a multi-pillar advocacy strategy reflects the complexity of addressing the challenges today's students face.

Ensure beneficial policies are fully implemented.

While Washington chose to mainly pursue a legislative strategy, it also identified the untapped potential of a federal policy change colleges were slow to implement— the Ability-to-Benefit provision that allows lower-skilled students on career pathways to establish eligibility for federal Title IV financial aid. Washington has been a trailblazer in developing the I-BEST program, a career pathways bridge program that connects students without a high school diploma/GED or with limited English language proficiency to postsecondary education via integrated basic skills and education and training. But colleges have been slow to act on ATB. This underscores the importance of not only securing state public policy changes, but also fully implementing them.

Bide your time.

Working on completely new policies without prior experience is challenging, and that lesson was brought home by SBCTC's decision not to pursue the policy options of preventing predatory lending. Now that the WSSN colleges have more concrete experience with financial coaching and helping students build assets, it would likely be easier for the SBCTC to advance policy in this area.

Find strength in numbers.

The success of SBCTC efforts to change the time limit on education and training for TANF recipients reflects years of advocacy and coordination with state and local policy advocates. Policy proposals backed by multiple stakeholders across the education and social services arenas can create a cacophony of voices that increases the likelihood of success.

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About Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream leads a growing network of more than 220 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress in closing academic achievement gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college's institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD, along with nearly 75 experienced coaches and advisors, works closely with Network colleges in 41 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million college students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM:

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