

DRAFT Spring Symposium Program, as of Monday March 10, 2025
The program is subject to change



WERA
2025 Spring SYMPOSIUM
March 20 - 21, 2025

The Power of Partnership:
Enhancing Supports for Seamless
Postsecondary Transitions

Thursday, March 20

7:00-8:30 Check-in and Continental Breakfast

8:30-10:30 Opening Session

Welcome from Shannon Calderone, WERA President
Nick Bontrager, Moses Lake School District and Symposium Chair
Bonnie Nelson, WERA Board Member

Keynote Address

Dr. Laura Wentworth, Director of Research-Practice Partnership Program at California Education Partners and Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti, Director of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships

"What is this thing called an RPP?" Exploring Fundamentals of Research-Practice Partnerships in Education

10:30-10:45
Transition time

10:45-12:00
Breakout Session #1

Next steps for those engaged in or committed to pursuing research-practice partnerships

Presenters: Dr. Laura Wentworth, Director of Research-Practice Partnership Program at California Education Partners and Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti, Director of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships ,

Description: Are you an educational leader or researcher who has given some thought to engaging in a research-practice partnership (RPP) and feel like you are ready to find a partner? Or, maybe you started a partnership or have existing relationships that are similar to a partnership, and you have questions about taking the next steps to advance the work? Come to this session where you will learn about the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnership's milestones for emerging RPPs.

Conversation on Data, Research, and Policy for Student Success

Lead Presenter: Bonnie Nelson, Board Member, WERA

Panel: Julie Garver, Council of Presidents; Liz Trautman, Stand for Children Washington; Sharon Rivera, College Success Foundation

Description: This session will feature three panelists who will discuss how their organizations use data, research, and advocacy to address barriers to enrollment and equity. Attendees will leave equipped with a better understanding of the policy/data/research ecosystem in the state and actionable strategies to foster stronger alignment across these fields to support higher education pathways for all students.

Achieving in life with Communities In Schools of North Central Washington

Lead Presenter: Edgar Salamanca, Program Director, Communities In Schools of North Central Washington

Co-Presenter: Emilio Vera Jr, Executive Director; Diana Vasquez-Silva, Michelle Gion, Communities in Schools North Central Washington

Description: At the heart of student success is a strong network of support. Our program provides a community that empowers students to stay in school and achieve lifelong success using the evidence-based Communities In Schools model. With site coordinators in each school, we foster relationships that help students overcome challenges like limited resources and lack of support. This session will show how we build resilience, leadership, and self-advocacy, preparing students for higher education and community leadership.

Developing Opportunities for Diverse Career Exploration for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Lead Presenter: Bailey Gauthier, Employment Services Coordinator, WSU ROAR

Co-Presenter: Holly Whittenburg, Assistant Professor of Special Education, WSU

Description: This session explores career development for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) within the WSU ROAR program, an inclusive postsecondary education program. Participants will learn about WSU ROAR's career exploration strategies, including coursework, employer engagement, and excursion-based learning. The session will highlight work-based learning opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, and paid employment. Attendees will leave with research-informed strategies to expand career opportunities for students with disabilities.

Skill Up For Our Future

Lead Presenter: Brian Jeffries, Policy Director, Washington Roundtable

Description: From 2023 to 2032, Washington will see at least 1.5 million job openings, with 75% requiring a postsecondary credential (and bachelor's degrees in highest demand). However, the state is not on pace to meet the moment. This presentation highlights new research, talent gaps, and challenges and recommendations to close the gaps to build a robust workforce.

12:00-1:00

Lunch

1:00-1:15

Transition time

1:15-2:30

Breakout Session #2

Leveraging Partnerships to Inform SNAP-Eligible Students About Tuition Free College

Lead Presenter: Leanne Davis, Managing Researcher, Education Northwest

Co-Presenter: Rathi Sudhakara, Associate Director, Strategy & Partnerships, WSAC and Becca Kenna-Schenk, Chief of Staff, WWU; Andrew Morse, Chief of Staff, CWU

Description: WSAC, ideas42, and Education Northwest collaborated to design early and effective guaranteed financial aid messaging aligned with guaranteed admissions programs. We spoke with students, families, school districts, and higher education institutions to understand enrollment barriers and design effective messaging strategies. In this interactive session, participants will engage in large and small group activities to discuss key findings, contribute to implementation plans, and explore opportunities for partnerships to increase awareness of tuition free college among SNAP-eligible populations.

Reflecting on Past Successes, Envisioning Preferred Futures: A Facilitated Conversation about Meeting Washington's Postsecondary Goal

Lead Presenter: Hilary Loeb, Acting Director, Puget Sound College and Career Network, Puget Sound ESD

Panelists: Elizabeth Cook, Puget Sound College and Career Network; Janet Gordon, The Gordon Group; Jonathan Joseph, Puget Sound College and Career Network

Description: Our legislature established that 70% of the state's adults should earn a credential beyond a high school diploma. Improving transitions offers a key opportunity to meet this goal. As WERA convenes researchers and practitioners, our members bring a wealth of knowledge about supporting students on the path to and through their postsecondary experiences. Join us for a facilitated conversation to envision the future of postsecondary transitions. Session participants will engage in small groups about: High school supports, career connected learning, student mental health and regional networks.

Regional Challenge Grant: A Community Vision for Statewide Attainment

Lead Presenter: KC Deane, Associate Director of Research and Program Evaluation, WSAC

Co-Presenters: Hannah Lodwick and Abbey Roth, WSAC

Description: This session introduces participants to the theory of change for WSAC's state-funded Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) program. WSAC staff responsible for the design and implementation of RCG will showcase how we believe state funding for local partnerships can yield meaningful changes in educational culture and lead more Washingtonians to pursue postsecondary training or education. We will engage participants in discussion of what we mean by regional and demonstrate how funded partnerships are already having an impact in their communities.

Defining Post-Secondary Success in Washington

Lead Presenter: Tammy Campbell, CEO, The Scholar First

Description: In 2023, the Education Roundtable was established to position ALL students across Washington state for post-secondary success, with a strategic focus on those traditionally underserved. Funded by the Gates Foundation and facilitated by Dr. Tammy Campbell—CEO of The Scholar First and former nationally recognized superintendent of Federal Way Public Schools—the group developed a shared definition of post-secondary success. In this session, explore how this definition was created and how the Roundtable is unpacking it, highlighting effective practices, embedding strategies, and influencing both policy and practice.

Postsecondary Student Mindsets & Transition Research; Emerging Insights

Lead Presenter: Verónica Guajardo , SOVA Partner & Project Lead

Co-Presenters: Erica Sánchez Santos

Description: This presentation's aim is to provide an update and emerging insights after one year of interviews, focus groups and questionnaires with students and school staff, where the focus is to understand student mindsets and the factors that deter and support high school seniors direct postsecondary enrollment, particularly among marginalized students (Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous students, and students from rural and low-income communities). By identifying barriers as well as successes, this research seeks to capture direct student, parent and school staff voices to better understand what strategies, policies and practices are needed to enhance postsecondary enrollment towards success for marginalized populations.

2:30-3:00

Snack break with transition time

3:00-4:15

Breakout Session #3

Building Regional Practitioner Partnerships to Increase Postsecondary Enrollment Through Limitless

Lead Presenter: Leanne Davis, Managing Researcher, Education Northwest

Description: The Limitless Learning Network convenes 26 partnerships across Washington with a focus on partnership capacity, improving data capacity, and developing best practices to help more students enroll in postsecondary programs. In this interactive panel discussion, participants will hear from Limitless members on aligning goal setting and project scoping and best practices for knowledge mobilization, within and across partnerships. Participants will leave with a set of tips and ideas that they can leverage to strengthen existing partnerships or build new partnerships to support student success.

State-Level Initiatives and Projects that Involve Postsecondary Data

Lead Presenter: Katie Weaver Randall, Director, ERDC

Co-Presenters: Darby Kaikkonen, Director Student Information & Data Foundations, OSPI; Kim Reykdal, Director of Graduation and Pathway Preparation, OSPI; Summer Kenesson, Director of Policy Research, Washington SBCTC; Dan Oliver, Director of Research, WSAC; Dr. Melissa Beard, Director of Legislative Affairs, COP; Dr. Julie Garver, Director of Policy and Academic Affairs, COP; Dana Anderson, CEO of WSIPC

Description: This session convenes Washington state agencies and statewide partners who utilize postsecondary data to support student success. Representatives will discuss their current projects, future goals, and collaborative efforts to enhance data accessibility, research-practice partnerships, and student support initiatives. Key topics include responsible data access, technical assistance, custom reporting, and digital transcript development. Through these collaborative efforts, Washington state agencies and partners are strengthening data-driven decision-making and enhancing pathways for students from K-12 to higher education and the workforce.

Building Bridges: Strategic Inter-Organizational Collaboration for Equitable and Scalable Youth Apprenticeship Programs

Lead Presenter: Christopher Nesmith, Superintendent, Elma School District

Description: The culmination of Chris Nesmith's doctoral research, exploring the dynamics of inter-organizational relationships in advancing equitable and scalable youth apprenticeship programs. This session delves into how strategic collaboration among education agencies, industry partners, and community organizations can transform vocational education systems.

Out-of-School, not Out-of-Sight: Creative Pathways to Credentials for Youth Experiencing Disengagement

Lead Presenter: Kendra Reiser, Project Coordinator, Industry Engagement, SnoCo Connect

Co-Presenter: Claire Petersen, SnoCo Connect WIOA Youth Services

Description: Join SnoCo Connect, Snohomish County's youth initiative under WIOA, for an interactive presentation and discussion. The team will share its approach to meeting the education and employment needs of youth, highlighting partnerships that have helped youth achieve credentials. SnoCo Connect uses a research-based model to meet the unique needs of 100+ young people annually, 75% of whom are out-of-school youth disengaged from systems of support. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of accessible, equitable credential-attaining programs for disconnected youth.

How Change Happens: Use of Street Data's Equity Transformation Cycle

Presenters: Nesley Bravo, Dr. Kristin McCowan and Kanza Hamidani, Community Center for Education Results

Co-Presenters: Steven Miller, Grace Wedgwood, Andii Sandman, and Cintya Beristain Rivera, Ranier Beach High School Students

Description: This session focuses on two of the Community Center for Education Result (CCER)'s school-based initiatives that are implementing the Equity Transformation Cycle (Safir & Dugan, 2021). Join us to hear directly from a school partner working on the ground and overall themes from the data that has emerged. We'll engage in conversation to discuss how to use street data for transformative change and what commonly undermines change.

Title: Sustaining Student Success: The Role of Housing and Wraparound Services for Postsecondary Transitions

Lead Presenter: Shelby Cooley, Data and Eval Lead, CYYAD DCHS, King County

Panelists: Elizabeth Esborn, Hanne Makhani, Guru Dorje, King County DCHS

Description: This two-program panel will discuss lessons in cross-sector partnerships, research co-design and cultivating learning cultures within postsecondary transition programs –King County Promise and the Shoreline Housing Pilot. Themes will include the unique data challenges, programming structures and service referral approaches that uniquely impact programs serving opportunity youth.

4:30-6:30

Networking Reception

Co-hosted by Renaissance Learning

Renaissance

See Every Student.

Friday, March 21

7:00-8:30

Check-in and Continental Breakfast

8:30-10:30 Opening Session

Keynote Address

Dr. Laura Wentworth, Director of Research-Practice Partnership Program at California Education Partners and Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti, Director of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships

What Works and How to Make it Work in Education Research-Practice Partnerships: Stories from the Field

10:30-10:45

Transition time

10:45-12:00

Breakout Session #4

Next steps for those curious, but not yet engaged in research-practice partnerships

Lead Presenters: Dr. Laura Wentworth, Director of Research-Practice Partnership Program at California Education Partners and Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti, Director of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships, ,

Description: Do you keep hearing the term research-practice partnership but you are not exactly sure what that means? Or, maybe you do some work in education that involves research or involves practice, but are interested in exploring how those two lines of work could collaborate together? Come to this session where you will learn about the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnership's RPP 101 – Understanding Important RPP Basics.

Preparing Students for the Journey Ahead: How Community Partnerships Increase Postsecondary Success

Lead Presenter: Rick Goble, Superintendent, Chehalis School District

Co-Presenters: Dr. Duane Baker, President of the BERCC Group and Darcell Scott, Dean of Student Success and Retention, Centralia College

Description: For the last ten years, The Chehalis School District, has been engaged in their Student Achievement Initiative focused on preparing students for postsecondary success. We will be sharing how community partnerships and the longevity of a singular goal have shaped the culture of our PK-16 system, increased graduation rates and has led to increased postsecondary credential attainment. In this session we will give an overview of what is working and engage in a round-table discussion on successful strategies from a decade of research and implementation.

A Case Study in Research and Policy Making: Financial Literacy in Washington State

Lead Presenter: Robert de Grouchy, Graduate Student, Washington State University

Co-Presenters: Tracy Godat, Executive Director; Pam Whalley, Associate Director of Financial Education, Miladys Garcia, Special Populations Program Supervisor - Washington State Financial Education Public-Private Partnership

Description: Financial literacy education (FLE) is essential for economic empowerment and mandated in 26 states. Washington may become the 27th with Senate Bill 5080, making FLE a graduation requirement by 2033. This session explores FLE's impact on students and local economies, lessons from global implementation, and strategies to maximize resources. We'll examine how Washington's Financial Education Public-Private Partnership (FEPPP) serves as a case study on the intersection of research, politics, and policy, highlighting real-world implications for communities and schools

Empowering Equitable Futures...What's Best for the Student

Lead Presenter: Anna McLeod, Director of Student Services, Washington State University, Everett

Co-Presenters: Alex Tadio, Director of Admissions; Shannon Calderone, Associate Professor Educational Leadership

Description: This presentation explores creating equitable and accessible pathways to education at WSU Everett, a regional campus of a Tier 1, Land-Grant, Research Institution. It examines how culturally responsive academic practices can address financial and systemic barriers. Shifting from exclusivity as excellence to equitability as excellence, WSU Everett focuses on strategic advising, intentional recruitment, personalizing student experiences, and fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment to address educational challenges.

So What? Beyond Learning Outcomes

Lead Presenter: Robert Hendrickson, Doctoral Student, William & Mary

Description: This session explores whether interventions work "as intended" by fostering outcome-mindedness in research and practice. Aligned with one of our SIG's expressed intentions, "Continuous Assessment for Improvement," we will discuss outcome evaluation, postsecondary transition data, and aligning learning outcomes with institutional missions. Participants will engage in discussions and activities to develop strategies for meaningful and lasting student success.

12:00-1:00

Lunch

1:00-1:15

Transition time

1:15-2:30

Breakout Session #5

Building Bridges for Impact: Designing a Statewide Research-Practice Partnership in Washington

Lead Presenter: Kelly Kovacic-Duran, Principal Consultant, Education First

Co-Presenter: Jack Hill, Education First

Description: This session shares key learnings from a feasibility study by Education First and the Gates Foundation on launching a statewide Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) pilot in Washington. Attendees will explore strategies for leveraging data and strengthening networks to drive actionable research. Through case analysis and discussions, participants will gain insights into building sustainable RPPs that enhance collaboration, research quality, and decision-making. The session also offers an opportunity to provide input that will help refine the study's findings.

Career & Technical Education in Washington State: Collaborate with us to interpret outcome findings from a longitudinal study of student access, participation, and outcomes

Lead Presenter: Sam Riggs, Managing Researcher, Education Northwest

Co-Presenter: Danielle Fumia, Senior Research Scientist, ERDC

Description: Education Northwest and ERDC are conducting a longitudinal study of student access, participation, and persistence in CTE programming, and the high school graduation, postsecondary, and labor market outcomes of students achieving different CTE credit thresholds. In this interactive session, participants will engage in large and small group discussions to make meaning of the study's outcome findings, overall and by career cluster. Participants will consider the implications of these findings for Washington, distill which findings are most relevant and actionable, and shape the final report.

Paving the Way: Improving College and Career Access for Every Student

Lead Presenter: Jeanne Willard, Executive Director, College & Career Readiness, Everett Public Schools

Co-Presenter: Sarah Pewitt, High School and Beyond Facilitator, Everett Public Schools

Description: This session will showcase Everett Public Schools' efforts to improve postsecondary outcomes for all students. It will explore how data is used to track progress toward postsecondary readiness and enrollment. The presentation will feature engaging and promising practices such as FAFSA nights, College 101 days, and counselor workshops. Additionally, the district's required College & Career Readiness Seminar for seniors will be highlighted, along with partnerships with local colleges and external organizations that expand student opportunities through dual credit programs.

College and Career Readiness: The Disproportionate Impacts on Black and Brown Bodies, Long-term Impacts and Why Does it Matter

Lead Presenter: Kirsten Thornton, GEAR UP District Coordinator, Renton Schools

Description: This presentation will critically analyze the political shaping of college and career readiness programs within the U.S. academic system, examining how, despite best efforts, graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates for Black and Brown students remain alarmingly low comparatively. Using Cultural Reproduction Theory, this research argues that dismantling generational poverty requires fostering a college-going culture within Black and Brown communities, thereby increasing access to higher education and challenging systemic barriers.

Data Tool Kits: Leveraging Data for Post-secondary Transitions

Lead Presenter: David Ogden, Assessment Facilitator, Renton School District

Co-Presenter: Katie Schott, Program Officer for K-12/Career Pathways, Washington STEM

Description: Districts from Spokane to the Puget Sound are working together to develop a toolkit for district and college partners to support K12 and Higher Education leaders across Washington state on how to approach conversations around data sharing, specifically in the high school to postsecondary transition phase of a student's journey.

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