

# The Seattle Times

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## EDITORIALS

### The newspaper's view



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## INVEST IN BOOSTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Every year, 17,000 Washington high school students fail to graduate on time. The statewide graduation rate has improved to about 80 percent, but that leaves 20 percent of students still not getting the help they need to make it to the finish line.

Getting every Washington student to graduate from high school prepared for college and career opportunities is the state's No. 1 goal. More attention must be focused on the high school experience.

The Legislature should follow the lead of Stand for Children and put more money and energy into helping more students graduate.

The education advocacy group has some good ideas, supported by key lawmakers, including Sen. Mark Mullet, D-Issaquah, that would make a difference. The plan calls for hiring more guidance counselors, pushing more students into academically challenging courses and paying more attention to freshman success. All three ideas are supported by education data and research.

Improvement in students' freshman experience is especially intriguing. In 2018, Stand for Children launched its Washington Freshman Success Network at 10 schools in rural and urban districts across the state. The education advocates now want to use state and federal dollars to expand the program across Washington.

A similar freshman-focused program in the Chicago school district led to a 24 percent increase in high school graduation rates over a decade. Stand for Children is working with the same research group at the University of Chicago to import that success to Washington.

The plan calls for making the

state's Learning Assistance Program dollars available for tutoring, plus learning on Saturday, and before and after the regular high school day. Most LAP money will still be used to teach elementary students to read and do math, but about 5 percent would be available for high school programs.

The program would also codify a "dropout early warning system" and push effective student interventions to other schools and districts. Professional development for teachers and administrators would focus on how to reach vulnerable students in foster care, the juvenile justice system, migrants students, recent immigrants, homeless students and others.

Stand for Children would also like to see the state expand the prototypical school model to provide more middle and high school guidance counselors, another essential reform. The average student-to-counselor ratio in Washington is 440-to-1. The recommended ratio is 250-to-1. Good access to a high school counselor will not only change graduation rates but will help students overcome barriers to college, including financial aid.

Stand for Children has a comprehensive plan aimed at one important goal: increasing high school graduation. Although the plan's cost is not yet clear, lawmakers should adopt these goals and proposals during the 2019 Legislature, which begins Jan. 14.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley; Frank A. Blethen, Donna Gordon Blankinship, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Melissa Santos, William K. Blethen (emeritus).*