

The Neglected Majority:

(Re)Defining True Success for Bremerton High School Students



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This research brief quantifies the educational attainment and living-wage employment for students of Bremerton High School, located in Bremerton, Washington – the most populous city in Kitsap County.

Since Bremerton is the largest city in Kitsap County, there is a particular interest in knowing how students are performing, if they are graduating, and what success follows high school. While graduating high school is a significant accomplishment for students, parents, and educators, it is most definitely not the end goal. On the contrary, we must pause and think about what happens to students after graduation day.

This brief will examine figures to determine: a) The proportion of students who graduate high school and enroll in college, b) How many complete a baccalaureate education, c) If immediately pursuing a 4-yr degree facilitates success for most students, and d) The number of students that receive commensurate employment after college graduation.

Although state and national figures are provided throughout this brief, attention will be placed on Bremerton High School, Bremerton School District, and Kitsap County.

Local Data

Bremerton High School enrolled approximately 1,200 high school students in 2013-14, with over 300 of these being freshmen. Approximately 78.2% of 9th grade students who started at Bremerton High School in 2013-14 graduated in 2017.¹

Among racial subgroups, Asian, mixed-race, Black, and white students had the highest graduation rates. Graduation rates for American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, low-income, English learners, and special education students trailed the high school's overall graduation rate.

- American Indian/Alaskan Native, 50%
- Asian, 100%
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 66.7%
- Black/African American, 85.7%
- Hispanic or Latino, 65.6%
- White, 79.4%
- Two or More Races, 88.9%
- Special Education, 49.1%
- English Learners, 41.7%
- Low Income, 73.4%

Data shows that between 2010 and 2017, Bremerton High School's graduation rates have fluctuated, ranging between 77.6% and 83%.² Most recently, Bremerton High School experienced a

¹ State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dropout and Graduation Reports, k12.wa.us/

2.6% dip between the Classes of 2016 (80.8%) and 2017 (78.2%) graduation rates. While Bremerton High School's graduation rate (78.2%) was higher than the District's (66%), it was still lower than that of Kitsap County (82.2%), as well as the state (79.3%). It is notable that the state's overall high school graduation rate has improved over the years. Between the 2012-13 academic year and 2016-17, graduation rates increased 3.3%. While this growth should be celebrated, there is still room for improvement since the nation's high school graduation rate was 84%, according to the most recent data available.³

Understanding the Impact of Local Data

Since 78.2% of Bremerton High School students are graduating, many assume that the rest – in this case, 21.8% of high school students – drop out from high school. This is not the case. Data for 2016-2017 shows that 11.2% drop out, while the rest enroll in alternative high school. If this trend continues over the next ten years, there will be nearly 400 high school dropouts in Bremerton. Statistics also show that the overall population at the Kitsap Juvenile Detention Center School has gone from an average of 33.9% in 2010 to 10.4% in 2018. This is the result of many variables including an increase in the use of diversions, deferments, and a reduction in the number of filings from the prosecutor's office.

For those students who successfully navigated the pressures and stresses of high school to experience graduation, national data shows that of the 2.9 million who graduated in 2017, about 1.9 million (66.7%), were enrolled in college by that Fall.⁴

Compare this figure to the latest state data indicating that 59.9% of Washington's high school graduates went straight into any college or university after graduation.⁵ Latest national data also indicates that 30.3% of high school completers enroll in a 4-year university and 58.4% enroll in a 2-year college.⁶ **At a local level, approximately 51% of students who graduate from Bremerton High School enroll into any college or university. Data shows 21% of recent graduates enrolled in a 4-year university, while 30% enrolled in a 2-year college.**^{7 8}

If we do the math, of the 78.2% who graduate from Bremerton High School, 40 graduates enroll into any type of postsecondary education (since 51% of graduates pursue any type of higher education). As shocking as this figure may be, it is not as shocking as analyzing county data: 22.7% of Kitsap County's traditional college-age population is enrolled in college or graduate school.⁹

² Between 2010 and 2017, District's graduation rates ranged between 66% and 72.7%. State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dropout and Graduation Reports, k12.wa.us

³ Morton, Neal. "Washington's high-school graduation rate hold steady at 79 percent." The Seattle Times. March 2018, seattletimes.com/education-lab/washingtons-high-school-graduation-rate-holds-steady-at-79-percent/

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, College Enrollment and Work Activity of Recent High School and College Graduates Summary, bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm

⁵ State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Postsecondary Enrollment Report, k12.wa.us

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Labor Force Status, bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.t01.htm

⁷ Education Research & Data Center, High School Graduate Outcomes, erdc.wa.gov/

⁸ Approximately 45.9% of students who graduate from Bremerton School District enroll into any college or university. Of these incoming college students, 39.3% were low-income. State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Postsecondary Enrollment Report, k12.wa.us

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Firstly, let's recall that higher education and "college" does not necessarily mean a traditional 4-year university degree. Many of the fastest-growing career fields actually require credentials other than a bachelor's degree. New and emerging occupations in every industry now require a combination of academic knowledge and technical ability often requiring one or two years of higher education.¹⁰

Many well-intentioned residents might wish to increase pathways into higher education by utilizing conventional methods such as Advanced Placement (AP). But, it is important to review students' performance in core and AP classes before determining a course of action. For example, approximately 75% of 12th grade students earned a grade of "C" or better in English during the 2016-2017 school year. Students seem to be struggling more with math, as nearly 50% of 12th grade students earned a "C" or better in math courses. Similarly, Advanced Placement students at Bremerton High School are performing below the state average. Approximately 42.4% of the AP students at Bremerton High School scored a "3" or higher in their AP exams, while 63.2% of all AP students in the state scored a similar score. At a first glance, it may seem students' passing score will translate into college credit, but unfortunately, most universities only take an AP score of a "4" or "5". A review of scores by exam revealed that 13.5% of all exams administered at Bremerton High School scored higher than a "3". With these figures in mind, it appears AP is not fulfilling its promise to help Bremerton-area students gain a competitive advantage and save money by passing their AP exams (and securing college credit). In fact, today, 58% of students paying for an AP test in Bremerton will not receive college credit; compared to the high(er) percentage of students earning college credit in other programs such as articulated courses or dual enrollment.¹¹

Success Beyond Graduation

Over half of students are deemed college-ready, not dropping out of high school, and heading straight into the pursuit of a post-secondary education. But, how many are actually successful once they complete their schooling?

Recent studies (regional and national) reveal a serious workforce gap for technically skilled workers. Changes in the economy, the automation of many current work processes, and local demographic issues, mean that jobs of the future will require more technically prepared workers. Training at a two-year college, military, and/or industry credentials, and not necessarily a four-year or graduate degree, may be the most lucrative initial decision for many residents to ensure Bremerton, Kitsap County, and Washington's economic future.

Currently, the nation is facing a technical workforce gap that is disrupting each state's economy. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the economy will need as many as 100,000 new information technology workers per year over the next decade. Currently, there is a deficit of nearly 40,000 workers per year. "We have over 700,000 job openings that we think will be available in Washington state in the near term, and most of those will go to people out of the state and even out of the country. So we need to reconfigure," Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan said in a 2018 interview.¹²

¹⁰ Fleming, K. (2016) ReDefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Press.

¹¹ Approximately 58% of Bremerton High School students earned less than a "3" in their AP exams. Sem 1 and Sem 2 2016-2017 Final Grades; AP Five-Year School Score Summary (2018) for Bremerton High School (480103). Report ran Jan 14, 2019. The College Board Advanced Placement Program.

¹² Wilson, Reid. "US Economy faces impending skills gap." The Hill, Feb. 2018, thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/373527-us-economy-faces-impending-skills-gap

For every 100 students in the region, data shows that 78 will graduate high school and 40 will seek any form of higher education.

Many students would immediately like to pursue a post-secondary education. But with rising costs, significant student debt, and gut-wrenching underemployment rates, the university is no longer perceived an option for many. This forces us to turn our attention to the misalignment between awarded degrees, the available employment opportunities that someone qualifies for, and the lack of real-world job skills. Combined, these three factors force 41.5% of **recent** university graduates to be underemployed.¹³ Unfortunately, this leads almost half of recent alumni to accept “gray-collar jobs” - taking positions that neither need nor require the university education they received.

In Washington, available data shows that even once getting accepted and starting studies at the university, only 58.9% of those who attend a 4-year university actually graduate within six years.¹⁴ Applied to the 40 local students who graduate high school and enroll in any form of higher education, we can project that 24 Bremerton students will graduate with their Bachelors...and from among those students 10 will be underemployed.

Given this reality of underwhelming college completion rates and high underemployment for university graduates, we must ask how we can help all our students be prepared for high-paying occupations in our region?

First, let us shift our thinking about preparing all students for the 4-year university. Some high school counselors, administrators, teachers, legislators, parents, and school board members may assert that all students will/should go to the university. Well-intentioned, they promote a “one size fits all” approach to college-prep high school curriculum. When in reality, many graduates will immediately find themselves enrolling in high-quality community colleges immediately after high school. More appropriate may be conveying a sentiment similar to the State of Utah which has successfully branded a “1-2-4-or more” campaign placing all post-secondary options equal and within reach.

Second, let us recognize that “college-prep” and career & technical education are in fact complementary, not competing, goals. Providing both the academic rigor and technical preparation required for our students to be successful in the 21st century workplace means that all local students need to secure industry credentials and technical skills in tandem with a rigorous general education.

Third, we need to (re)educate all stakeholders about the realities of a 4-year degree. Just getting into the university is not the goal; as only 58.9% of Washingtonians enrolled in college will complete their degree. Moreover, graduating with a bachelor’s degree is also not the end goal; as 41.5% of recent college graduates are underemployed.¹⁵ Rather, we should be focused on ensuring that those who enroll in post-secondary education, at any level, both graduate and find commensurate employment. This requires earlier career exploration and aligning one’s initial career choice with

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (IPUMS); U.S. Department of Labor, O*NET

¹⁴ NCES, IPEDS 2015 Graduation Rate Survey

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (IPUMS); U.S. Department of Labor, O*NET. And: Fleming, K. (2016) ReDefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Press.

both the individual student’s abilities and interests as well as directing students into fields that have projected openings.

One way to provide Bremerton’s future workforce with a general education combined with applied technical skills, industry driven credentials, and specific preparation for employment, is to enroll at one of the nearly 40 community colleges in the state. It should be noted that low-income students (44%) are three times more likely to enroll at a community college than high-income students (15%).¹⁶ Returning to a local level, 57% of low-income Bremerton School District graduates enrolled in a 2-year college.¹⁷

There are many paths to success after high school, and the goal of our system should be to match students with the right fit — whether that’s an apprenticeship program, university, trade school, the military, community college, or a gap year for travel or work. It is time to (re)define success for today’s students.

¹⁶ Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., and Harrell, A. (2015) Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2008 Cohort (Signature Report No. 9). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

¹⁷ State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Postsecondary Enrollment Report, k12.wa.us

The Fate of 100 Bremerton High School 9th Graders

11

Drop out of High School



78

Graduate High School



11

Go Straight to Work or Pursue Alternative High School



Of the 78 Graduates

38 Immediately Enter the Workforce



40 Immediately Enroll in Higher Education



Only 14 Secure Commensurate Employment After College Graduation



16 Drop Out



10 Graduates are Underemployed



Non-Discrimination Notice:

The Bremerton School District complies with all federal and state rules and regulations and does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. This holds true for all students who are interested in participation in educational programs and/or extra-curricular school activities. Inquiries regarding compliance and/or grievance procedures may be directed to the District's Title IX/RCW 28A.640 Officer and ADA Coordinator, Garth Steedman, at 360.473.1026, email garth.steedman@bremertonschools.org or the Section 504 Coordinator, John Welsh, at 360-473.4400; email john.welsh@bremertonschools.org; Mailing address: 134 Marion Avenue North, Bremerton, WA 98312.

No-discriminación

El distrito escolar de Bremerton cumple con todas las reglas y reglamentos federales y estatales y no discrimina por motivos del sexo, la raza, el credo, la religión, el color, la nacionalidad, la edad, posición militar o veterano licenciado con honor, la orientación sexual incluyendo la identidad o expresión del género, la presencia de cualquier discapacidad sensorial, mental, o física, ni el uso de un perro guía o animal de servicio por una persona con una discapacidad en los programas y actividades del distrito y proporciona acceso igual a los Boy Scouts y otros grupos juveniles designados. Lo anterior es también cierto con respecto a los estudiantes que están interesados en participar en programas educativos y/o actividades extracurriculares. Para cualquier información concerniente a su cumplimiento o para levantar una demanda puede comunicarse con el funcionario del distrito título IX/RCW 28A.640 y coordinador de ADA, Garth Steedman al 360.473.1026 o a la dirección electrónica garth.steedman@bremertonschools.org también puede hacerlo con el coordinador de la sección 504, John Welsh al 360.473.4400, o a la dirección electronica john.welsh@bremertonschools.org. La dirección para recibir correspondencia es 134 Marion Avenue North, Bremerton, WA 98312.



