



Help more high school seniors apply for financial aid

Make higher education affordable and accessible to all eligible students

Recommendation

Enhance tools and training to help students complete financial aid applications (\$580,000 in fiscal year 2020 | \$575,000 in fiscal year 2021)

Expand training opportunities, events, resources, and support for educators who assist students with FAFSA and WASFA completion. These educators include high school counselors and college access providers.



The Imperative

Washington must expand capacity to support FAFSA and WASFA completion

Completing a financial aid application is necessary for any high school senior interested in receiving financial assistance for postsecondary education. Yet just over 50 percent of Washington's public high school graduates do so, making Washington one of the states with the lowest completion rates in the nation.²⁸ Increasing the number of aid applications hinges on the training and support of school counselors and college access providers, as well as providing additional application assistance events statewide. Washington must expand capacity to support FAFSA/WASFA completion and to increase application completion events, include more regions, support schools with monitoring application completion, and provide additional training and resources to counselors and college access partners. Washington is also one of a handful of states offering aid to undocumented individuals; information regarding the WASFA needs to be shared broadly across the state, as applications have been decreasing.

Context

Washington can build on the 12th Year Campaign

This proposal will enable more connections and learning opportunities for schools, nonprofits, immigrant-serving organizations, and others in promoting financial aid application completion and supporting local efforts. The recommendation will build upon the work of the Washington Student Achievement Council's 12th Year Campaign. The 12th Year Campaign boosts college and financial aid application rates in Washington by helping those working with high school seniors and their families complete applications for college admissions and financial aid. 12th Year Campaign sites receive free training, printed materials, and other resources to support their students.

Quick Facts:

Applying for financial assistance is correlated with postsecondary attendance.²⁹

53 percent of Washington's public high school seniors in the class of 2018 completed a FAFSA.³⁰

During the 2017–18 academic year, 12th Year Campaign sites had a ten percent higher FAFSA completion rate than non-sites and a six percent higher completion rate than the state average.³¹

Outcomes and Measures

Enhanced training, events, and resources will increase Washington's FAFSA and WASFA completions

- Increased FAFSA and WASFA completion for seniors by ten percent each biennium.
- Double the number of 12th Year Campaign sites to more than 300 events.
- Expand training opportunities and partnership recruitment by 100 percent.
- An increase of 30 percent in the number of sites using the FAFSA completion portal to monitor seniors' applications.



Modernize communications to College Bound Scholars

Use innovative communications tools to get vital program info to students and families

Recommendation

Provide consistent, reliable, and timely information to College Bound students (\$400,000/year)

Provide timely information and guidance to College Bound Scholarship (CBS) students and their families—throughout middle and high school—using innovative electronic tools and communications support.

The Imperative

Washington must increase the number of College Bound students who pursue and succeed in postsecondary education

The College Bound program offers an early promise of financial aid, yet only half of College Bound Seniors complete the FAFSA and 60 percent enroll in college directly after high school. The promise of the scholarship must be packaged with critical information and reminders to ease students' transitions into higher education. WSAC can provide greater support to the 300,000 College Bound students throughout their K-12 years and at critical transition points, helping students prepare, enroll, and persist through their educational journey.

Context

Digital tools will help College Bound students succeed

In WSAC's 2017 CBS study, the number one recommendation from students to improve their college-going behavior was to "provide more support and information."³² WSAC proposes to connect CBS students with trusted, timely, and personalized information, providing guidance at the critical junctures in education. Using digital engagement tools will help students plan and prepare for postsecondary education. Using these platforms will enhance staff capabilities to efficiently and effectively provide timely and personalized support to College Bound students. A variety of third-party platforms offer research-based messaging using innovative tools—from interactive customized texting to gamification—to nudge student behavior and urge actions at critical stages of decision-making. A variety of technological platforms, developed for the field of college access, provide scalable solutions for students, increasing the likelihood they will take the necessary steps to prepare for postsecondary education.

Outcomes and Measures

Targeted support will improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates

- Increased engagement among CBS students.
- Increased understanding of CBS program requirements and general college-going information.
- Increased high school graduation by five percent each biennium.
- Increased first-year college enrollment by five percent each biennium.

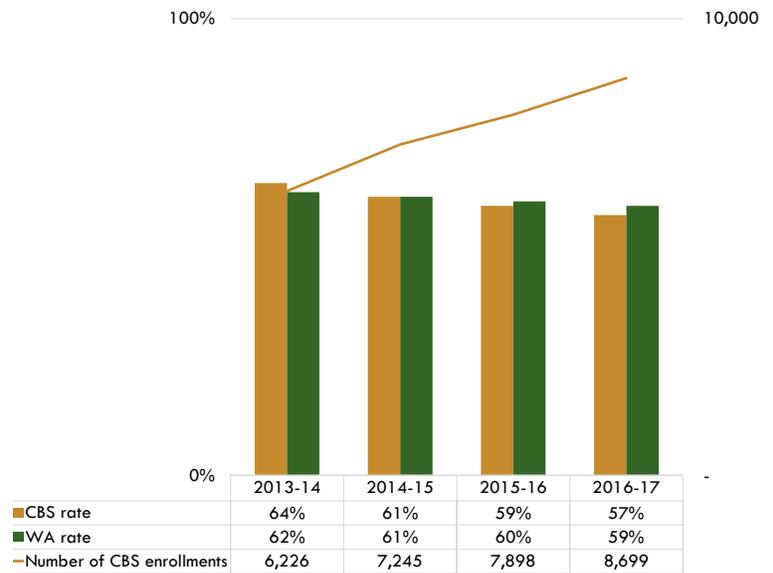
Quick Facts:

57 percent of CBS students from the class of 2017 enrolled in postsecondary education directly after high school (the state average was 59 percent).³³

Targeted digital interventions can improve postsecondary enrollment.³⁴

The commitment of financial aid, combined with relevant supports, makes College Bound an essential tool to address opportunity gaps in Washington.

Direct postsecondary and CBS enrollment rates



Source: Weiss, Sarah. "College Bound Scholarship Annual Update." May 2018. Accessed October 5, 2018. <https://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2018.CBS.Report.pdf>.



Expand the educator workforce

Reduce teacher shortages in high-need areas

Recommendation

Expand the educator workforce by funding the Teacher Shortage Conditional Grant (\$1 million/year)

Provide \$1 million to support approximately 120 aspiring teachers. The Teacher Shortage Conditional Grant (TSCG) reduces affordability barriers and invests in teacher recruitment early in the pipeline. TCSG also incentivizes teaching service in shortage areas after certification.

The Imperative

Teacher shortages exacerbate the lack of diversity among educators, which hurts students and worsens opportunity gaps

Washington is experiencing a shortage of teachers in particular geographic and subject areas. Cost barriers affect a broad range of potential teacher candidates, especially those from traditionally underrepresented groups. Educator diversity does not reflect student diversity; people of color account for only 11 percent of the educator workforce, compared with 45 percent of the student population.³⁵ TSCG is a financial aid vehicle that has the benefit of addressing two different policy goals on the teacher shortage pipeline: recruiting students to the teaching profession and retaining them as teachers in Washington, while incentivizing teaching in shortage areas. For 2017–18, program demand far exceeded available funding, with awards provided to only seven percent of qualified applicants. TSCG offers an affordable, targeted approach, developed based on research and stakeholder input, with high unmet demand and strong initial results.

Context

Washington faces a teacher shortage, and TSCG helps address it

TSCG provides need-based conditional grants to teacher preparation candidates and prioritizes support for individuals from groups traditionally underrepresented in the teaching workforce. In exchange for receiving the grant, recipients must teach at a Washington preK-12 public school for two school years, or fulfill the obligation in half the time by serving in a shortage area. The long-standing Future Teachers program had received \$1 million in annual funding prior to the recession; a recommitment of \$1 million would fund about 120 TSCG awards annually. The existing framework can be easily scaled to manage an expanded program.

Outcomes and Measures

More teachers will meet critical education needs

- Reduced educator shortages in geographic areas and by subject area.
- Increased numbers of teachers from groups underrepresented in the teaching workforce.
- Increased retention of teachers due to lower education debt.
- Approximately 120 teacher preparation program candidates will receive up to \$10,000 per year and commit to service in Washington's public schools.

Quick Facts:

In 2017-18, just seven percent of qualified applicants received the award: out of 885 total applicants, 826 met minimum qualifications and 56 were awarded.

Awardees are diverse.

- 89% first-generation college students.
- 95% multilingual.
- 98% future teachers of color.

One hundred percent of awardees were pursuing an endorsement in a shortage area, including endorsements in bilingual, English Language Learner (ELL), and elementary education.

As of summer 2018, one hundred percent of awardees had completed or were still enrolled and making satisfactory academic progress toward on-time completion.



Fund the newly expanded Passport to Careers program

Improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care

Recommendation

Expand supports for youth in foster care or who have experienced homelessness (\$1.9 million/year)

Provide scholarships and services to help youth from foster care or who have experienced homelessness prepare for careers. The Passport program serves about 400 former foster youth each year with scholarships, campus support services, and service coordination. Recent legislation expanded the program to include homeless youth and support for apprenticeship programs.



The Imperative

Washington must reduce the educational inequities facing former foster and homeless youth

Less than fifty percent of foster youth graduate from high school, far below statewide averages.³⁶ Unaccompanied homeless youth face similar challenges. Unless financial barriers are addressed, significant educational inequities for both of these populations will continue. The newly expanded Passport to Careers program will begin serving unaccompanied homeless youth in 2019, and the number of Passport-eligible students will double at that time. Additional funding will not only provide student scholarships, but also will ensure the newly eligible population receives the same support services that have helped previous Passport students succeed.

Context

Washington is a recognized leader when it comes to supporting foster youth in postsecondary education

The Passport to College program has a unique design, different from typical financial aid programs. It is a model looked to by other states and national foster youth advocates. Since 2007, Passport has offered a student scholarship for former foster youth; incentive funding to campuses to recruit and retain former foster youth; and contracted support services from College Success Foundation to provide direct student services, as well as training and technical assistance to campus staff. The 2018 expansion created an umbrella program called Passport to Careers that also provides financial assistance and support services for students in pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship programs.

Quick Facts:

Youth who have been in foster care or experienced homelessness have educational outcomes well below the state average.³⁷

With support from the Passport program, students persist at the rates of students from low-income families, overcoming significant challenges to their success.³⁸

The Passport expansion will double the number of eligible students with the addition of unaccompanied homeless youth.

Outcomes and Measures

More students will benefit from Passport's established record of success

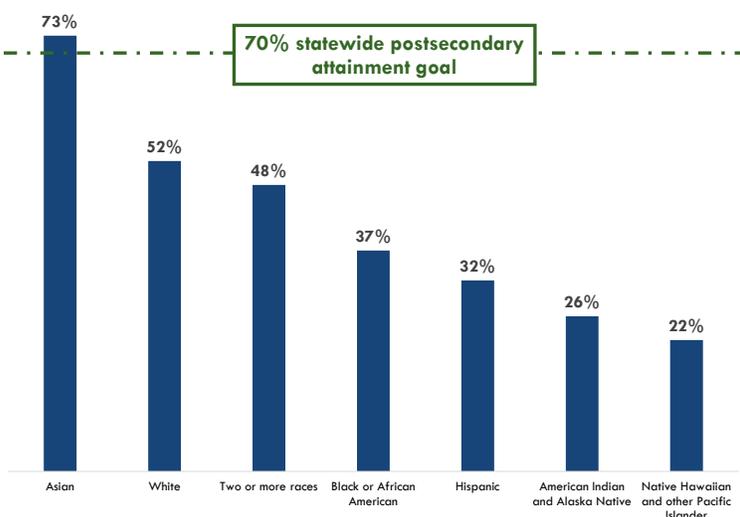
- More scholarships and support services for youth who have been in foster care or experienced homelessness.
- Increased funding for the SETuP program to assist foster youth in transitioning from high school to postsecondary enrollment, career, or service.
- Strong persistence rates for the expanded eligible population.
- Expansion to pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, in keeping with the Legislature's intent to support additional pathways.

Key Challenge #2: Close Educational Opportunity Gaps

While education decreases economic and social inequality, stark gaps in academic success exist among many demographic groups: students whose parents did not complete college, those from lower-income backgrounds, English Language Learners, veterans, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. foster care, homelessness, formerly incarcerated). The attainment gaps based on race and ethnicity are profound. For example, the Hispanic/Latino population is Washington's second largest racial/ethnic group, and this demographic has one of the largest gaps in educational attainment at the postsecondary levels (see Figure 2).

A high school diploma or equivalent is the foundation for a student's future educational success and career progression. Yet Washington's high school graduation rate is below the national average by four percentage points, 80 versus 84 percent.⁵ At a time when all of the anticipated growth in K-12 will be among populations of color, we have graduation rate gaps up to 27 percentage points.⁶ And although about three-quarters of Washington's jobs require credentials beyond high school, only 64 percent of seniors enroll in postsecondary education or training directly after high school, with only 31 percent ultimately completing a credential.^{7,8,9} While conferring of postsecondary credentials increased five percentage points in a five-year period, Washington is experiencing decreasing overall enrollments, and the total credentials awarded are expected to decline unless advances are made.^{10, 11, 12} Without a concerted effort to improve educational success for all students, the state risks exacerbating the workforce talent pipeline shortage.

Figure 2: Rate of postsecondary attainment among Washington adults ages 25–44 by race/ethnicity



Source: Source: WSAC Analysis of American Community Survey 2012-2016, U.S. Census (August 2018).

Call to action for a systems approach

Washington must increase high school completion, readiness for postsecondary education, and postsecondary credential completion. Our progress in recent years has been slight, and opportunity gaps persist. Still, individual schools and support programs have proven that gaps can indeed be closed. To make the many benefits of higher education available to students of color and others from underrepresented groups, we must amplify our efforts to provide all students with college and career readiness opportunities and completion supports.

Given the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues that impact the opportunity gap, a system-wide approach addressing the whole student is necessary. Closing opportunity gaps requires the collective efforts of K-12, higher education, and community-based organizations.

The Council supports the following strategies to advance college- and career-readiness activities throughout middle and high school. Such activities increase high school graduation rates and prepare students for postsecondary success.

Provide additional school counselors. Currently, there are nearly 500 students assigned to each counselor.¹³ To better serve and support students, we must expand access to family engagement counselors and middle school counselors. Providing additional counselors will keep students engaged in school and improve high school graduation rates for underserved populations.

Address the teacher shortage issue. We must build a strong pipeline of teachers. Each segment of the educational system can address a piece of this multifaceted problem. Together they can target subject shortages, diversify the teacher workforce, expand capacity at teacher-training institutions, improve affordability for student-teachers, and provide incentives to increase the number of skilled teachers.

Support College Bound Scholars. The majority of low-income middle school students aspire to postsecondary education. To harness this potential, we must do more than send students periodic email messages. Instead, we should provide robust communications and support to students as they work toward college readiness. Engaging students through the College Bound Scholarship (CBS)—a successful statewide program in which students of color are overrepresented—is critical. Enhanced communication and support using innovative digital tools will support students from CBS sign-up through college enrollment. The commitment of financial aid, combined with supports, makes College Bound an essential tool to close opportunity gaps in Washington.

Expand FAFSA and WASFA training and events. With only half of Washington’s seniors applying for financial aid, we must expand capacity to hold more application events, serve more regions, and support more schools and partners with data, training, and resources. Additional sites will include partnerships with libraries, immigrant-serving organizations, and schools. Washington must move from being one of the lowest-ranking states in FAFSA completion to one of the strongest.

Ensure dual credit programs are equitably accessible. The majority of students accessing dual credit come from families with financial means.¹⁴ We must make dual credit accessible for more students, especially students of color and low-income students. All students who are ready to participate in and receive college credit for coursework completed in high school should have the opportunity to do so. We need to evaluate and improve options in each district, for every student, regardless of family income or geographic location.

Strengthen support for youth from foster care and homeless youth. Foster and homeless youth experience the lowest overall educational outcomes. We must provide a streamlined and coordinated system of care that addresses systemic barriers. State agencies and nonprofit partners have jointly developed recommendations that will help optimize service delivery for our most vulnerable students.

Bolster student supports on campus. With an increase of just two percent in credentials awarded, we must improve student success and completion.¹⁵ To encourage academic success and increase completion rates, campuses need resources to provide individualized student support, address mental health needs, and augment career-connected learning activities.