



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE HB 1835

Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Pilot

DECEMBER 2025

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Executive Summary

The Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Pilot Program, launched by the Washington State Legislature in 2022 through 2SHB 1835, aims to increase financial aid awareness and application completion among high school seniors, especially in regions with historically low completion rates. The initiative began with Education Service Districts (ESDs) 114 and 123, partnering with Olympic College, Peninsula College, Big Bend Community College, Columbia Basin College, and Walla Walla Community College. Supported by the Washington Student Achievement Council and coordinated by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the program expanded in 2024 to ESD 113 (Centralia College, Grays Harbor College, South Puget Sound Community College) and in 2025 to ESD 171 (Wenatchee Valley College), extending its reach and adding new outreach specialists.

The pilot employs a multi-channel outreach strategy to connect with students and families, including embedded support in high schools, at community events, and diverse communication platforms. Outreach specialists provide direct case management, partner with school staff and external organizations, and utilize culturally responsive practices to ensure equitable access for all student populations.

Since its inception, the program has shown measurable impact. Outreach specialists have assisted over 22,000 students, including nearly 12,000 seniors. Financial aid completion rates have improved: FAFSA completion increased from 43% to 48% in the 2024–2025 academic year, despite continued technical challenges with the new FAFSA rollout. WASFA application counts grew by 58%, further supported by the addition of new colleges participating in the pilot program. Data-driven practices and ongoing collaboration among colleges, school districts, and community partners have been critical to these successes.

Recommendations for future action include strengthening partnerships, ensuring outreach specialists have necessary resources, developing formal agreements between colleges and districts, investing in comprehensive data tracking systems, and amending legislation to enable more robust outcome reporting.

Overall, the Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Pilot Program demonstrates significant progress in expanding postsecondary access for Washington students, with continued promise as the program grows and adapts to emerging needs.

Background

The Financial Aid Outreach Pilot Program, initiated in fall 2022 under 2SHB 1835, began with the two Education Service Districts (ESDs) with the lowest financial aid completion rates from 2019 to 2021: ESD 114 (north Olympic Peninsula and Kitsap Peninsula) and ESD 123 (southeast Washington). ESD 114 collaborates with Olympic College and Peninsula College, while ESD 123 partners with Big Bend Community College, Columbia Basin College, and Walla Walla Community College. With support from the Washington Student Achievement Council, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) provides ongoing training for pilot colleges, high school educators, and district staff.

In 2024, the Legislature approved expanding the pilot to ESD 113, incorporating Centralia College,

Grays Harbor College, and South Puget Sound Community College, adding five new outreach specialists to support the Capital Region. In 2025, the outreach program was further expanded to strengthen regional support. Educational Service District (ESD) 171 was incorporated, adding Wenatchee Valley College with one dedicated outreach specialist. Additionally, staffing for Big Bend Community College was increased to two outreach specialists, ensuring enhanced capacity to serve students and communities. The pilot focuses on financial aid completion for high school seniors, including U.S. citizens eligible for federal aid via Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and undocumented students eligible for state aid via Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA).

Legislation Implementation

The pilot program funding was directed by legislative mandate, requiring outreach teams to maintain a staffing ratio of one outreach staff member per 600 high school seniors. Data from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) indicated that the identified ESD regions had a total of 11,000 high school seniors, necessitating 19 outreach specialists to meet this ratio.

The fiscal note for the original bill estimated that \$1,500,000 would be needed to hire the 19 outreach specialists, each with a base salary and benefits totaling \$80,000. The State Board received the full amount for fiscal year 2023, which was distributed to the pilot colleges at the start of the fiscal year in July 2022.

In July 2024, the Legislature approved an additional allocation of \$425,000 to expand the pilot to ESD 113, covering the Capital Region. Due to limited funding, only five outreach specialists were hired for three colleges, deviating from the 1:600 outreach specialist to student ratio specified in 2SHB 1835. Additionally, in July 2025, the Legislature approved \$170,000 for the expansion of ESD 171 which was also limited to the hiring of two outreach specialists.

While all funding is allocated directly to pilot colleges, SBCTC maintains a critical supportive role by delivering professional development opportunities, targeted training, and supplemental resources as available. In collaboration with WSAC, SBCTC ensures outreach specialists and college teams are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and tools to facilitate financial aid completion for high school seniors. Additionally, SBCTC has convened in-person summer sessions focused on strategic planning for engagement with high school staff, students, and communities. These convenings also provide a structured forum for outreach specialists to exchange best practices and strengthen collaborative support networks.

Pilot Expenditures as of 11/19/2025

ESD	College	Allocation	Expenditures	Remaining Balance
114	Olympic College	\$400,000.00	\$106,865.00	\$293,135.00
114	Peninsula College	\$240,000.00	\$4,657.07	\$235,342.93
123/ 171	Big Bend Community College	\$125,000.00	\$7,412.68	\$117,587.32
123	Columbia Basin College	\$660,000.00	\$ 227,375.55	\$432,624.45
123	Walla Walla Community College	\$160,000.00	\$53,122.72	\$106,877.28
113	Centralia College	\$170,000.00	\$48,412.03	\$121,587.97
113	Grays Harbor College	\$170,000.00	\$35,388.74	\$134,611.26
113	South Puget Sound Community College	\$85,000.00	29,880.00	\$55,120.00
171	Wenatchee Valley College	\$85,000.00	-	\$85,000.00

Pilot Staffing

ESD	College	Staff	Position(s)
114	Olympic College	5	1 Assistant Director, 4 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists
114	Peninsula College	3	3 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists
123	Big Bend Community College	2	2 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists
123	Columbia Basin College	8	1 Assistant Director, 7 Outreach Specialists
123	Walla Walla Community College	2	2 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists
113	Centralia College	2	2 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists
113	Grays Harbor College	2	2 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists
113	South Puget Sound Community College	1	1 Financial Aid Outreach Specialist
171	Wenatchee Valley College	1	1 Financial Aid Outreach Specialist

Outcomes

The outcomes data below excludes the recent ESD 171 expansion, as Big Bend Community College and Wenatchee Valley College are still integrating new outreach specialists into high schools. Expansion data will appear in the 2026 Legislative report.

Since its launch in 2022-2023, the pilot program has assisted 30,602 students, including 14,214 seniors, showcasing its expanding influence. Although primarily targeting seniors, outreach teams have also supported juniors, sophomores, families, and community members through individualized sessions, workshops, and presentations. Colleges are using creative approaches to measure outreach effectiveness, with most specialists meeting with each high school senior one or two times on average.

Staffing and Capacity

One of the ongoing considerations for outreach programs is the challenge of maintaining sufficient staffing levels, especially as new pilot colleges continue their integration process. When outreach staff are responsible for multiple schools, it can be challenging to consistently build strong relationships and provide highly individualized support, which may occasionally affect service continuity. Recognizing these complexities, colleges have explored innovative strategies to optimize their outreach efforts.

Outreach Strategies

Embedded and 1:1 case management

Many programs have adopted the embedded specialist model, placing dedicated outreach professionals within high schools. These specialists, supported by office space, district email addresses, and formal agreements between colleges and high schools, can foster close partnerships with school staff and build trust among students and families. This model has been associated with enhanced access to financial aid and college readiness resources, as well as stronger student engagement in college planning.

Currently, about one-third of high schools in the pilot program have embedded specialists, while the remainder benefit from other forms of outreach support. As programs evolve, expanding the embedded specialist approach remains a promising avenue for increasing the reach and effectiveness of financial aid outreach, allowing more students and families to benefit from these important support services.

Community based outreach

Outreach events are held in places like cafés, libraries, and community centers rather than schools, reducing barriers for families who may not want to attend school-based activities or face scheduling conflicts with K-12 hours.

Multichannel communication

Effective outreach campaigns utilize a variety of communication methods, including ParentSquare, Canvas, Remind, Google Classroom, flyers, radio advertisements, and social media platforms. Leveraging internal school channels further amplifies the reach, ensuring that information is distributed widely and consistently.

Focused partnerships

Collaboration is a key component of outreach efforts. Outreach specialists work closely with career centers, school counselors, and K-12 directors to foster referrals and create integrated programming. By participating in staff meetings and student events, specialists strengthen relationships and increase student engagement.

Flexible meeting formats

Outreach support is offered in various formats, including in-person, virtual, and text-based meetings. This flexibility allows families to access assistance in the manner that best suits their needs. Follow-up communications are tailored to the progress of individual students, helping to maintain momentum throughout the college planning process.

Culturally responsive practices

Efforts to support diverse student populations include bilingual workshops, clear and accessible messaging for families with mixed-status immigration statuses, and intentional trust-building with

immigrant communities. These practices ensure that outreach is inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of all families.

Creative event participation

Outreach specialists actively participate in school activities such as spirit weeks, concerts, sports events, and expos. By meeting students in these informal settings, specialists help normalize college-related conversations and increase their visibility within the school community.

Data informed practices

Colleges utilize data from the WSAC portal alongside internal metrics and dashboards, such as Power BI, to monitor outreach impact. This data-driven approach allows for ongoing assessment and refinement of outreach strategies to maximize effectiveness.

2022-2023 student outreach

Region	College	Year	Seniors Served	Students Served
ESD114	Olympic College	2022-23	1,117	2,886
ESD114	Peninsula College	2022-23	403	703
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2022-23	67	87
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2022-23	2,453	2,453
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2022-23	1,111	1,111
			Total: 5,151	Total: 7,240

2023-2024 student outreach

Region	College	Year	Seniors Served	Students Served
ESD114	Olympic College	2023-24	2,386	4,361
ESD114	Peninsula College	2023-24	450	750
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2023-24	104	146
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2023-24	3549	3549
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2023-24	1283	1283
			Total: 7,772	Total: 10,089

2024-2025 student outreach

Region	College	Year	Seniors Served	Students Served
ESD113	Grays Harbor College	2024-25	1420	5680
ESD113	Centralia College	2024-25	927	1227
ESD113	South Puget Sound Community College*	2024-25	3169	12,958
ESD114	Olympic College	2024-25	Total: 2315	Total: 3391

Region	College	Year	Seniors Served	Students Served
ESD114	Peninsula College	2024-25	1129	1966
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2024-25	327	453
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2024-25	4080	4080
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2024-25	847	847
			Total: 14,214	Total: 30,602
<p>*South Puget Sound Community College receives additional funding beyond the pilot program, allowing them to hire four more outreach specialists and serve more students. Only one position is funded by HB 1835.</p>				

Trends in FAFSA and WASFA Completion

Over the past three years, FAFSA completion rates have fluctuated, with a significant decline observed in the 2024–25 academic year. This drop was largely attributed to delays in the “Better FAFSA” rollout and various technical challenges. Students and families encountered barriers such as system glitches, staff shortages, confusion over new formats, and apprehension regarding federal policies, surveillance, and immigration status.

The 2025–26 FAFSA introduced technical enhancements, including real-time identity verification, which streamlined the application process. Despite these improvements, families without Social Security Numbers or reliable internet access continued to face difficulties, and skepticism lingered because of prior technical issues. Ongoing concerns such as the digital divide and policy uncertainties disproportionately impacted mixed-status families. Additionally, staff fatigue, limited outreach efforts, and more stringent eligibility requirements led to tighter Pell Grant and loan limits. These factors, combined with political volatility, affordability challenges, and ongoing technical problems, such as unreliable internet and portal inconsistencies, continued to hinder financial aid application rates. The transition to new data systems also made it more challenging to compare completion rates across different years.

Data integrity and limitations

All financial aid completion data presented in this report are sourced from the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) as of November 3, 2025. The WSAC enforces strict privacy measures regarding the publication of financial aid data, with special attention to safeguarding the identities of undocumented students and their families.

WASFA data protection measures

To protect the privacy of undocumented students, WSAC publicly releases only WASFA application counts instead of completion rates. WASFA counts are withheld when there are fewer than ten students represented, reducing the risk of inadvertent identification. In recent years, WASFA data have been limited to likely high school seniors—specifically, first-time filers and freshmen who have never enrolled—whereas previous reports may have included a broader range of student groups.

FAFSA data suppression guidelines

FAFSA completion rates are not reported for groups with fewer than twenty students. When rates are published, they are rounded, and exact headcounts are not provided. These protocols are designed to maintain student confidentiality and uphold data privacy standards in all publicly available reports.

Financial Aid Completion Rates and Numbers

During the 2024–2025 academic year, the FAFSA completion rate rose from 43% to 48%, reflecting a positive trend after the considerable challenges associated with the previous year’s FAFSA simplification process. Furthermore, the WASFA count increased 58%, rising from 284 to 493 over the last year. It should also be noted that this growth is partly attributable to the inclusion of three additional pilot colleges: Grays Harbor College, Centralia College, and South Puget Sound Community College for ESD 113, which contributed to the overall WASFA count over the past two years.

2021-2022 High School Senior Cohort (Pre-Outreach Interventions)

Region	College	FAFSA Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD114	Olympic College	2022-23	41%	N<10
ESD114	Peninsula College	2022-23	33%	N<10
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2022-23	46%	61
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2022-23	43%	98
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2022-23	51%	21
				Total: 180

2022-2023 High School Senior Cohort

Region	College	FAFSA Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD114	Olympic College	2023-24	41%	20
ESD114	Peninsula College	2023-24	33%	N<10
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2023-24	46%	75
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2023-24	43%	111
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2023-24	51%	20
				Total: 226

2023-2024 High School Senior Cohort

Region	College	FAFSA Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD113	Grays Harbor College (pre intervention)	2024-25	46%	15

Region	College	FAFSA Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD113	Centralia College (pre intervention)	2024-25	40%	20
ESD113	South Puget Sound Community College (pre intervention)	2024-25	51%	51
ESD114	Olympic College	2024-25	45%	24
ESD114	Peninsula College	2024-25	36%	N<10
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2024-25	54%	65
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2024-25	50%	87
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2024-25	56%	22
				Total: 284

2024-2025 High School Senior Cohort

Region	College	FAFSA Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD113	Grays Harbor College	2025-26	48%	33
ESD113	Centralia College	2025-26	44%	23
ESD113	South Puget Sound Community College	2025-26	54%	84
ESD114	Olympic College	2025-26	46%	50
ESD114	Peninsula College	2025-26	39%	12
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2025-26	54%	82
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2025-26	48%	154
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2025-26	50%	55
				Total: 493

Recommendations

- Enhance awareness and relationships: Increase awareness of the pilot program through strengthened relationships with schools and community partners. Enhanced marketing and promotion at all levels would further support these relationships.
- Ensure accountability: High school districts should ensure that outreach specialists have access to all necessary resources to support students. This includes network access, district email, designated office space, and permission to pull students out of class when appropriate.
- Develop memorandums of understanding: Colleges and school districts/high schools should develop memorandums of understanding to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all

parties. This will ensure that outreach specialists can effectively perform their duties within high schools.

- Invest in a comprehensive tracking system: Outside of WSAC’s FAFSA portal and monthly WASFA data updates, all other data, such as outreach efforts and student engagement, were tracked manually by the pilot colleges using Excel or Google Sheets. This manual tracking requires significant work and can lead to data inconsistencies. Investing in a tracking system compatible with ctcLink, the community and technical college’s ERP software system, could more accurately track data and effectively support the pilot.
- Amend current statute to allow the Educational Research and Data Center (ERDC) to report on Washington high school seniors' FAFSA and WASFA completion rates by demographic, comparing pre- and post-program data, and including first-year postsecondary enrollment rates after graduation.

Conclusion

In summary, the Financial Aid Outreach Pilot Program has demonstrated meaningful progress since its launch in 2022. Through dedicated outreach and expanded partnerships, the program not only increased its reach to thousands of Washington high school seniors but also achieved a notable rise in financial aid completion rates. Most recently, the FAFSA completion rate climbed from 43% to 48% in the 2024–2025 academic year, reversing prior declines and showcasing the positive impact of targeted support strategies. Additionally, WASFA application counts surged by 58%, reflecting expanded access and intentional outreach to undocumented and mixed-status families. These upward trends in both FAFSA and WASFA completion highlight the program’s effectiveness in reducing barriers to postsecondary education, closing equity gaps, and ensuring more students across Washington have the resources and support needed to pursue their educational goals. As the program continues to expand and innovate, it stands as a promising model for increasing college access and financial aid participation statewide.



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