College Bound
Postsecondary Enrollment

An exploration of students' understanding and beliefs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) is designed to inspire and encourage Washington middle school students from low-income families to prepare for and pursue postsecondary education. The state provides an early commitment of financial aid, which is intended to alleviate the financial barriers preventing students from considering college as a possibility. Postsecondary enrollment rates of College Bound students match or exceed those of non-College Bound Washington high school graduates; however, the postsecondary enrollment rate of College Bound students has fallen as the percentage of 7th and 8th grade students signing the pledge has increased.

This study, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a first look into eligible students' perceived obstacles to postsecondary enrollment, despite access to the College Bound scholarship. We do not present statistically significant results or tests among schools' programming. Rather, this study explores possible gaps in information and students' perceived obstacles to continuing education. We find that students in our study:

- Report uncertainty and mistaken information about program requirements and eligibility.
- Almost overwhelmingly report planning to attend postsecondary; however roughly a fifth of current seniors are "unsure when."
- Believe primary and secondary schools should begin explaining the benefits of college and exploring careers requiring postsecondary sooner in the student's education.
- Want a mandatory class during the school day with college preparation guidance, such as career counseling, FAFSA filing, and meeting deadlines.

This report begins with state program information and data from the Washington Student Achievement Council showing sign-up rates and postsecondary enrollment rates for students in public K-12 schools.[1] Next, we present findings from:

- Two focus groups of current seniors.
- One survey of current seniors.
- One survey of recently graduated College Bound-eligible students designed to probe students' understanding of the College Bound program and their perceived obstacles to postsecondary enrollment.

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[1] Program information pulled from Washington Student Achievement Council. College Bound Scholarship Report, March 2017.

We conclude with recommendations for improving CBS postsecondary enrollment rates and suggest further research based on our findings.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND DATA

In order to be eligible for the College Bound Scholarship (CBS), low-income seventh and eighth graders sign a pledge to graduate from high school with a 2.0 grade point average or higher and without felony convictions, as well as to complete admissions and financial aid applications in a timely manner. Students must apply by the end of the eighth grade year. Foster youth are automatically enrolled. Applicants who meet pledge requirements, whose family income falls within 65 percent of the state's median family income, and who meet other scholarship requirements are eligible for an award. The CBS award amounts are equal to the difference between public institution tuition and required fees plus a book stipend, less the value of any state-funded assistance the student receives. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) administers the program. To maximize program efficiency and effectiveness, WSAC collaborates with:

- Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI).
- Washington College Access Network (WCAN) and College Success Foundation (under contract with OSPI).
- Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS).
- Schools, districts, K-12 professional associations.
- Higher education institutions, and others.

College Bound Applications

To date, over 250,000 students have signed up for the College Bound Scholarship. Through strong partnerships with the Washington College Access Network and school districts, as well as an automated application system, applications for College Bound have grown each year. To monitor a cohort's sign-up throughout the seventh and eighth grade, WSAC calculates an initial sign-up rate using a snapshot of eligible students during fall of seventh grade. To account for student mobility and students who become eligible after fall of seventh grade, OSPI and WSAC calculate a reconciled rate, as shown in Figure 1. While the reconciled rate shows annual increases in applications, the improved calculation reveals a nearly 20 percent increase in student eligibility. District-level sign-up data is available at www.wsac.wa.gov/college-bound.

Figure 1. College Bound Scholarship Applications

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
CBS Applicants by HS Class	15,947	16,070	20,903	23,398	25,272	28,980	32,195	33,117	32,096

Class of 2020: 32,096 applicants
Initial Sign-Up Rate = 89%
Reconciled Sign-Up Rate = 71%
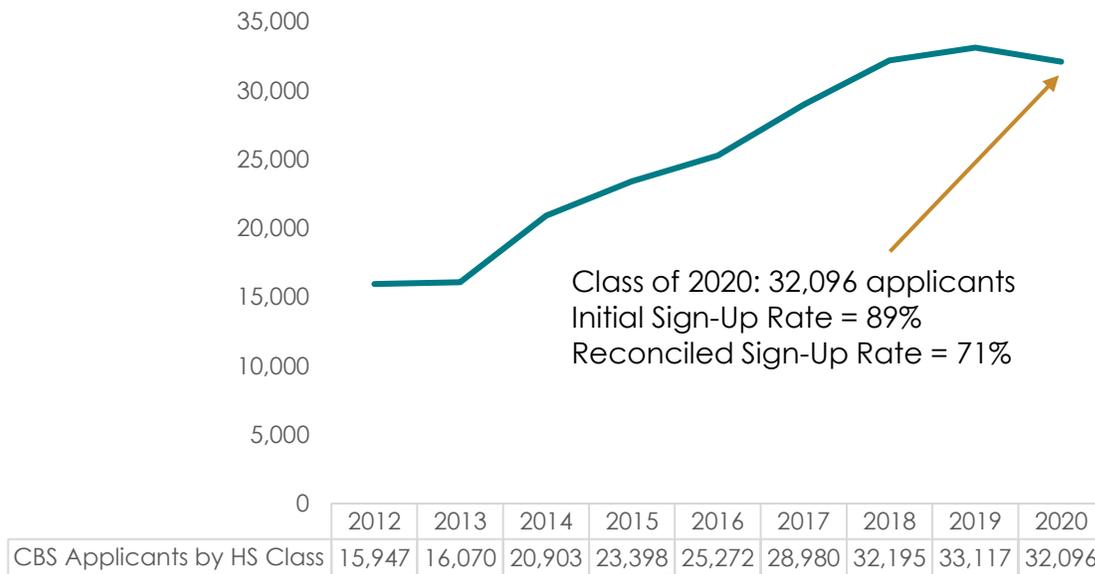
Source: Washington Student Achievement Council Administrative Data, 2016

College Bound Enrollments

As College Bound cohorts have grown, the rate of immediate enrollment in college has decreased slightly, from 67 to 61 percent, as shown in Figure 2. However, College Bound students are enrolling at slightly higher than the statewide rate. In addition, of the 31,208 scholars who did enroll in college (2012-13 through 2015-16), 92 percent enrolled the year immediately following high school graduation.

Figure 2. Postsecondary Enrollment Rates of High School Exit Cohorts: College Bound Scholars and Washington High School Graduates

Postsecondary Enrollments

67%
64%
61%
62%
61%
60%

% CBS Graduates Enrolling in PSE

% HS Graduates Enrolling in PSE

2012-13   2013-14   2014-15
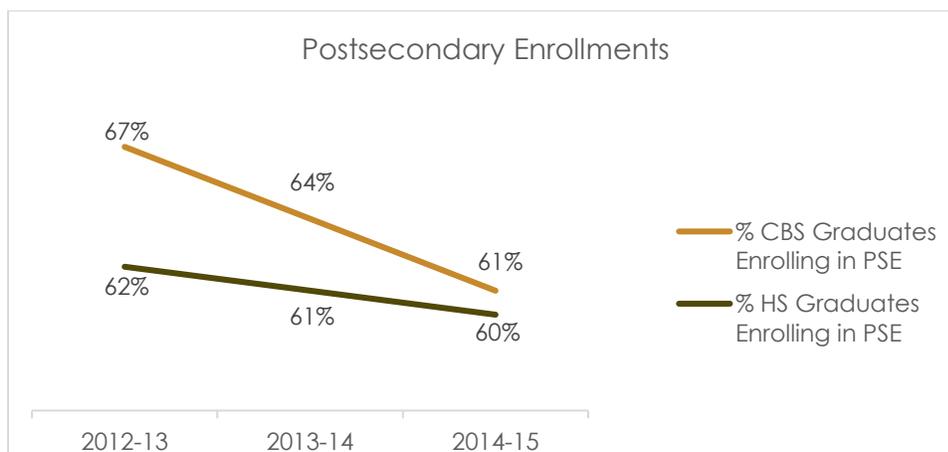
Source: Washington Student Achievement Council Administrative Data, Office of the Superintendence of Public Instruction, Education and Research Data Center, 2016.

The research presented here provides a first look at CBS-eligible students' understanding and knowledge of the scholarship program and their perceived obstacles to postsecondary enrollment.[2]

Focus Groups and Survey Design

WSAC, with financial support from the Gates Foundation, conducted two focus groups and two surveys of students who had signed up for the College Bound scholarship in the 7th or 8th grades and were eligible to receive College Bound scholarships at the time of data collection. The focus groups were intended to help refine and inform the survey instrument used in both surveys.

Two populations—current and recent CBS-eligible high school students—received surveys so we could obtain a meaningful number of responses. This project initially focused only on CBS-eligible high school graduates who had not yet enrolled in postsecondary; however, response rates often track with education and age. As this is a young, uneducated population, we were concerned that response rates might be too low to draw inferences about students' needs. Therefore, we added the second survey of current CBS-eligible high school seniors. Since school staff could promote this survey, we expected and achieved higher response rates.

Focus Groups

WSAC conducted two focus groups within one Educational Service District. We selected one school with a low CBS sign-up rate and one with a high sign-up rate to ensure we captured feedback from schools with different College Bound cultures. The schools were roughly equal in size; however, the first school, with a low sign-up rate, serves a population of which roughly two-thirds of the students are low-income.[3] The second school, with a high sign-up rate, is roughly one-third low income. The district's counselor chose twelve CBS-eligible students to participate from the schools' senior classes.[4]

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[2] In this report, CBS-eligible implies the student signed the College Bound pledge in the 7th or 8th grade, is still enrolled in school or graduated high school with at least a 2.0 GPA, committed no felonies, and is still within the period following graduation during which they are able to enroll and receive the scholarship award.
[3] The percentage of the school that is eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL or FRL) is used as a proxy for the percentage that is low-income.
[4] These students were eligible at the date of data collection for the College Bound scholarship, provided the students successfully graduated high school and maintained GPAs above 2.0.

Findings from Focus Groups

We conducted the focus groups to refine the survey instrument and mode of delivery. [5] Both focus groups were adamant that a paper survey delivered and collected during the school day would maximize response rates over any other survey mode.

The focus groups also provided a rich source of information about students' perceived obstacles to postsecondary enrollment and completion. Importantly, not all students in the focus groups knew what the College Bound scholarship was or that they were currently eligible to receive it upon postsecondary enrollment assuming successful completion of the remaining requirements.

School 1: Low sign-up rates and high proportion of low-income students

We asked focus group participants why they believed *other* students eligible for the College Bound scholarship do not enroll in postsecondary education. Participants at this school overwhelmingly reported believing non-enrolling students most likely want to work first, having prioritized immediate income over continued educational investment. They also believed their peers may lack planning skills, and thought their peers erroneously believe they "have time to linger around, and they can do it later."

When asked what schools or the state could do to improve postsecondary enrollment and completion, participating students suggested:

- Host more college-themed events, assemblies, and visits.

  "I think it's easier if the school did it; it's too hard to find time to get to the campuses."

- Explain the outcomes of going to college compared to not continuing education after high school.

- Provide more extensive career counseling in high school.

  "Career counseling would help a lot. Say you want to be one thing one day and you want to try it, there's nothing you can really do to experience it. Another day, you want to be something else. Job-shadowing, on-the-job training; that would help out to think about what you want to go into before you even start college."

- Begin the discussions about postsecondary earlier in high school.

School 2: High sign-up rates and low proportion of low-income students

Students in the second school tended to focus more on academic preparedness and personal connections to peers who attempted postsecondary education, but were unable to complete due to the academic rigor required. Almost all students in this

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[5] The focus group instrument is found in Appendix 1.

group knew a peer who attempted postsecondary education and was unable to complete. However, all students *also* knew at least one peer who was successfully able to complete his or her degree and had a positive experience in postsecondary.

Recommendations stemming from these focus group participants include:

- Host colleges in the classroom to discuss what to expect in postsecondary.

- Provide more FAFSA and WASFA support.

    o Many students were unaware of the FAFSA or WASFA in this focus group.

    One student noted that the FAFSA was confusing to complete. He thought that completing the FAFSA might conscript him to the military because of the language regarding males and the draft.

- Begin discussions about college earlier in high school and provide more career center resources.

"I think if the career center was more supportive at the beginning of the year rather than the end; [providing support to] sophomores through seniors, [so they can] really get an idea of what they're going to do. They should be more open about that. They don't really talk about anything until the end of the school year…I wish they would have started freshman year. I wasn't prepared at all. I took random classes until my junior year. I just took classes that sparked an interest in something."

"It's another motivation, something that's just pushing you to actually achieve something. If you don't have a career in mind, it's not going to push you in the road you want to be at."

Survey 1: Current Seniors

Participating Schools and Response Rates

WSAC invited all high schools in Washington to participate in the College Bound survey of current seniors. Counselors at twenty six schools accepted and returned 1,196 completed surveys between February and April 2017. We rewarded counselors with a financial incentive for conducting the survey at their campus. To receive the incentive, counselors needed to achieve a minimum 75 percent response rate of CBS-eligible students at their respective schools. All but five schools achieved this response rate.

As shown in Figure 3, schools ranged in size from a minimum of 12 seniors, 1 of whom is CBS-eligible, to a maximum of 581 seniors, of whom roughly 200 are CBS-eligible. The schools split roughly evenly between rural and urban. Appendix 4 contains the survey instrument. For more information about survey methodology, see Appendix 3.

Figure 3: Senior Class Size & Proportion College-Bound eligible of Responding Schools[6]
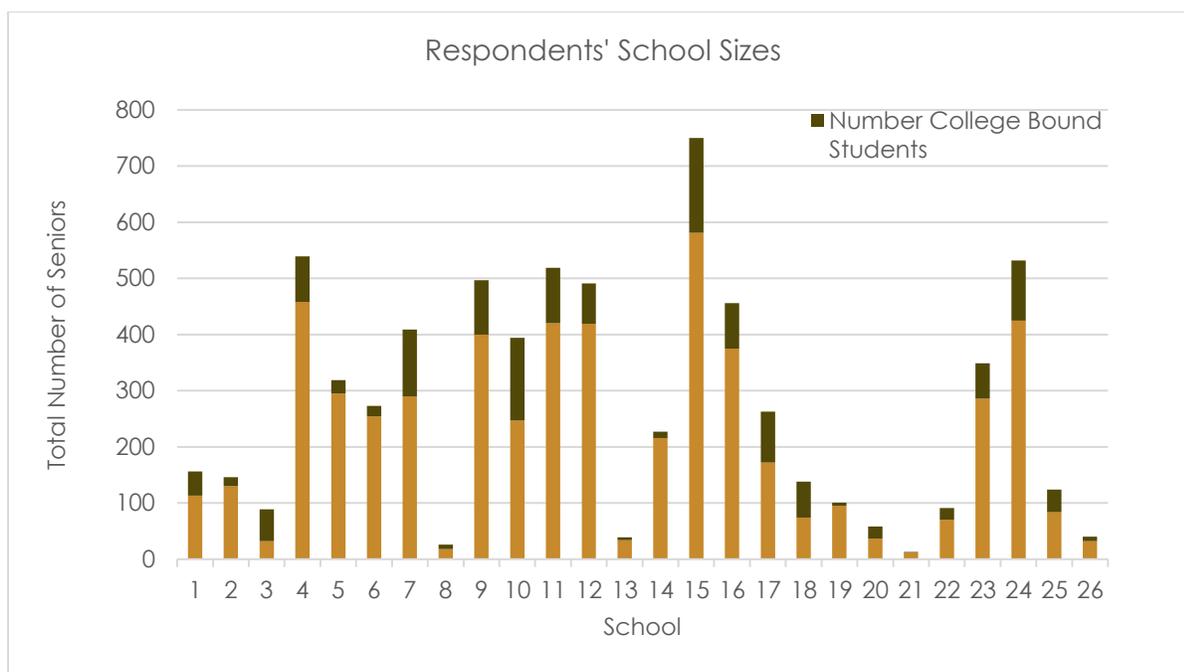
The sampling methodology for this survey was not random, as counselors self-selected into the study. Counselors who are motivated to participate in a research study may also be more motivated to encourage students to attend postsecondary institutions. Therefore, student responses from these schools may be biased in that they are likely to come from schools where counselors are more motivated. Because of this, we did not test survey results for statistical significance or causation. Results of this study are exploratory in nature and should be used to inform further research or additions to programming for schools and College Bound.

Findings from Survey of Current Seniors

Eligibility Beliefs, Program Knowledge and College-Going Behavior

We asked several questions designed to probe the student's understanding of the College Bound program, as well as their understanding of their own eligibility. Students could believe they are ineligible for private reasons (such as knowledge of their family's finances or their GPA), or they could lack program knowledge which causes them to mistakenly believe they are ineligible for the scholarship.

Importantly, 91 percent of respondents do not appear to understand at least one aspect of the CBS program requirements. While the majority of respondents believe they qualify for CBS, 37 percent believed they would be ineligible; of this number, 66 percent think it's because their GPA is too low (see Figure 4).

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[6] See Appendix B for the complete list of participating schools.

*Figure 4: Reasons 37% of Respondents Believe They Will **Not** Be Eligible for CBS*
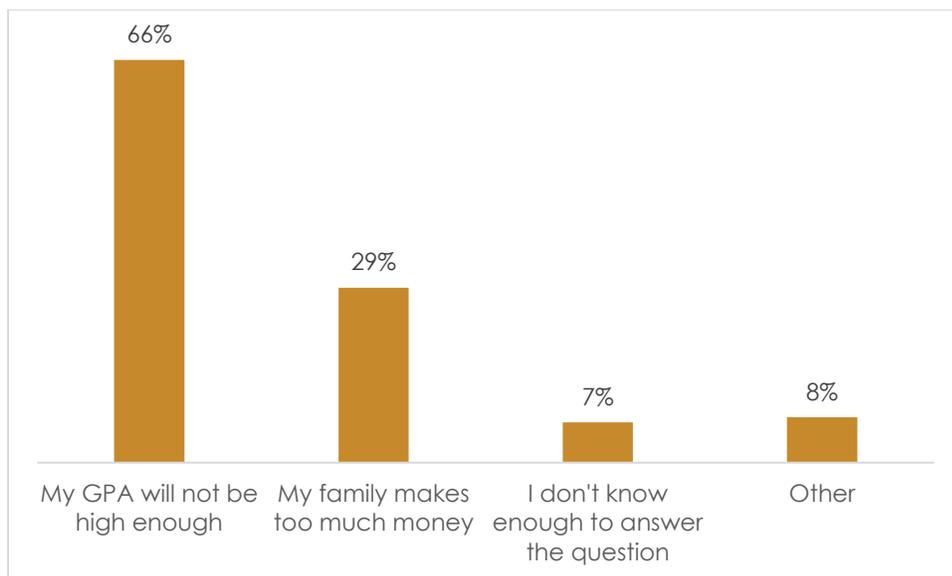
In order to enroll, students must engage in progressively costlier activities; visiting a website or reading a brochure is necessary research that costs the student little in terms of his or her own time and effort. Completing the FAFSA is another step in the process towards enrollment, but this activity requires more of the student's time and effort. These questions are designed to examine where in the hierarchy of college-going behaviors students falter. The purpose of these questions is to determine whether students who understand program requirements and believe they are eligible are more likely to persist through college-going behaviors and enroll in postsecondary. As shown in Table 1, students who believe they will qualify for CBS exhibited a stronger tendency to show college-going behaviors.

Table 1: Eligibility Beliefs and College-Going Behaviors

	Believe will qualify	Do not believe will qualify/unsure
Visit one or more college websites	95%	88%
Visit one or more college campuses	86%	76%
Submit one or more college applications	76%	51%
File a FAFSA/WASFA	90%	73%
Participate in at least one college preparedness program	76%	62%
Plan to continue education	98%	93%
Take an admissions test	70%	56%

Future Education Plans

While the above college-going behaviors are important, the purpose of the CBS program is to induce more low-income students to enroll in and complete

postsecondary education. Therefore, we also asked students whether they were planning to continue their education and their reasons if they did *not* plan to continue. While 96 percent of respondents planned to continue their education sometime in the future, only 65 percent of respondents planned to go in the coming fall of 2017. Of the students who planned to continue, 36 percent did not believe that they qualify for CBS. They planned to enroll despite believing they would not be able to access the College Bound scholarship. Only 3 percent of respondents were *not* planning to enroll in postsecondary in the future. As shown in Figure 5, the majority of these are choosing not to continue their education in order to enter the workforce sooner and earn and income.

Figure 5: Reasons for discontinuing education
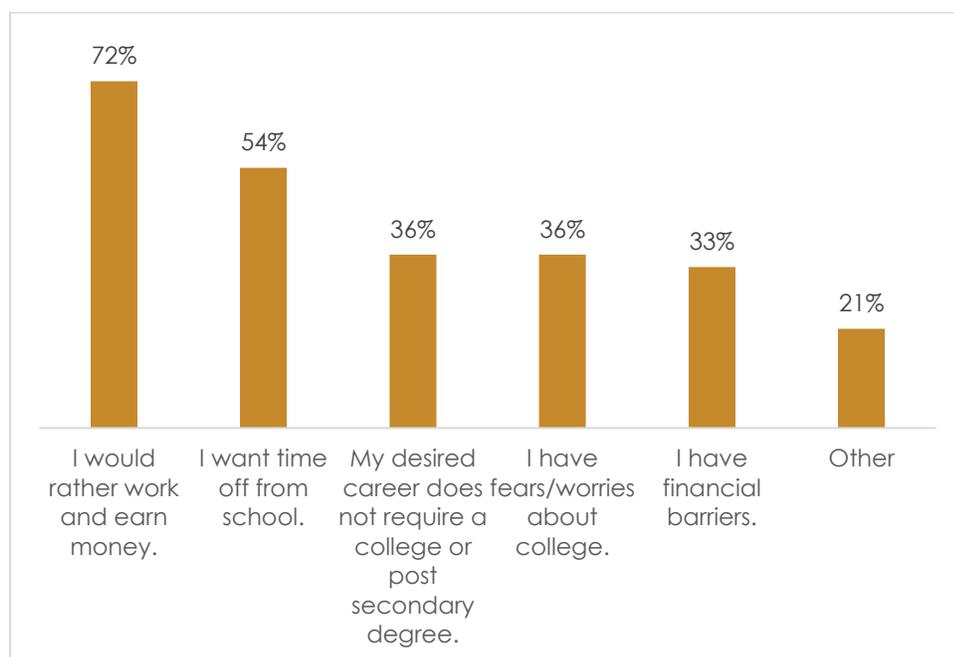

Note: N=39 responses

Encouragement for Postsecondary

The survey asked students about their sources of encouragement for pursuing postsecondary education. We used these questions to control for external factors that improve college-going behaviors and postsecondary enrollment. As shown in Figure 6, almost all respondents were encouraged by at least one adult to continue their education.

Figure 6: Sources of Students' Encouragement to enroll in postsecondary
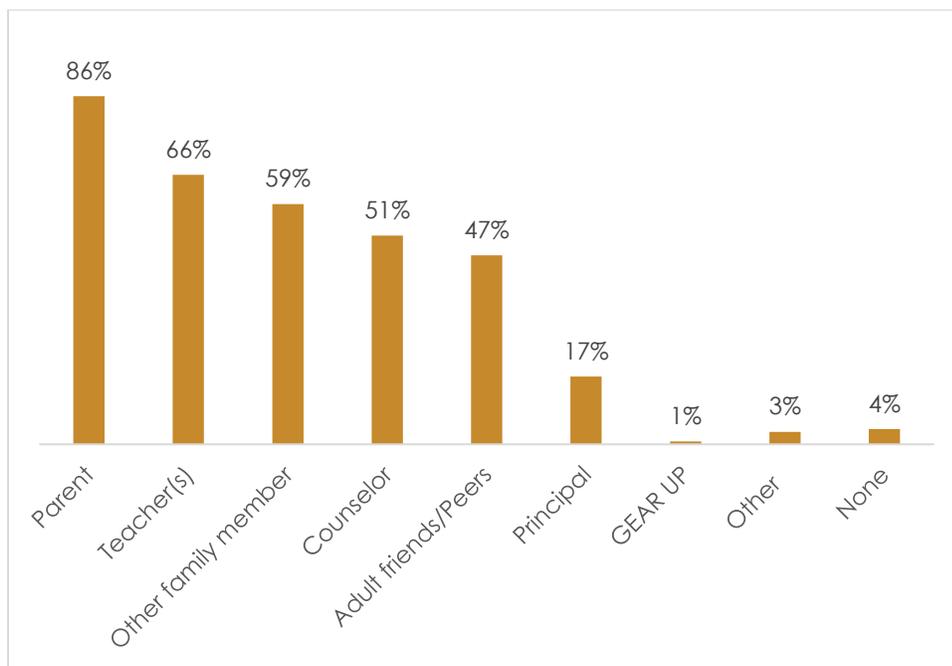
FAFSA or WASFA Knowledge and Behavior
To receive College Bound Scholarship awards, students must file a FAFSA or WASFA.[7] In order to observe whether program knowledge or student motivation is the cause of discontinuing their education, we probed students on their knowledge of the FAFSA/WASFA . We also asked whether they had filed a financial aid application. At the time of data collection:

- 83 percent of respondents had filed, or started to file, a FAFSA/WASFA.
- 7 percent did not know what the FAFSA/WASFA are.
- 9 percent are unsure if they filed one.

This represents roughly 200 of the 1,196 student surveyed who will become ineligible to receive CBS funds unless they file a financial aid application.

College Preparedness and College Going Behaviors
We asked students about their participation in postsecondary preparation programs in order to see whether participation corresponds to higher rates of college-going behaviors. Roughly 70 percent of respondents participated in at least one college preparedness program. Of those who participated, 48 percent participated in *only* one program. The top three programs in which students participated are:

1. College fair (39 percent).

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[7] FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. WASFA is the Washington state corollary, the Washington Application for Student Financial Aid intended for students unable to file a FAFSA.

2. GEAR UP (31 percent).
3. Dual credit (14 percent).

As shown in Table 2 below, participation in at least one college preparedness program corresponded to a two-fold increase in the share of students who believed they would qualify for the College Bound Scholarship.[8]

Table 2: College Preparation Program Participation and Eligibility Beliefs

	Did **not** participate in College Preparedness Program	Did participate in College Preparedness program
Did **not** believe will qualify	14% (n=167)	23% (n=276)
Believed will qualify	15% (n=183)	47% (n=564)

Table 3 shows that participation in a college preparedness program also correlated with family encouragement to enroll in postsecondary education. Also shown in Table 3 is the high percentage of students that received family encouragement for postsecondary education:

Table 3: College Preparation Program Participation and Family Encouragement

	Did **not** participate in College Preparedness Program	Did participate in College Preparedness program
Did **not** receive family encouragement	4% (n=52)	6% (n=75)
Did receive family encouragement	25% (n=299)	64% (n=770)

Table 4 shows that fewer students received encouragement from school personnel than received family encouragement. Similar to the correlation between family encouragement and student participation, students who receive encouragement from school staff are more likely to have participated in a college preparation program.

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[8] Find a list of college preparedness programs represented in the survey in Appendix 4.

Table 4: College Preparation Program Participation and School Personnel Encouragement

	Did **not** participate in College Preparedness Program	Did participate in College Preparedness program
Did **not** receive school personnel encouragement	10% (n=119)	15% (n=183)
Did receive school personnel encouragement	19% (n=232)	55% (n=662)

Table 5 shows that most respondents visited a college campus even if they did not participate in a college preparedness program. Roughly seven times as many students in the college preparedness program visited a campus as those who did not visit a campus. Of those who did not participate, roughly twice as many visited a campus as did not visit. Similar results hold for participation in a college preparedness program and submitting a college application.

Table 5: College Preparation Program Participation and Campus Visits

	Did **not** participate in College Preparedness Program	Did participate in College Preparedness program
Did **not** visit a campus	10% (n=111)	8% (n=94)
Did visit a campus	18% (n=205)	64% (n=743)

Of those who participated in college preparedness programs, roughly twice as many students were accepted to postsecondary as were not yet accepted (398 accepted, 225 not yet accepted). Of those who did not participate in a preparedness program, roughly half had been accepted to postsecondary and half had not yet been accepted (70 accepted; 62 not yet accepted).[9] This implies that students who choose to participate in a college preparedness program (or are exposed to a college preparedness program) are twice as likely to be accepted to a postsecondary institution as are those who do not participate. Whether this difference is due to the success of the program or the motivation of the student is unknown.

This study is not designed to test direction of the correlation between college going behaviors and encouragement to participation in one of these programs. For example, it is possible that family encouragement is the cause of participation in college preparation and also leads to an increased likelihood of campus visits or knowledge about the College Bound program. It is also possible that participation in a college

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[9] All students may enroll in community colleges in Washington; therefore, students planning to enroll at a community college would not necessarily receive an acceptance letter. This survey question wording may therefore have undercounted future enrollments.

preparation program induces family support. As noted in the beginning of this report, our study does not determine causation or relative strength of the impact of any set of variables on a student's likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education.

When viewing college-going behaviors in isolation, we found that:

- 93 percent of respondents visited at least one college website.
- 82 percent visited at least one college campus.
- 66 percent submitted at least one college application.
- 65 percent of respondents took an admissions test.
- 62 percent have been accepted to at least one college.

As of 2014-15, roughly 61 percent of CBS-eligible seniors had enrolled in postsecondary education. The above percentages suggest that in the hierarchy of college-going behaviors, submitting at least one college application is where one observes the most divergence between CBS postsecondary enrollees and their non-enrollee peers. That is, a large majority of students visit websites and campuses; only 66 percent persist to the application step.

Student Recommendations for Improvement in College-Going Behavior
We asked students in the study what their schools or the state could do to encourage more postsecondary participation. While students at other Washington schools not represented in our sample may want *additional* supports not mentioned by students in our study, it is likely these recommendations would be helpful for all CBS-eligible students. The top five suggestions are:

1. Provide more support and information (general, not specified) (15 percent).[10]
2. Provide application support (college applications, FAFSA, scholarships) (15 percent).
3. Explain the benefits of college or what to expect in college (15 percent).
4. Arrange college field trips, college fairs, and guest speakers (14 percent).
5. Provide monetary support and information or make college affordable (12 percent).

In both the focus groups and survey of current seniors, respondents consistently report a desire for more discussion and education around the benefits and justification for college. Students want opportunities that allow them to see the benefits of college in relation to their own passions and interests. They also report hearing college discussed in terms of a step *others* want them to take, but express uncertainty about how

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[10] The lack of clarity about the support that students need could imply that the process of navigating their career and postsecondary options is too nebulous or complex for students to understand exactly what kinds of assistance they need. They need help navigating the process, but they don't know where to begin; they don't know what they don't know.

postsecondary education would relate to their own career paths. Students also express uncertainty about what will be expected of them once at a postsecondary institution.

Students also reported wanting a course designed solely to assist with the paperwork and decision-making necessary to enroll in postsecondary education. The students seemed aware that voluntary preparation assistance outside of the standard school day would discourage attendance and participation. This is intuitive, as many students struggle with transportation and parental support outside of the standard school day schedule.

Recent news from Onalaska, Washington supports this recommendation. The Seattle Times reported on June 5, 2017 that all 43 high school seniors in Onalaska had been accepted to college.[11] The author, Katherine Long, points to a daily class that helps prepare students for career and postsecondary as the explanation for students' success. However, "only about 40 schools offered [the high school and beyond plan] as a for-credit class in 2016."

Survey 2: Recent High School Graduates

Participating Schools and Response Rates

We also surveyed recent high school graduates who graduated with a 2.0 and had signed the College Bound pledge in 7th and 8th grades. This second survey focused exclusively on unenrolled CBS-eligible students. Given that over 90 percent of current seniors included in Survey 1 indicated future postsecondary enrollment plans, WSAC wanted to understand why roughly 40 percent of CBS-eligible students fail to enroll within the window of eligibility each year.

We invited recent CBS-eligible graduates who had not yet enrolled to participate in the survey.[12] We sent invitations in eight separate waves via personal parcel post. Waves were comprised of unenrolled students who had signed up for College Bound in the 7th or 8th grades and who had graduated high school in either 2013-14 or 2014-15.[13] We pulled postsecondary enrollment status from WSAC Unit Record data and the National Student Clearinghouse in May 2016. Our invitation letter explained the survey's purpose and told respondents they would receive a $10 Amazon gift code for completing it.[14] Of the 5,000 mailed invitations, 544 recent graduates completed the survey. As

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[11] Long, Katherine. 2017. "Big News in tiny Onalaska, Washington: All 43 grads were accepted to college." Seattle Times. Originally published June 5, 2017.

[12] The survey instrument was roughly the same for recent graduates as for current seniors; however, branching made the survey slightly different.

[13] In the first four waves, roughly one-quarter of the invitations were mailed to 2013-14 high school graduates. As addresses for this cohort aged out of the United States Post Office's forwarding service, all invitations were sent exclusively to 2014-15 graduates in waves 5 through 8.

[14] The invitation letter is shown in Appendix 5.

addresses were often stale by the time of invitation, the true response rate is higher than 11 percent.

We first asked respondents if they had enrolled in any postsecondary institution (as enrollment data lag actual enrollments). Table 6 shows that roughly half of our respondents reported current enrollment in postsecondary.

Table 6: Are you currently enrolled in a higher education program?

Self-Reported Response	Percent (Frequency)
No	51% (279)
Yes	49% (265)

Post-data collection, WSAC conducted an enrollment analysis of respondents to this survey. Using postsecondary enrollment data available as of June 2017, we found that roughly 10 percent of respondents, who said they enrolled, had not enrolled in any of the institutions reporting to the National Student Clearinghouse or IPEDS. However, almost 40 percent of respondents contacted had enrolled at the time of data collection. Table 7 displays the crosstab of self-reports versus enrollment records.

Table 7: Self-Reported Enrollment Compared to Enrollment Records

Self-Reported Response	Percent (Frequency) Self-Reported Enrollment	Percent (Frequency) Verified Enrollment, 2013-14 to 2016-17
No	51% (279)	25% (133)
Yes	49% (265)	37% (203)

The following findings are based on students' self-reported enrollment values, regardless of any conflicts suggested by our enrollment analysis.

Findings from Survey of Recent Graduates

Similar to the reports of current seniors, a majority (71 percent) of recent high school graduates failed to correctly identify the true program requirements for College Bound eligibility. However, of the sample of unenrolled recent graduates, over half (57 percent) believe they will not or do not qualify for the College Bound scholarship. Figure 7 displays the reasons respondents believe they will *not* be eligible for the College Bound scholarship:

*Figure 7: Reasons 57 Percent of Respondents Believe They Will **Not** Be Eligible for CBS*
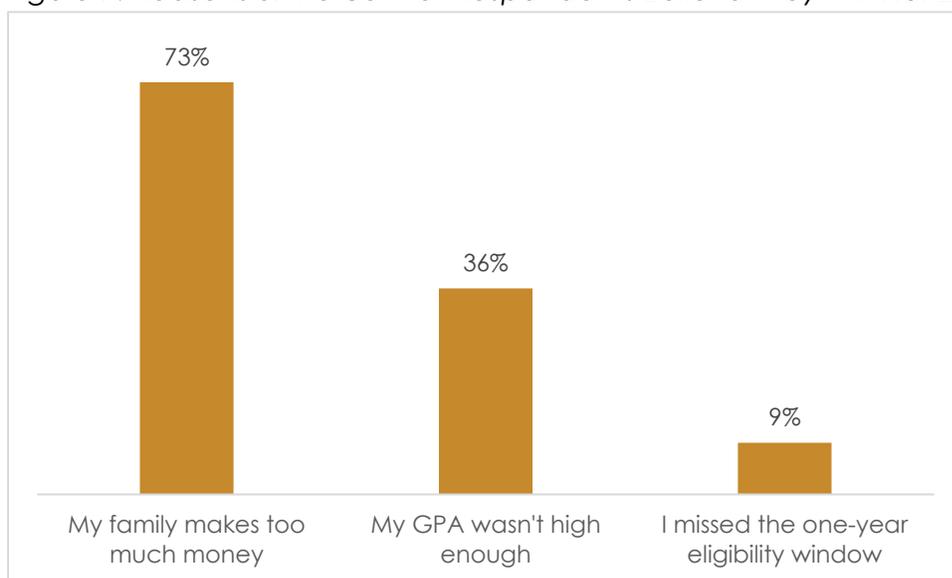
N=22; note, respondents could select multiple responses.

Again, the majority of respondents (85 percent) report planning to continue their education, even though their eligibility window either has closed or was closing soon at the time of data collection. However, 43 percent of the respondents who plan to continue their education erroneously believe they still qualify for CBS. Further,

- 22 percent had not visited a college website.

- 26 percent had not visited a college campus.

- 56 percent had not applied to a higher education program at any time.

A small number of respondents (43) indicated they were not planning to further their education. The reasons offered were myriad, as Figure 8 displays.

Figure 8: Reasons for discontinuing education
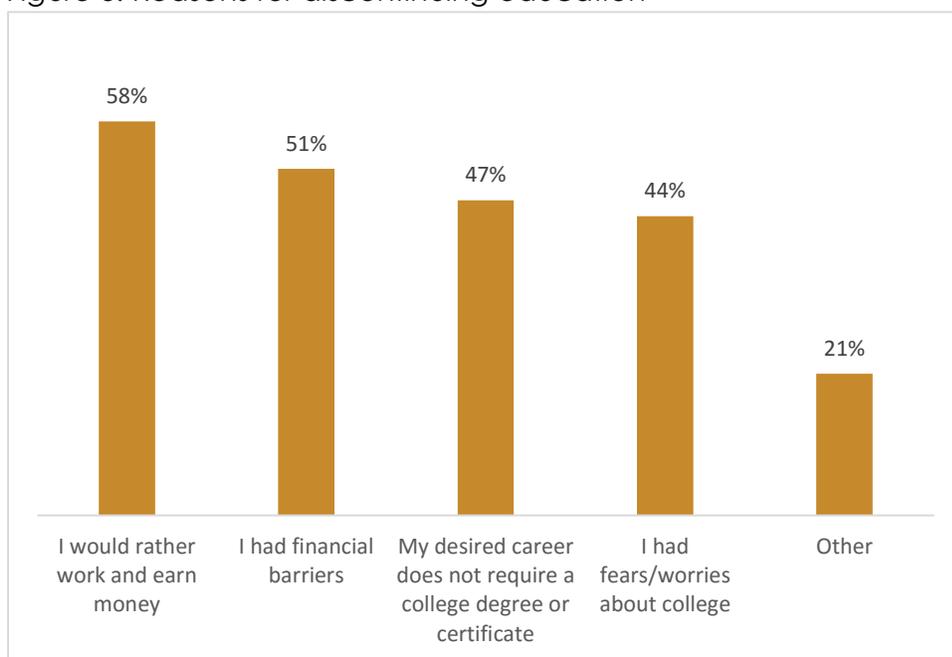
N=43

Encouragement for Postsecondary

Almost all respondents (95 percent) report that they received encouragement to continue their educations. However, as Figure 9 shows, only slightly more than half report receiving encouragement from school personnel, fewer than half report encouragement from their peers, and an overwhelming number of respondents reported family as their source of encouragement (86 percent).

Figure 9: Sources of Students' Encouragement to Enroll in Postsecondary
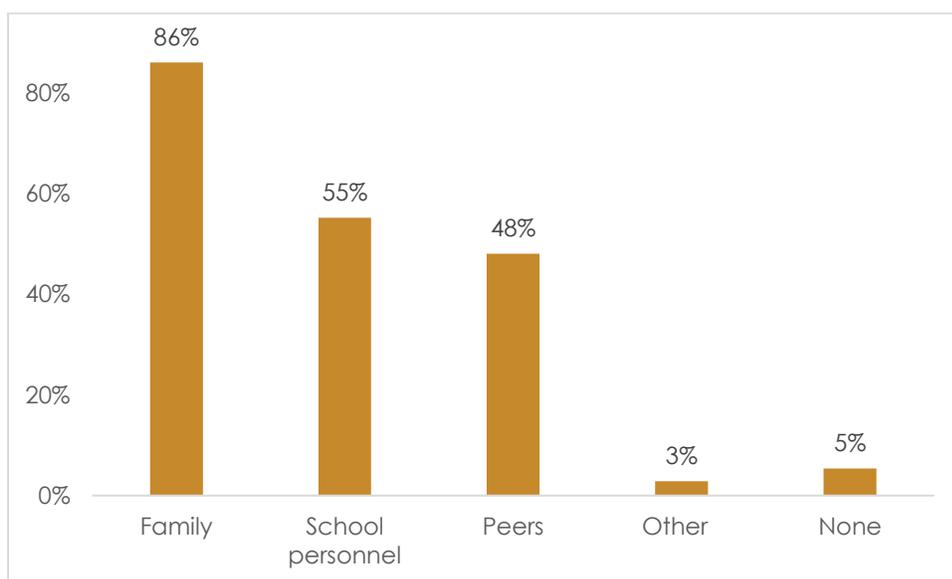
Encouragement corresponded with many college-going behaviors, but not all. For instance, a student who received family encouragement was three times as likely to visit a campus as not. However, the correlation seems to decline as the "cost" of the behavior increases. For example, visiting a website takes less time and resources than visiting a campus. These both take less time and resources than completing and submitting a postsecondary application. Tables 8–12 show the large drop-off in students engaging in these behaviors right at different points of resource-intensity (Campus Visit to Admission Test).

Table 8: Family Encouragement and Plans to Continue Education

	Did **not** receive encouragement from family	Did receive encouragement from family
Do not plan to continue education	5% (n=13)	11% (n=30)
Do plan to continue education	9% (n=26)	75% (n=210)

Table 9: Family Encouragement and Website Visits

	Did **not** receive encouragement from family	Did receive encouragement from family
Did **not** visit a website	5% (n=15)	19% (n=54)
Did visit a website	9% (n=24)	67% (n=186)

Table 10: Family Encouragement and Campus Visits

	Did **not** receive encouragement from family	Did receive encouragement from family
Did **not** visit a campus	6% (n=18)	22% (n=62)
Did visit a campus	8% (n=21)	64% (n=178)

Table 11: Family Encouragement and Admissions Tests

	Did **not** receive encouragement from family	Did receive encouragement from family
Did **not** take admissions test	9% (n=26)	42% (n=117)
Did take admissions test	5% (n=13)	44% (n=123)

Table 12: Family Encouragement and Postsecondary Application Submission

	Did **not** receive encouragement from family	Did receive encouragement from family
Did **not** submit an application	10% (n=28)	49% (n=136)
Did submit an application	4% (n=11)	37% (n=104)

College Preparedness Programs and College Going Behaviors

Less than half of unenrolled recent graduates (48 percent) participated in a college preparedness program.[15] Of those who participated in a college preparedness program, 59 percent participated in only one program. The top three programs in which respondents participated are:

1. College fair (18 percent).
2. High school workshop (16 percent).
3. Dual credit (12 percent).

Participation in a college preparation program seems to follow the same pattern as family encouragement. That is, as the behavior becomes more costly to the student in terms of time or resource, the proportion of students engaging in the behavior declines regardless of participation (and regardless of encouragement). However, the percentage of college preparation participants who achieved at least one acceptance to a postsecondary program was much higher than among those who did not participate. As noted earlier, whether this correlation is due to the success of the preparation program or is instead a function of student motivation is unknown. Tables 13–17 again show the large drop-off in college behavior at the admissions test.

Table 13: College Preparedness Participation and Website Visits

	Did **not** participate in college preparedness program	Did participate in college preparedness program
Did **not** visit a website	15% (n=42)	10% (n=27)
Did visit a website	37% (n=102)	39% (n=108)

Table 14: College Preparedness Participation and Campus Visits

	Did **not** participate in college preparedness Program	Did participate in college preparedness program
Did **not** visit a campus	18% (n=50)	11% (n=30)
Did visit a campus	34% (n=94)	38% (n=105)

---

[15] This sample differs from the sample of current seniors, as we intentionally did not survey the 60 percent of recent graduates who *did* enroll in postsecondary within one year of graduating high school. Roughly 70 percent of current seniors surveyed had participated in at least one college preparedness program.

Table 15: College Preparedness and Taking an Admissions Test

	Did **not** participate in college preparedness Program	Did participate in college preparedness program
Did **not** take an admissions test	30% (n=85)	21% (n=58)
Did take an admissions test	21% (n=59)	28% (n=77)

Table 16: College Preparedness Participation and Submitting a Postsecondary Application

	Did **not** participate in college preparedness program	Did participate in college preparedness program
Did **not** submit an application	33% (n=93)	25% (n=71)
Did submit an application	18% (n=51)	23% (n=64)

Table 17: College Preparedness Participation and Postsecondary Acceptance

	Did **not** participate in college preparedness program	Did participate in college preparedness program
Did **not** receive acceptance	15% (n=17)	12% (n=14)
Did receive acceptance	30% (n=34)	43% (n=50)

Student Recommendations for Improvement in College-Going Behavior

Roughly a quarter (23 percent) of respondents provided suggestions for what the state or schools could do to encourage students to continue their education. These follow roughly the same pattern as the suggestions offered by focus group participants and current seniors, as Figure 10 shows. Again, while our sample is not statistically representative, it is likely that students across Washington would enjoy these types of support.

Figure 10: Recent Graduates' Recommendations for Improving Postsecondary Participation

Recommendation	Percent
Provide application support (college apps, FAFSA, scholarship apps)	29%
Give us more general support/info (not specified)	25%
Provide monetary or financial info/support or make college affordable	22%
Explain benefits and expectations for college	20%
Provide in-class support or 1-on-1 support	17%
Provide career guidance (by providing support and information)	11%
Give equal emphasis to all types of postsecondary, not just one kind (sector, location, programs)	6%

As with both the focus groups and survey of current seniors, desire for assistance with applications appeared as the most pressing need among College Bound students wishing to enroll in postsecondary. While respondents did not specify the type of support requested in one-on-one settings, there was clearly an expressed need for more individualized guidance and assistance navigating the transition from high school to postsecondary.

Second, the desire for the *justification* for college—benefits and expectations—also appeared as a strong recommendation. Roughly a fifth desired more information on the benefits and expectations of college. Another 11 percent desired more career guidance. In other words, students want schools and the State to better explain why enrolling in postsecondary is both in their interests and within their capabilities.

Recommendations

This study is exploratory in nature and points towards possible reasons CBS-eligible students fail to take the step of enrolling in postsecondary. Further research should expand the population included in the study, and begin to assess the impact of school programming on parental involvement and student outcomes. Importantly, future research should examine what high school and postsecondary campus supports are proving helpful towards successful completion once students are enrolled in postsecondary education. Nonetheless, the findings of this study point to concrete changes that would likely improve postsecondary enrollment rates of not just CBS-eligible students, but all students.

As both surveys' results show, eligible students engage in college-going behaviors where the investment is less intensive for the student. As the students' investment increases, there is a drop-off in college-going behaviors, with the largest exit occurring at the admissions test and application point. Students' recommendations follow their behaviors. Students overwhelmingly want justification for their own investment earlier in the K-12 pipeline. Further, they desire more intensive support with applications and bureaucratic enrollment requirements.

Below are our recommendations to improve postsecondary enrollment, as well as any recent efforts underway which work towards these recommendations.

- Focus on coordination between middle and high school counselors to ensure smooth transition of support for students.

To this end, WSAC has piloted a partnership with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Washington College Access Network (WCAN). Together, we have hosted nine regionally based college access workshops, one in each Educational Service District (ESD). Attendees included both middle and high school counselors, as well as community-based organizations. Feedback from the workshops was extremely positive, with 97 percent of survey respondents finding the workshop useful in developing an action plan to increase the number of secondary students who have a postsecondary plan.

- Give early and consistent justifications for college; show students the benefits to holding a degree. Provide early career counseling to broaden students' horizons to career pathways requiring postsecondary education.

WSAC, in partnership with the Washington College Access Network (WCAN) recently began engaging CBS-eligible students in a Repledge Campaign. This is a campaign to remind 9th grade students, who signed up in the 7th or 8th grades, of their College Bound Scholarship pledge and the eligibility requirements. However, this program currently operates with limited grant funds, limiting equitable distribution. It would benefit from a dedicated, ongoing funding stream.

- Intensify efforts toward postsecondary enrollment of CBS-eligible students in order to keep pace with growing sign-up success.

WSAC operates the 12th Year Campaign, which provides resources, training and support for college admission and financial aid application work in schools and throughout the community. However, students overwhelmingly desired a *credit-bearing course* that occurs during the school day, at the school campus. Schools that are able to transform the 12th Year Campaign into a class would likely see improvements in the number of postsecondary enrollments among their students. Finally, WSAC currently awards middle school counselors "Gold Star Awards" for achieving high sign-up rates. Creating a similar program for high school counselors whose students achieve high

postsecondary application rates might induce further innovation and support for CBS-eligible students on the high school campuses.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENT

Focus Group Introduction Script and Questions

Introduction Script

Thank you all for coming here today and helping us to improve our survey. This survey will be sent to other College Bound Scholarship-eligible students around the state to help us better understand our target population: YOU!

Plan: We will ask you to complete the surveys we are about to pass out. You will keep the surveys as we discuss them, then you will turn them in to us at the end. We will not have your name on the survey, so your survey answers will be anonymous.

After everyone has completed the survey, we will ask you questions about the survey, itself, such as, "Were there any questions that were confusing?" This is when we hope to learn how to improve our survey for other students from your comments.

So, let's get started; please fill out the survey coming around to you. If you have a question, please raise your hand and one of us will come to you to answer it.

Ground rules (read after students complete the survey):

1) Be honest: both in taking the survey and telling us how to make it better.
2) Participate; give us your suggestions. Tell us what you liked or didn't like about the survey. There are no wrong answers, and we are here because we want your opinions.
3) Be respectful to each other: please do not interrupt your classmates. Wait until the last person has finished speaking before you speak.

Questions for Enrollees

Note: Questions were written as a guide for discussion; not all questions were asked. Transcripts available upon request to authors.

1. Were there any questions here that were confusing or we should word differently?
2. We listed reasons for not continuing your education beyond high school:
   1. I believe the financial costs will be too great.
   2. I would rather work and earn money.
   3. My desired career does not require a college degree.
   4. I need to earn money to help support my family.
   5. I don't think I will get into the college I want.
   7. I am not sure what field/major/area of study to pursue.
   8. My family does not want me to go to college.
   9. I don't think I'll fit in at college.

10. I want a break from school.
11. I plan to travel or go on a mission trip.
    a. 12. Other (please specify) _____

Were there any reasons not on this list that you think we should add?

3. Why do you think some students with this scholarship aren't going to school?
4. Is there anything that the school or district staff could do to encourage you to continue your education?
5. Are you familiar with the College Bound Scholarship?
    a. Can you tell me a little bit about it?
6. Who has provided encouragement for you to continue your education after high school?
    a. Which of these individuals was most important to your decision to continue your education?
7. Did you participate in any college readiness programs, such as Avid or Gear Up or a dual credit program?
    a. What was most helpful from these programs in supporting your post-high school schooling?
8. Who has taken the SAT or ACT?
    a. Where did you learn about taking the SAT/ACT?
    b. Was the cost of the test too high for anyone you know?
9. Who has filled out their FAFSA or WAFSA?
    a. Did you need help?
        i. Who helped you and your family?
    b. Where did you learn you needed to file the FAFSA/WAFSA?
    c. Do you know anyone who couldn't complete the FAFSA/WAFSA?
        i. Why were they unable to do so?
10. How many college websites have you visited? By "college," we mean anything after high school, including colleges, universities, community colleges, and technical or vocational schools.
    a. How did you access these websites? Phone? School library computer? Home computer?
    b. Do you know anyone who had difficulty accessing school websites?
11. Did any of you consider working rather than going to school after graduating from high school?
    a. What changed your mind?
12. Without using names, do you know anyone who is going to continue their education *despite* their family's wishes? In other words, their family does not want them to attend college and they are going anyway?
    a. What do you think helped them to make that decision?
13. Were any of you concerned about any costs of attending school after high school graduation?

a. Which costs?
14. How many times have you spoken with a counselor or teacher about college or college applications? (Again, college means anything after high school, so this includes university or vocational/technical school applications as well.)
    a. What part of the application process was most difficult or confusing?
    b. What or who helped you navigate the application process?
    c. Again, using no names; do you know anyone who did not apply because of the cost of application fees?
15. If you could make one recommendation to make going to school after graduation easier, what would that be?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Centralia High School

Chiawana High School

Columbia High School

Hanford High School

Henderson Bay High School

Kelso High School

Lakeside High School

Lewis & Clark High School

Lewis and Clark High School (Vancouver FLEX Academy)

Mossyrock Jr./Sr. High School

North Kitsap High School

On Track Academy

Rainier Beach High School

Raymond Jr Sr High School

River Ridge High School

River View High School

Shadle Park High School

Shelton High School

Southridge High School

Steilacoom High School

Toppenish High School

Trout Lake School

University High School

W.F. West High School

Wahkiakum High School

Zillah High School

APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY FOR SURVEY OF CURRENT SENIORS

In order to deploy this survey at the school campus during school hours, we invited counselors to assist with the survey deployment and collection activities in return for an Amazon gift code. We invited schools invited through newsletters and direct contact.

Counselors that expressed interest were first invited to an online training. We required counselors to attend before we provided the survey attachment to deploy at their schools. We used a PowerPoint presentation to train counselors on the required methodology, such as ensuring anonymity of responses to the extent possible. We also trained on areas of flexibility, such as using a pre-existing event at the school to deploy the survey. After the web training, we provided counselors with the PowerPoint presentation, a crib sheet of instructions, a Word survey for their students, a Word survey for counselors to complete, and a methodology worksheet. The methodology worksheet proved extremely helpful to both identify any problems with counselors' methodology and best practices for future survey work.

In order to receive the financial incentive, we required counselors to return surveys for at least 75 percent of their College Bound seniors along with the completed Counselor survey and the completed methodology worksheet within a specified time frame. We used senior class size as an approximate indicator of the effort required of counselors to achieve the 75% response rate of College Bound seniors. Participating schools with senior class sizes of 200 or greater received a $500 Amazon gift code. Schools with fewer than 200 senior students received a $250 gift code.

Attachment 1: WSAC College Bound Survey Methods Crib Sheet

Find College Bound Seniors at your School

- Use https://fortress.wa.gov/wsac/portal/ to create your list of College Bound Seniors eligible to survey
- Try to give every CBS student an opportunity to complete the survey
- Do not give this survey to all seniors; they MUST be a College Bound senior
    - We are not collecting personally identifiable information; if you give the survey to all seniors, we will have no way to identify which were completed by College Bound students and which were not
    - Not all students know they are College Bound, so if you ask College Bound students to come by your office and pick up a survey, they might not know that means *them*

Limit Bias in Responses

- Do not give this survey immediately *after* a College Bound information session

- o You may seize the opportunity to use an event already scheduled for College Bound students, but please collect survey responses *before* discussing the College Bound program at that session.
- o Identify your College Bound Students, and ask them to complete a survey that seeks to improve educational outcomes for students in the state of Washington.

Returning Surveys

- When surveys are complete, please email lexis@wsac.wa.gov & ellenm@wsac.wa.gov
  - o Subject heading: "Returning CBS Surveys from _____" [insert your **school**'s name]
  - o We will email you a Fedex label for returning your surveys to WSAC
- Include your CBS survey worksheet and counselor surveys
  - o Both documents must be included in your Fedex envelope to receive the Amazon gift code (as well as a 75% response rate).

Gift Codes

- Once the above items have been verified, you will receive an email from lexis@wsac.wa.gov with your Amazon gift code
  - o $250 for schools with 200 or fewer high school seniors (headcount of all seniors, including College Bound and non-College Bound students)
  - o $500 for schools with 200+ high school seniors

Results

- Results will be shared via a written report, published on wsac.wa.gov in the summer of 2017.

Questions

- Please feel welcomed and encouraged to email Lexi Shankster, Director of Research at WSAC, with any questions you may have regarding your survey plan, the survey itself, or life in general; She likes to chat. lexis@wsac.wa.gov
  - o She is strangely voicemail avoidant, so email is the best communication route; you are welcome to email to schedule a phone call so that she makes sure to be by the phone!

Attachment 2: Counselor Survey

Thank you for taking roughly 10 minutes to answer this survey. We are collecting this information in order to learn more about how and when students learn information regarding postsecondary education. Your answers are confidential, and will only be

reported in aggregate with other responses. If you have any questions, please contact Lexi Shankster at lexiS@wsac.wa.gov or by calling 360-753-7833.

1) Please write in your school name:_____

2) Please indicate which college activities your school provides to students, as well as the student's year in which they are offered. You may indicate multiple years if the activity is offered to students in multiple years:

	Not offered	Offered **by or in** Freshman Year	Offered Sophomore year	Offered Junior Year	Offered Senior Year
Information session on the FAFSA/WASFA					
Assistance completing the FAFSA/WASFA					
Information session on the College Bound Scholarship					
Assistance with completing college applications					
College Brochures					
Career Fair					
College Fair					
Campus visits					
Speakers from College Campuses					
Dual Credit program					
High School and Beyond Plan Review					

3) In your experience, what are the reasons College Bound eligible students do not pursue further education beyond high school? Please select up to 3 choices.
   o They can't afford to go (please specify; select all that apply)
      o Cannot afford college admissions exam

- o Cannot afford application fees
- o Cannot afford portion of fees/tuition not covered by CBS
- O Decide to work
- O No encouragement from family
- O Immature
- O Limited experience with college/postsecondary institutional culture
- O Low college admissions test scores
- O Poor grades
- O Applications not filed in time
- O No encouragement from friends
- O Must financially support family instead
- O Not accepted at college
- O Transportation problems
- O Lack of self-advocacy skills

4) Please select whether you agree with the following statements:

	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
The College Bound Scholarship guidelines are easy for students to understand			
The benefits of the CBS program are easy for students to understand			
CBS makes postsecondary education affordable to low-income students			

5) Please share any comments with us regarding how we could improve the College Bound Scholarship program to improve the proportion of low-income students who attend postsecondary institutions

Attachment 3: WSAC College Bound Senior Survey Worksheet (Methodology Worksheet)

Please complete this sheet describing the CBS survey at your school. This sheet must be returned with your students' surveys in order to receive the Amazon thank you code.

Name (first, last)

_____

School
Name_____

ESD _____   Email

_____

Did you access the Portal to identify your College Bound Seniors? (circle one) YES NO

How did students receive the invitation to take the survey? (Please provide attachments of any emails or letters used to invite students to take the survey)

Were students given the survey at the school and collected the same day? (circle one) YES NO MOST

Date(s) of survey collection:

On what days did you collect survey responses from students? (Please just write dates, such as 02/15 or 02/15/17).

If you collected surveys over multiple days, you may simply write the date of the first received survey and last received survey.

Brief description of where/when students took survey:

Example: We had scheduled a CBS workshop on Feb 15, and gave all students who attended the survey and collected responses before we began the workshop.

I noted which CBS students on my list were not in attendance, and handed them surveys on Feb 16; We set up a box for students to drop their surveys in once complete outside of the Principal's office. Box removed on Feb 25.

APPENDIX D: SURVEY INSTRUMENT FOR CURRENT SENIORS

Thank you for sharing your experiences with us. We are the Washington Student Achievement Council, an agency created by the state of Washington to improve educational outcomes in the state. You have been asked to complete this survey because you signed a pledge for the College Bound Scholarship in middle school. We are asking for your participation to make it easier for students like you to attend college/university/vocational school. Your individual answers are confidential and will not be shared with teachers, parents, or anyone else outside of the Washington Student Achievement Council.

This survey should take about 10 minutes or less.

1) Do you believe you will qualify for a College Bound Scholarship? (Please select **one** answer)

- ○ Yes, I believe I will qualify
- ○ No, I do not believe I will qualify
- ○ I don't know if I will qualify
- ○ I don't know what the College Bound Scholarship is

1) Please skip this question if you believe you will qualify or are unsure what the College Bound Scholarship is.

    If you believe you will not qualify, or don't know if you will qualify for the scholarship, please tell us why you think may not qualify. Please select **all that apply**.

    - ○ My GPA will not be high enough
    - ○ My family makes too much money
    - ○ Other (please tell us why)

      _____

2) After graduating high school, how long does a College Bound Scholarship recipient have to enroll in college and claim their scholarship? Please select **one** answer.

    - ○ Students must enroll in the fall after they graduate high school

    o Students must enroll within a year of graduating high school

    o Students may enroll in college or university any time after graduating high school

    o I don't know

3) Are you planning to continue your education after high school? Please select **<u>one</u>** answer.

    o Yes, in the coming fall

    o Yes, next year

    o Yes, but unsure when

    o No

4) Have you submitted a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid)? Please select **<u>one</u>** answer.

    o I don't know what either of those are

    o I started the FAFSA or WASFA, but I did not complete it

    o I don't know if I submitted the FAFSA or WASFA

    o Yes, I submitted either the FAFSA or WASFA.

5) Which of the following adults have encouraged you to continue your education after high school? Please select **<u>all that apply</u>**.

    o Parent

    o Other family member

    o Guidance counselor

    o Teacher(s)

    o Principal

    o Adult friends

    o Other (please specify) _____

    o None of the above (0)

6) Have you participated in any of the following college preparedness programs? Please select **<u>all that apply</u>**.

    o No, I have not participated in a college preparedness program

    o High school workshop

- ○ College fair
- ○ AVID
- ○ GEAR UP
- ○ Navigation 101
- ○ Upward Bound
- ○ Achieving a College Education (ACE)
- ○ TRIO
- ○ College Access Now
- ○ HERO
- ○ Achievers
- ○ Dual credit program
- ○ Running Start
- ○ Other program (please specify)

  _____

7) Have you taken a college admissions test (SAT, ACT, etc)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unsure

8) Roughly how many college/university/vocational school *websites* have you visited?

   _____ (Please write in a number)

9) How many college/university/vocational school *campuses* have you visited?

   _____ (Please write in a number)

10) How many college/university/vocational school *applications* have you submitted?

   _____ (Please write in a number)

11) Please skip this question if you have not submitted any college applications.

   If you have submitted an application, to how many colleges/universities/vocational schools have you been accepted?

○ _____ (please write in the number of schools to which you have been accepted)

12) Please skip this question if you are planning to continue your education.

If you are NOT planning to continue your education after high school, please tell us your reasons for not continuing your education. Please select **all that apply**.

○ I believe the financial costs will be too great.
○ I would rather work and earn money.
○ My desired career does not require a college or postsecondary degree.
○ I need to earn money to help support my family.
○ I don't think I will get into the college/institution I want.
○ I am not sure what field/major/area of study to pursue.
○ My family does not want me to go to college or other postsecondary institution.
○ I don't think I'll fit in at college.
○ I want a break from school.
○ I plan to travel.
○ I plan to go on a church mission trip.
○ Other (please specify) _____

13) Please skip this question if you are continuing your education or are not concerned about costs.

If you believe the costs will be too great, which costs are you concerned about? Please select **all** costs you believe would prevent you from enrolling.

○ Application Fees
○ Commuting Costs
○ Food Costs
○ Tuition
○ Fees
○ Books
○ Clothes
○ Cost of computer and other supplies

14) In your own words, is there anything the state of Washington or your school could have done to encourage you or your classmates to continue your education after graduating high school?

15) May we contact you in the future?
    ○ Yes
    ○ No

16) **If you agree to let us contact you in the future**, please provide an email address or phone number where we could email/text you:

_____

> *Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses are so valuable to us, and we hope to improve the College Bound Scholarship for Washington students as a result.*

APPENDIX E: INVITATION TO RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

February 8, 2017

Siri Alexa
123 ABC St
Capitol City, WA 12345

Dear Siri Alexa,

You have been selected for a survey of recent Washington graduates' decisions regarding education after high school. The survey is being conducted by the Washington Student Achievement Council, an agency created by the state of Washington to improve educational outcomes in the state.

About the survey: The survey takes roughly ten minutes to complete. Your answers are anonymous, and your identity will never be shared with anyone outside of the Washington Student Achievement Council.

Thank you gift: Once you complete the survey, you will be given a gift code to Amazon.com for **$10**. To be eligible for the gift code, you must complete the survey within **2 weeks** of the date of this letter.

To take the survey, simply go to the following address in your browser:

http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/2791912/College-Bound-Scholars-Recent-Graduates

Your login ID is: 54321

Your password is: 12345

You can also use the following QR code to access the survey:

Thank you so much for taking a few minutes to help us improve access to higher education in the state of Washington. Your responses are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please email Lexi Shankster, Director of Research at the Washington Student Achievement Council at: LexiS@wsac.wa.gov.

Thank you again for your time,

Alexandra Shankster

Lexi Shankster
Director of Research