

## Guaranteed Washington College Grant (WA Grant):

### SNAP Households Communication Strategy

The Legislature passed [HB 2214](#) in the 2024 session. The law requires the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to communicate to students in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades – whose families are on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits – the promise of a full WA Grant beginning AY 2025-26. WSAC worked with ideas42, a national nonprofit that uses behavioral science-based approaches to strategize and solve problems, to develop a communication strategy to engage WA Grant recipients in SNAP households.

The students and families interviewed and surveyed for this project were from school districts with a majority of students on free and reduced-price lunches (FRPL).

The recommendation to ensure a successful communications rollout is to use a **Reminder and Outreach System** with three critical components:

1. Create a coordinated communications campaign.
2. Clearly align the information about financial aid and postsecondary steps.
3. Personalize information to the target audience (students, parents, and high school staff) via platforms they *already* use.

To aid with the implementation of the Reminder and Outreach System, a [Communications Planning Guide](#) has been created.

### 8th Grade: Early Awareness

- Introduce WA Grant (aligning with CBS) in simple terms.
- Introduce college as an accessible option for all students, including those receiving SNAP benefits.
- Introduce the WA Guaranteed Admissions Program (WAGAP) in simple terms.
- Emphasize the importance of high school course selection for college eligibility.

### 9th & 10th Grade: Building Momentum

- Reinforce WA Grant message.
- Communicate guaranteed WA Grant message to students and parents in SNAP households.
- Reinforce/introduce WAGAP requirements; share grade-specific course checklists.
- Provide motivational stories of local students who used WA Grant.
- Offer insights into career exploration and pathways.

### 11th Grade: Preparing for Action

- Highlight the total cost of college, showing examples of what WA Grant recipients pay.

- Introduce students and parents to college resources (financial aid office, career exploration programs, etc.).
- Promote career fairs and college campus visits.
- Start detailing the FAFSA/WASFA process and debunk myths about eligibility and data use.

### 12th Grade: Action and Completion

- Personalized messaging about WA Grant and WAGAP based on eligibility criteria.
- Simplified FAFSA/WASFA application steps, including documents required.
- Emphasize deadlines for FAFSA/WASFA, college applications, and scholarships.
- Celebrate milestones.
- Address college readiness concerns.

### Summer after High School: Bridging the Gap

- Reminders about college orientation, housing, and class registration deadlines.
- Encourage use of campus resources (e.g., food pantries, financial aid offices).
- Highlight success stories to reinforce confidence in their decision.

The guide includes a detailed plan for each phase with timing of the message (fall or spring semesters), suggestion of a trusted messenger (school counselor, school district, community-based organization, WSAC etc.), the medium (text message, email, flyer/postcard, LMS portals, videos etc.) to be used and sample messages that include a call-to-action component.

### Example Messaging

**Text Message to Parents:**

“College could be tuition-free for your family! Learn about the WA Grant and how it helps families like yours—visit [insert link] or talk to your child’s counselor.”

**Parent Workshop Announcement:**

“Join us for a special session on how to make college affordable for every family. We’ll cover programs like the WA Grant, which offers tuition assistance—even full coverage—for families receiving public benefits (like SNAP, Free and Reduced Lunch, etc.). Don’t miss this opportunity to learn how college is within reach for your child.”

**Social Media Post:**

“College is for everyone, including families with limited incomes! Programs like the WA Grant make tuition affordable—even free for eligible families receiving certain benefits like SNAP or free/reduced lunch. Start planning today: [insert link].”

### How is this idea informed by behavioral science?

Ideas42 and WSAC partnered with three institutions, Central Washington University, Western Washington University, and Washington State University Tri-Cities, and each of their partnering school districts (five school districts in all) to get a comprehensive view of the barriers to enrollment. The school districts and their respective FRPL population percentages are Eisenhower High School, Yakima, with 61.3 percent, Davis High School, Yakima, with 100 percent, Granger High School, Yakima, with 100 percent, Chiawana High School, Pasco, with 80 percent, Pasco High School, Pasco, with 92 percent, and Mount Vernon High School, Skagit, with 77 percent.

Through **100 interviews and more than 850 survey responses** from students, parents, and school and college staff, some key barriers were identified.

- Students and families think college is unaffordable.
- Students see college as a costly, time-intensive investment.
- Students and families are unclear about the application (financial aid and college application) process.
- The application process is riddled with hassles.
- Students don't feel ready for college.

While these barriers alone are not new or unique to these regions in the state, utilizing the *design thinking process*, re-designable elements were identified that, when addressed, will help reduce their effects.

*Key re-designable elements identified in the data were:*

- Students and families hear incomplete narratives about college costs.
- Students, parents, and staff receive confusing or inaccessible aid eligibility info with little direct outreach or targeted communication about WA Grant.
- Students struggle to track college and financial aid deadlines due to scattered or unclear information.
- Students face competing priorities, especially in their senior year, among schoolwork, jobs, financial aid, college applications, and graduation prep.
- Families, especially first-generation families, get limited to no guidance which makes it impossible for them to support their students.

As a result, the proposed Reminder and Outreach System would address these re-designable elements by helping correct incorrect mental models about financial aid and college held by staff, students, and families. It also eliminates the tunneling effect, which causes students to become so focused on other tasks, such as schoolwork or graduation, that they lose sight of important deadlines for financial aid and college. By providing timely reminders and behavioral science-informed communication (with clear coordinated messages and calls to action), steps and deadlines become salient for students and families while also helping to myth-bust common misconceptions.

## **Considerations for a Successful Implementation**

A coordinated effort across WSAC, institutions, school districts, high schools, and community-based organizations is essential to ensure students and families get accurate, timely, and relevant information through their middle and high school journey. This system can be adapted to support postsecondary enrollment into two-year colleges, apprenticeships, and trade schools as well as for adult learners.