



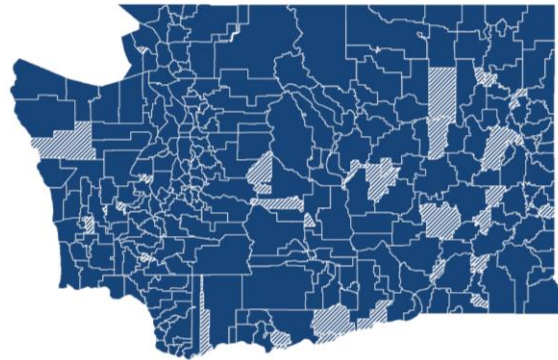
Findings From Our Annual Counselor Survey

WSAC's College Access Initiatives (CAI) Division

March 2025

CAI Supports Washington's Trusted Messengers

Each year, CAI provides critical college and financial aid outreach support to more than 350 school districts, Tribal schools, colleges and universities, and nonprofit organizations across the state. In the 2023-24 academic year, only 12% of districts (35 out of 295; see accompanying map) did not receive documented support or outreach from CAI. None of those 35 districts enrolled high school seniors.



Keeping up with the needs of counselors, educators, and college access professionals—whom we call trusted messengers—requires that we intentionally learn about how they work. In support of this goal, we recently asked the state's trusted messengers how we can help. Nearly 300 people—many from the Yakima and Tri-Cities regions—shared how we can continue engaging trusted messengers in urban, suburban, and rural areas. The majority identified as white (70%) or Hispanic/Latine (25%).

Counselors Consistently Rely on WSAC's Website, Trainings, and FAFSA Portal



60% rely on WSAC's financial aid trainings (in person/virtual)



67% rely on CAI's websites



69% rely on the FAFSA Portal

But We Need to Strengthen Messaging on State Financial Aid

Survey findings revealed gaps in counselors' understanding of state financial aid programs, emphasizing the need to communicate clearly and incorporate targeted knowledge checks into key resources.



Only 44% of respondents knew that students' WA Grant award amounts are based on public college tuition rates.



Only 55% of respondents correctly identified that students must file a FAFSA or WASFA to receive both WA Grant and College Bound.

Trusted Messengers Know What They Need to Support Students

Counselors emphasized the need for accessible and actionable resources to effectively support students and families. High on their priority list were checklists of required documents (85%) to streamline the financial aid process. They also sought guidance on avoiding common mistakes (82%) and interpreting award letters (74%) to ensure students fully understand their aid packages.

Beyond resources, counselors highlighted the importance of direct support strategies. The vast majority (86%) indicated that one-on-one counseling remains their primary method for assisting students and families. Several respondents pointed to the urgency of scheduling in-person events at times and in locations that are responsive to the needs of their communities. Furthermore, counselors underscored the importance of culturally responsive advising and the availability of multilingual materials, trusted messenger trainings, and student-focused workshops to better serve diverse student populations.

They Also Provided Insight Into Where They Lack Confidence

Among survey respondents who reflected on their own financial aid knowledge, more than one in five said they were either slightly confident or not at all confident in supporting students in two key areas.

I feel less confident...



CAI Staff Continuously Adapt Based on Trusted Messengers' Needs

By adapting what we do in response to trusted messengers' feedback, WSAC will continue to empower them with tools and strategies that directly benefit students and their families.



Hold Listening Sessions to Improve Resources and Communication

We are hosting four listening sessions with over 40 trusted messengers in March 2025. In these sessions, we will learn directly about how they use our most popular resources and what they need from us to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.



Add More Knowledge Checks in Trainings and Webinars

Beginning March 2025, we have incorporated new learning assessments into our webinars to reinforce learning and assess counselor understanding, especially when it comes to state aid requirements, loan options, and financial aid award letters.



Enhance WSAC Materials to Increase Counselors' Confidence

We are simplifying existing resources so that they give the exact information that counselors need. We are also developing new resources that will help counselors feel confident advising students on their financial aid offers, including loan options.

About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

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