



Washington State College Bound Scholarship Report 2025



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Washington Student Achievement Council
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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Preface	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction	8
CBS Auto-Enrollment Has Improved Student Access and Equity	9
The Percent of High School Students Who Graduate Within Four Years Differs by Gender and Race/Ethnicity.....	11
CBS Is Increasing Postsecondary Access for Low-Income and Underrepresented Students	13
Persistence Rates for CBS Recipients Vary by Institution Type and High School GPA	15
Most CBS Recipients Are Earning Postsecondary Credentials at Four-Year Institutions	18
The Extension of CBS Eligibility Has Led to Fewer Recipients Timing Out	19
WA Grant Expenditures in Support of CBS Recipients Have Grown Steadily.....	20
Discussion and Concluding Remarks	21
References.....	22

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Preface

This report is intended as an analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the College Bound Scholarship program as specified in RCW 28B.118.090. The data for this analysis have been provided by the Washington Student Achievement Council and the Washington State Education Research and Data Center (ERDC), with data provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the state's postsecondary institutions, both public and private.

The research presented here uses confidential data from the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) located within the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM). ERDC's data system is a statewide longitudinal data system that includes de-identified data about people's preschool, educational, and workforce experiences. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of OFM or other data contributors. Any errors are attributable to the authors.

Executive Summary

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program is a key state financial aid program that connects with low-income students in middle school, which is a critical stage in their education journey, to encourage and support them in continuing their education beyond high school. It combines financial aid with effective communication strategies to provide CBS Students with the tools they need to succeed. To support this effort, coordinated email and mail campaigns are employed to deliver key information to students, families and trusted messengers. In addition, WSAC developed and administers OtterBot, a free chatbot texting service designed for CBS students, providing them with timely information about financial aid and college planning with reminders. The CBS program also advances more equitable education opportunities for historically underrepresented student groups by addressing college financial access barriers.

To promote a college-going culture, the original program guidelines required that to receive a scholarship award, eligible students must (a) graduate with a 2.0 GPA or higher, (b) have no felony convictions before high school graduation, (c) enroll in a college within one year of high school, and (d) have a Median Family Income (MFI) of 65% or less. CBS Recipients were required to use their award eligibility within five years after high school graduation (for a maximum of 12 quarters, 8 semesters, or the equivalent). In subsequent years, to expand access to CBS benefits, automatic CBS enrollment was introduced in 2021 for students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch, the minimum GPA standard was lifted in 2023 for students enrolling at community and technical colleges, and eligibility was extended in 2024 to six years after high school graduation.

Essential College Bound Scholarship Terms

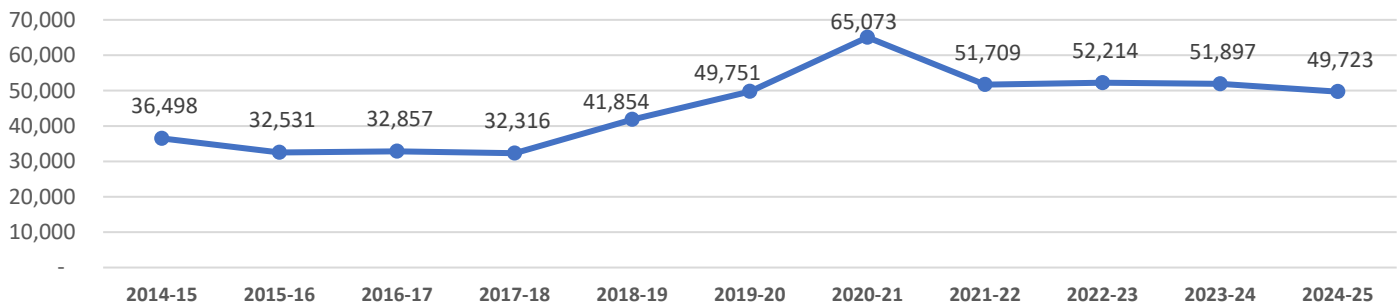
CBS Student: A high school student who has completed a College Bound Scholarship (CBS) application or has been automatically enrolled.

CBS Recipient: A College Bound student who has graduated high school, met all eligibility requirements, is attending an eligible institution in Washington, and received CBS funding for one or more terms during the year.

CBS Auto-Enrollment has Improved Program Access

With the introduction of automatic enrollment in 2021 (SB 5321), the process of enrolling has been greatly streamlined and eliminated the need for students and parents to navigate the complexities of the application process. As a result, the number of completed applications has grown significantly beginning in the 2019-20 academic year. Figure 1 shows the number of completed applications from the 2014-15 academic year to 2024-25. The number of completed applications peaked in the fall of the 2020-21 academic year when Governor Inslee issued a 30-day emergency proclamation, in

Figure 1: Completed CBS Applications by Academic Year



Source: WSAC CBS program administrative data.

response to school building closures during the pandemic, that suspended the student and parent/guardian signature requirement for eligible students to sign up for CBS and WSAC completed applications for thousands of eligible students without signatures. In subsequent years, with auto-enrollment, completed applications have remained relatively high.

CBS Students with a high school GPA of less than 2.0 are less likely to continue their education after high school.

One of the fundamental requirements of the CBS program, as it was originally designed, was that CBS Students must maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher in high school. This was to help promote a college-going culture within the CBS cohorts. This requirement was removed in 2023 for CBS Students who are planning to attend a two-year community or technical college, but the standard is still in effect for those planning to directly attend a four-year institution directly after high school. The data suggest that CBS Students who maintain this minimum 2.0 GPA through high school are more likely to pursue higher education after graduation. For example, Figure 2 shows the percentage of CBS Students in 2023 who enrolled in a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution after high school graduation by high school GPA. Over 46 percent of all CBS Students enrolled in postsecondary education. But those with a lower than 2.0 GPA enrolled at a significantly lower rate (18.9 percent).

Figure 2: Postsecondary Enrollment Rate of CBS Students in the High School Graduation Year of 2023 by GPA



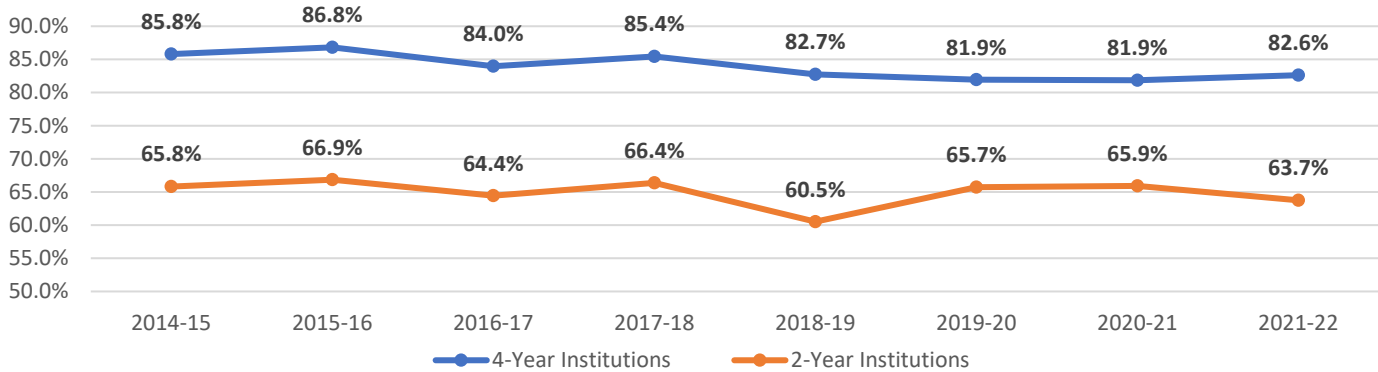
Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: CBS Students are students who completed a College Bound Scholarship application. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. Enrollment is calculated for students who graduated high school within 4 years of entering 9th grade. Postsecondary enrollment is defined as enrollment in a four-year or two-year institution after a student's high school graduation date.

Postsecondary persistence rates for CBS Recipients vary by institutional type and have been on a downward trend for nearly a decade, with the decline accelerating in the wake of the pandemic's onset.

An important key to success in pursuing education after high school is persistence. For this report, persistence is defined as continuing to enroll for a second year following the student's first year in a postsecondary institution in Washington. Persistence rates for CBS Recipients - defined as CBS Students who have graduated high school, enrolled in a WA postsecondary institution, and are receiving CBS funding - remain relatively high. However, they also reflect the overall decline in enrollment that accompanied the pandemic and its aftermath. The percentage of CBS Recipients who enrolled for a second year at four-year institutions declined from a high of 86.8 percent in the 2015-16 high school graduation cohort to a low of 81.9 percent in the 2019-20 and 2021-22 cohorts before rising to 82.6 percent in the 2021-22 cohort (see Figure 3). The persistence rate at two-year institutions was lower and showed more volatility during this time period, declining gradually from a high of 66.9 percent in the 2015-16 cohort, dipping sharply to 60.5 percent in the 2018-19 cohort and rising to 65.9 percent in the 2020-21 cohort before dipping once again to 63.7 percent in 2021-22.

Figure 3: Persistence Rates of CBS Recipients by High School Graduation Year



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: Persistence is defined as a student enrolling in any postsecondary institution for a second year immediately following their first year in postsecondary. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

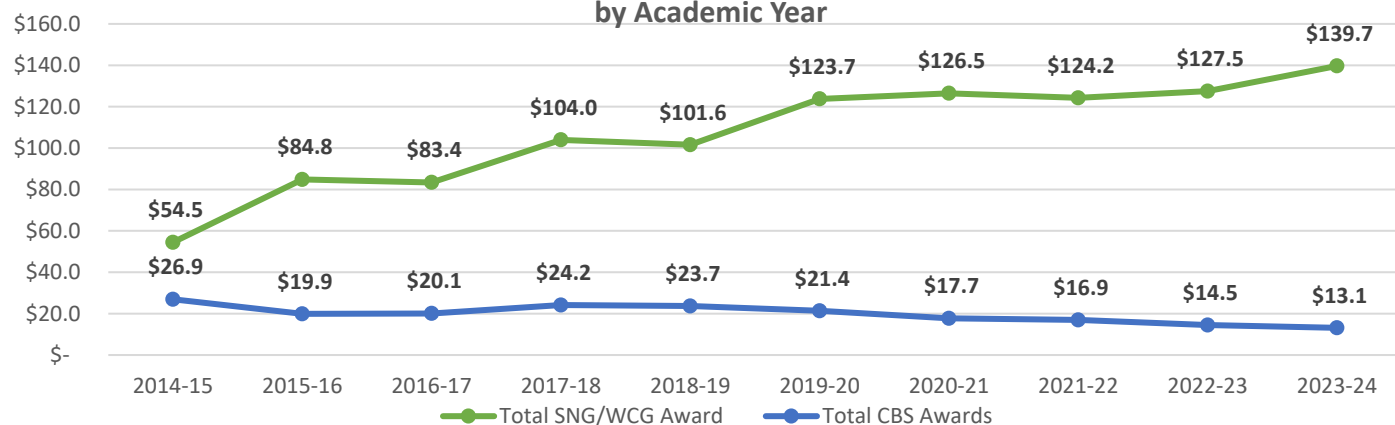
CBS Recipients Are Earning Postsecondary Credentials

Many CBS Students are taking advantage of the program, pursuing postsecondary education after high school graduation, and earning key credentials. In the 2016 high school graduation cohort, 47.3 percent (headcount: 3,035) earned a credential. There has been a slight decline in postsecondary completions for CBS Recipients among subsequent cohorts, reflecting the effects of the COVID pandemic. In the 2018 high school graduation cohort, 44.4 percent (headcount: 3,092) of CBS Students earned a postsecondary credential within 150 percent of normal program time (6 years for bachelor’s degree and 3 years for associate degree or certificate).

Paying for the Program: The Washington College Grant and CBS funding

Typically, award packages for CBS Recipients begin with need-based state aid via a full Washington College Grant (WA Grant), or with a full State Need Grant (SNG) as it was known prior to 2019. After taking the WA Grant and any other state financial aid programs the recipient might be eligible for into account, CBS funds are then used to make up any difference that might remain to meet the state’s aid commitment. Figure 4 shows the total SNG/WA Grant funds and CBS funds that were used for awards to CBS Recipients from 2014-15 to 2023-24. Expenditures from SNG and WA Grant funding sources have grown significantly during this period. For example, SNG and WA Grant award expenditures expanded from 54.5 million dollars in 2014-15 to 139.7 million dollars in 2023-24. On the other hand, expenditures from CBS funding has declined over this period. Expenditures from CBS funds decreased from 26.9 million in 2014-15 to 13.1 million in 2023-24. The significant decline in the use of CBS funds beginning in 2019 is due to the creation of the WA Grant, which is a guaranteed funding source and provides more of the state’s CBS commitment to students than the SNG.

**Figure 4: Total SNG/WA Grant and CBS Awards (in millions)
by Academic Year**



Source: WSAC WCG and CBS program administrative data.

Note: SNG refers to the State Need Grant, which was renamed as the Washington College Grant (WA GRANT) in 2019, with funding beginning in the 2020-21 academic year.

Overall, the CBS program continues to serve low-income students and those who historically have been furthest from opportunity and access to postsecondary education. However, even with this assistance, postsecondary enrollment rates for CBS Students have been declining in recent years. This is due in part to the lingering effects of the COVID pandemic and to the large influx of new CBS Students that entered the program with the introduction of auto-enrollment beginning in 2020-21, some of which may have been less academically prepared than those who actively enrolled in the CBS program in previous years. This decline is also reflective of the broader trend in postsecondary enrollment in Washington in recent years, which showed enrollments dropping significantly during the onset of the COVID pandemic and ensuing years through 2023, when enrollment declines began to stabilize in the four-year sector and began to rise again in the two-year sector (Washington Student Achievement Council, May 2025).

Introduction

Program Overview. The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program is a guaranteed state grant that was created in 2007 to inspire and encourage eligible low-income students to pursue postsecondary education and assist them in meeting the costs. The program is designed to cover the full cost of up to six years of tuition and allowable fees at public rates, primarily met by a full WA Grant award (known as the State Need Grant prior to 2019) plus a \$500 book allowance. Beginning in the seventh grade, students are notified of their eligibility and the requirements for award of the scholarship. To be eligible, a student must qualify for free and reduced-price lunches (FRPL) in the seventh or eighth grade (or be newly eligible in ninth grade). A student who is a dependent of the state or who has received extended foster care services in grades seven through twelve are also eligible.

Award packages for CBS Recipients are filled by first using WA Grant funds, after considering their eligibility for other state aid programs, such as the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) Opportunity Grant, American Indian Endowed Scholarship (AIES), or Passport to Careers (PTC). CBS funding is then used to make up the difference to meet the state’s aid commitment to CBS Students. In practice, award amounts vary by the cost of tuition at the institution the student is attending and by the student’s enrollment status (full-time or less).

Recent legislative changes have increased student access. To promote a college-going culture, the original program guidelines required that to receive a scholarship award, eligible students must (a) graduate with a 2.0 GPA or higher, (b) have no felony convictions before high school graduation, (c) enroll in a college within one year of high school, and (d) have a Median Family Income (MFI) of 65% or less. CBS Recipients were required to use their award eligibility within five years after high school graduation (for a maximum of 12 quarters, 8 semesters, or the equivalent). In recent years, however, several legislative changes to the CBS program have expanded student access and made it easier for CBS Recipients to complete postsecondary programs and earn credentials. These changes include the following:

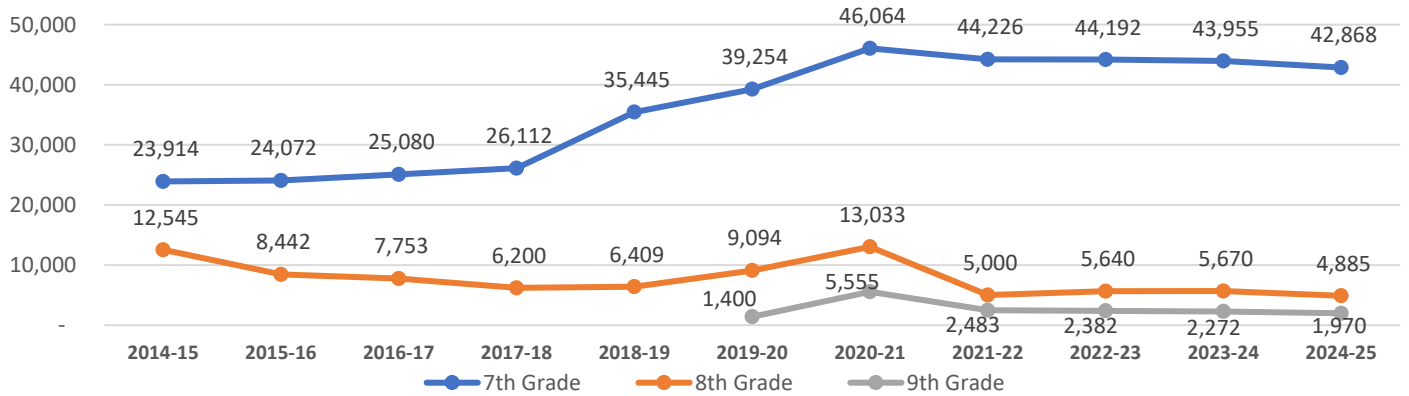
Year of Implementation	Legislation	Description of Policy Change
2019-20	<u>HB 1311</u>	Extended CBS eligibility to students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch in the ninth grade, even if they were previously ineligible in the seventh or eighth grade.
Fall 2021	<u>SB 5321</u>	Students are automatically enrolled in CBS if they attend a public school and are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch in 7 th or 8 th grade or were newly eligible in 9 th grade.
Fall 2023	<u>HB 1232</u>	The minimum 2.0 GPA requirement was eliminated for CBS Students who plan to attend a community college or technical school.
Fall 2024	<u>SB 5904</u>	The window of eligibility for CBS Recipients was extended from five years to six years or 150 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled (up to 18 quarters, 12 semesters).

CBS Auto-Enrollment Has Improved Student Access and Equity

The CBS program was designed to provide encouragement and critical grant funding to low-income students and expand awareness of how that funding can alleviate financial barriers that prevent many from even considering college. However, despite this clear advantage, prior to 2020 about 30 percent of the student population that qualified for free and reduced-price lunch did not complete a CBS application by the end of 8th grade. This was due in part to the challenges of navigating the application process and acquiring the necessary signatures (Washington Student Achievement Council, January 2023). In 2020, in response to the closing of schools during the COVID-19 crisis, Governor Inslee temporarily suspended the signature requirements, allowing the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to automatically complete applications for those that lacked signatures. Then in 2021, Senate Bill 5321 rendered the automatic enrollment of eligible CBS Students permanent. This bill greatly simplified the process, eliminating the need for students and parents or guardians to sign application forms to enroll in the program. As a result, there was a substantial increase in completed applications beginning in 2019-20 with the Governor’s Proclamation and reaching a peak in 2020-21 before leveling off.

Figure 5 shows the number of completed CBS applications by grade level from 2014-15 to 2024-25. A rise in applications can be seen beginning in 2020. Most of the applications were completed when the students were in 7th grade, with some in 8th grade, and a much smaller number in 9th grade. With the start of automatic enrollment, more efficiency is seen with 7th grade CBS enrollments. Prior to 2020, the number of applications completed in 8th grade were about a quarter of the number completed in 7th grade. After 2020, the number completed in 8th grade dropped to less than an eighth of those in 7th grade.

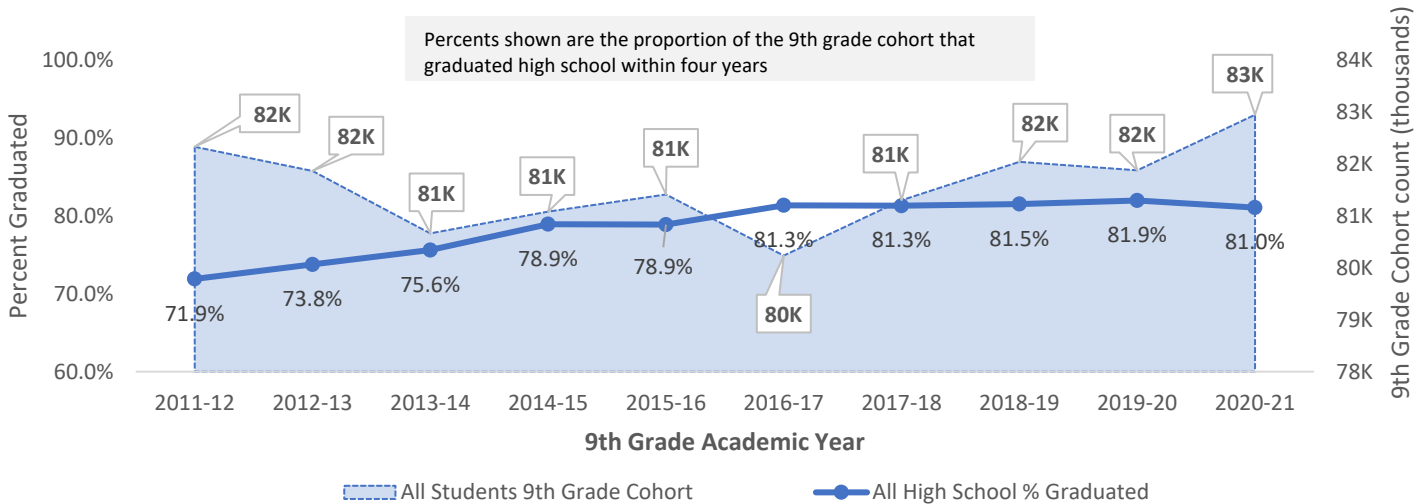
Figure 5: Completed CBS Applications by Grade Level and Academic Year



Source: WSAC CBS program administrative data.

Figures 6 and 7 display the 9th grade cohort headcount and percent of students who graduated within four years after entering 9th grade for all high school students compared to CBS Students from 2011-12 to 2020-21. During this period, the percent of students who graduated within four years after entering 9th grade among CBS students was slightly lower than the percent for all students, reflecting the challenges low-income students face. The percent who graduated within four years of entering 9th grade among all students reached a peak of 81.9 percent in the 2019-20 cohort while the percent for CBS students in this same cohort was just under 77.5 percent. In the 2020-21 cohort, the percent graduating within four years among all students declined slightly to 81 percent. The percent graduating within four years among CBS students in this same cohort year was 74.4 percent, a much sharper decline. This steep decline is due to the fact that 2020-21 was the first CBS auto-enrollment year. There was a large wave of new CBS students, which is reflected in the shaded area of Figure 7. A significant number of these students may have been less academically prepared and on track to graduate compared to those who actively signed up for the CBS program in previous years.

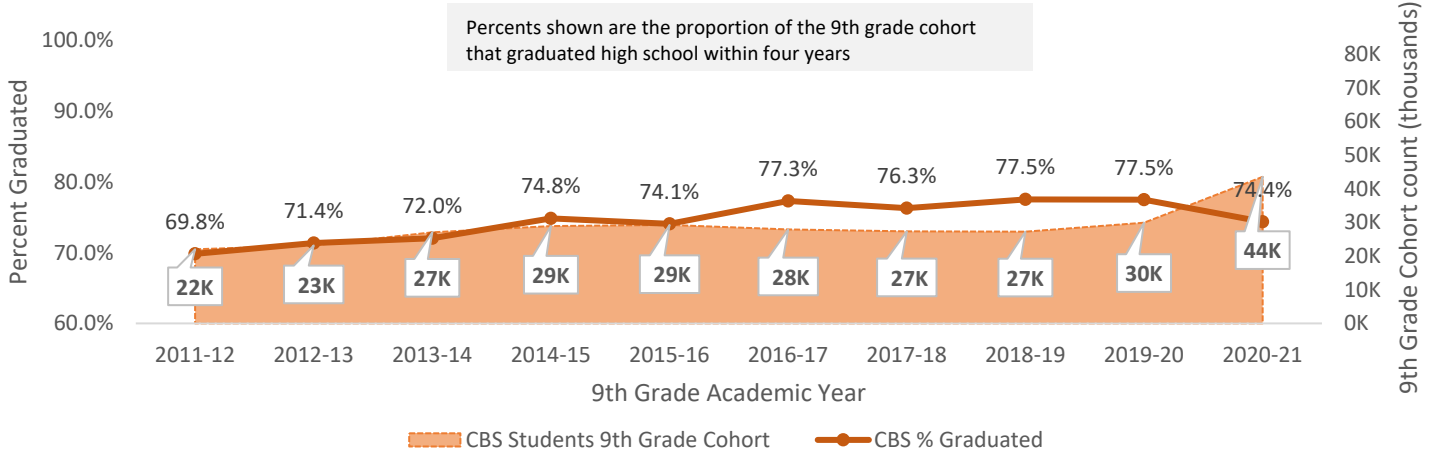
Figure 6: All Students - 9th Grade Cohort Headcount and Percent of Students who Graduated within Four Years



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: 9th Grade Cohorts for High School Graduation percent are calculated from a student's first 9th grade year. 9th Grade Cohorts do not include students who transfer into OSPI system after 9th grade, confirmed transfers out of OSPI system after 9th grade, or deceased students.

Figure 7: CBS Students - 9th Grade Cohort Headcount and Percent Who Graduated within Four Years



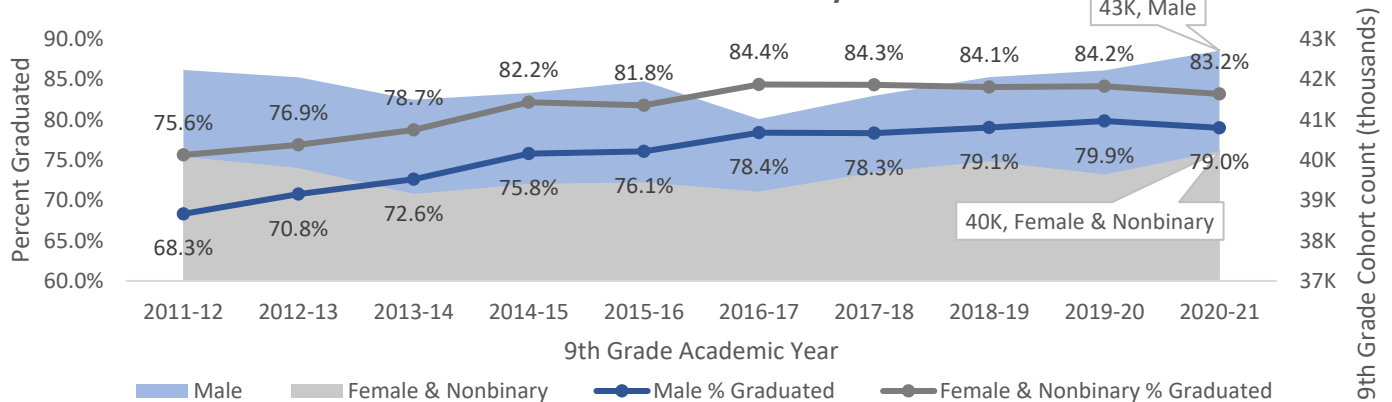
Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: 9th Grade Cohorts for High School Graduation percent are calculated from a student's first 9th grade year. 9th Grade Cohorts do not include students who transfer into OSPI system after 9th grade, confirmed transfers out of OSPI system after 9th grade, or deceased students.

The Percent of High School Students Who Graduate Within Four Years Differs by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

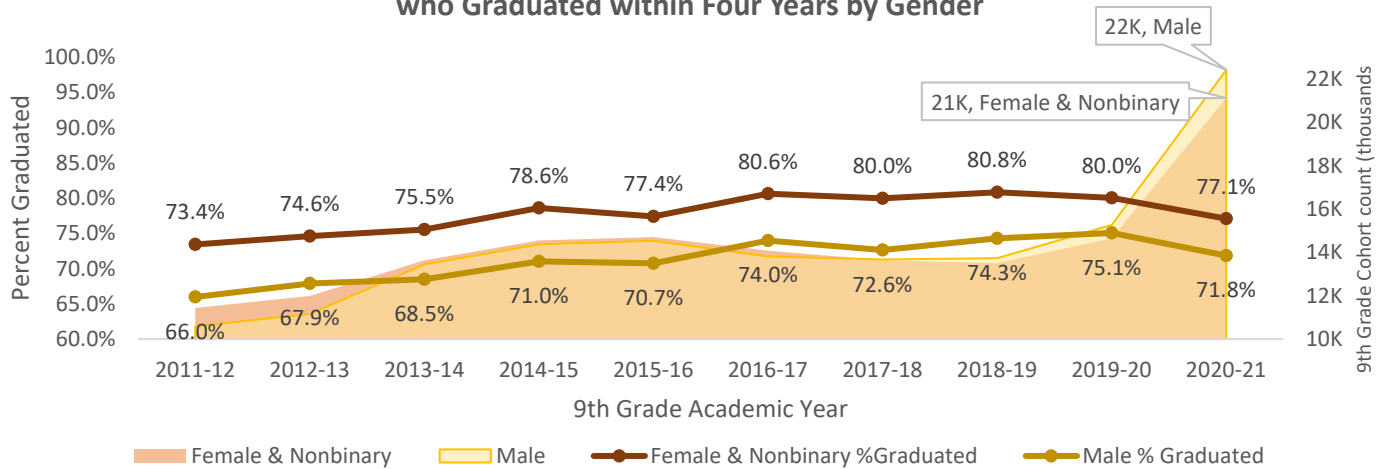
Figure 8 shows the 9th grade cohort headcount for all high school students and the percent who graduated within four years by gender from 2011-12 to 2020-21. Figure 9 shows the 9th grade cohort headcount for CBS Students and the percent who graduated within four years by gender for this same period. In a consistent trend, a higher percentage of female and nonbinary students have graduated high school within four years compared to male students over the past decade, but the gap has narrowed slightly. In the 2011-12 9th grade cohort, 73.4 percent of female/nonbinary CBS students graduated high school within four years compared to 66.0 percent of male CBS Students, a 7.4 percentage point difference. By the 2020-21 9th grade cohort, the gap narrowed to 5.3 percentage points, with 77.1 percent of female/nonbinary CBS high school students graduating within four years compared to 71.8 percent of male CBS Students.

Figure 8: 9th Grade Cohort Headcount of All Students and Percent of Students who Graduated within Four Years by Gender



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Figure 9: 9th Grade Cohort Headcount of CBS Students and Percent who Graduated within Four Years by Gender



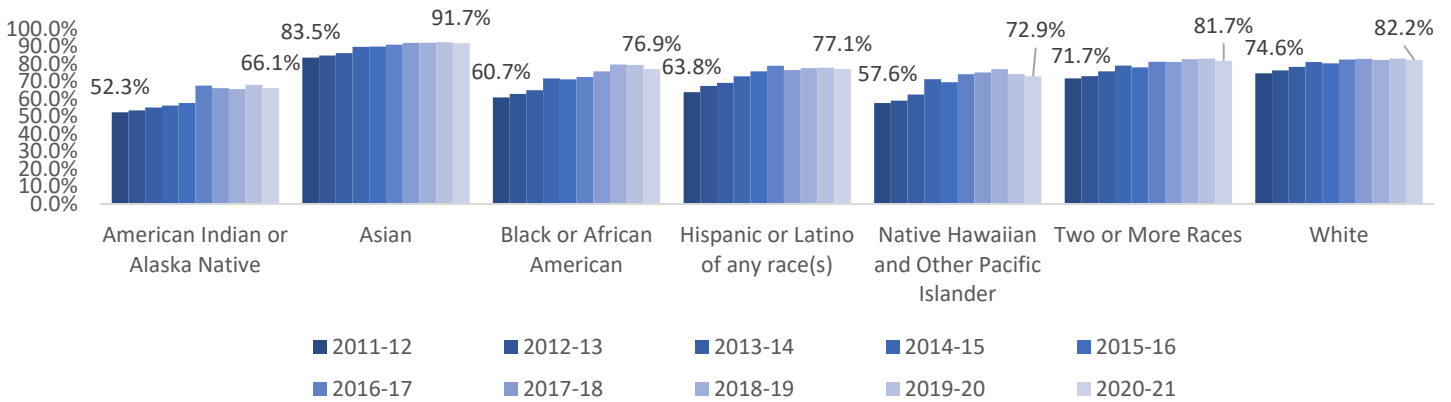
Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: 9th Grade Cohorts for High School Graduation percent are calculated from a student’s first 9th grade year. 9th Grade Cohorts do not include students who transfer into OSPI system after 9th grade, confirmed transfers out of OSPI system after 9th grade, or deceased students.

Again, we see a significant decline in the percent of CBS Students graduating within four years in the 2020-21 9th grade cohort as a result of the large wave of new CBS Students who entered the program that year due to the introduction of auto-enrollment. Some of these students may have been less academically prepared to graduate on time than students who actively signed up for CBS in previous years.

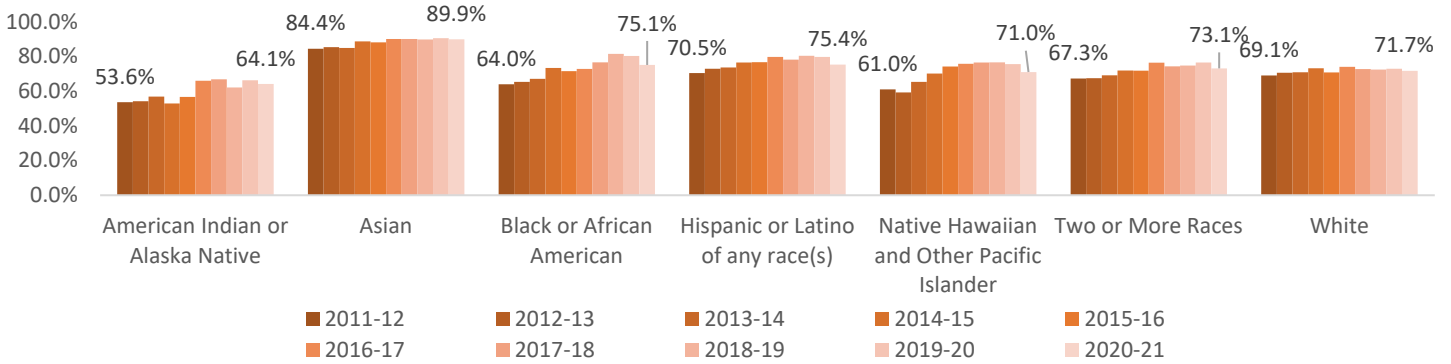
The following charts compare the percent of 9th grade cohorts who graduated within four years for all students (Figure 10) and CBS Students (Figure 11) broken out by race and ethnicity. Overall, the percentages are similar, with those for CBS students slightly lower than the percentages for all students. Students of races and ethnicities that have been historically underrepresented in postsecondary education tend to have lower percentages who graduate within four years. For example, in the 2020-21 9th grade CBS cohort, American Indian/Alaskan Native students graduated within four years at the lowest rate at 64.1 percent, followed by Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (71 percent), Black/African American students (75.1 percent), and Hispanic/Latino students (75.4 percent). White CBS Students also had a relatively low graduation rate (71.7 percent), while Asian CBS students had the highest graduation rate for that year at 89.9 percent.

Figure 10: All Students - Percent of 9th Grade Cohort who Graduated High School Within 4 Years by Race/ Ethnicity



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Figure 11: CBS Students - Percent of 9th Grade Cohort who Graduated High School Within 4 Years by Race/ Ethnicity



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: 9th Grade Cohorts for High School Graduation percent are calculated from a student’s first 9th grade year. 9th Grade Cohorts do not include students who transfer into OSPI system after 9th grade, confirmed transfers out of OSPI system after 9th grade, or deceased students.

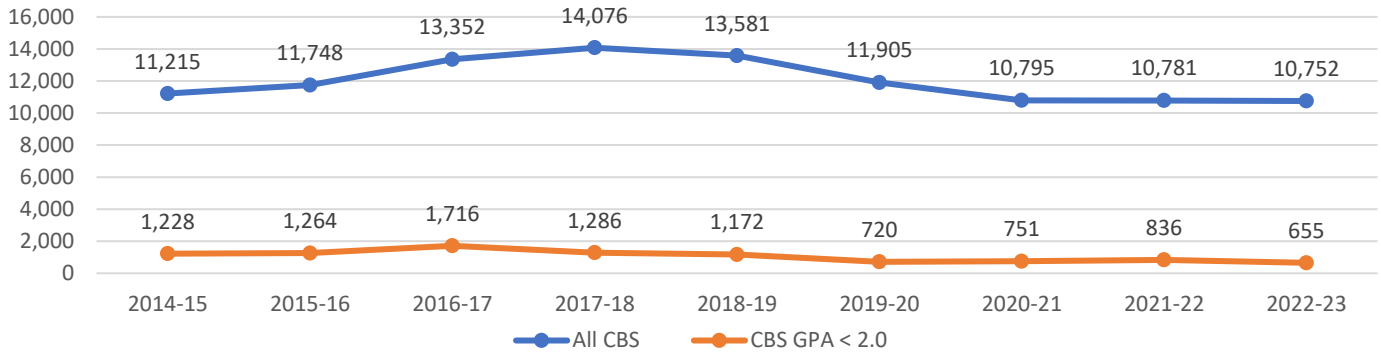
CBS Is Increasing Postsecondary Access for Low-Income and Underrepresented Students

Historically underrepresented students are a key component of the low-income population that the CBS program is designed to assist. Students in this group are more likely than the overall K-12 population to qualify for the program, and they tend to be represented in the CBS student population at higher percentage rates. For example, Hispanic/Latino students represent about 23.4 percent of the overall K-12 student population but over 41 percent of CBS Students. Black and African American students comprise 4.4 percent of the overall population compared to 7.3 percent of CBS Students (Washington Student Achievement Council, September 2023).

Postsecondary enrollment for CBS Students has been declining in recent years but has levelled off since 2020-21

The trend for CBS Students enrolling in postsecondary programs within the first year after high school graduation reflects an overall decline in enrollments in the wake of the COVID -19 pandemic (Washington Student Achievement Council, September 2023). As shown in Figure 12, first year enrollments for all CBS recipients reached a peak with the 2017-18 cohort with 14,076 continuing on to postsecondary studies. Enrollments declined over the ensuing three years before levelling off. In the 2022-23 high school graduation cohort, 10,752 CBS Recipients enrolled in postsecondary studies. The number of CBS Recipients with a high school GPA of less than 2.0 peaked in 2016-17 at 1,716, followed by a gradual decline in ensuing years. In 2022-23, 655 CBS Recipients with a high school GPA of less than 2.0 enrolled in a postsecondary program in the first year after graduating high school.

Figure 12: Postsecondary Enrollment Count of CBS Students by High School Graduation Year and GPA



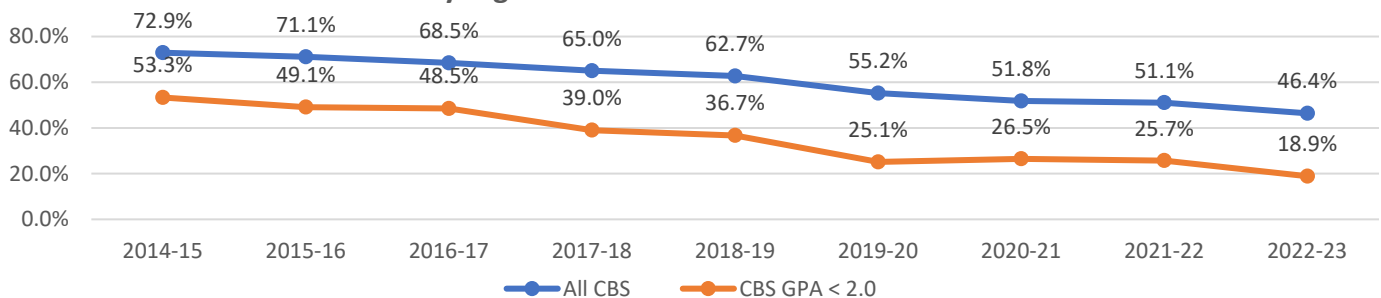
Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: Postsecondary enrollment is defined as enrollment in a four-year or two-year institution after a student’s high school graduation date. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. Enrollment is calculated for students who graduated high school within 4 years of entering 9th grade.

CBS Students with a high school GPA below 2.0 enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates

The CBS program was designed to encourage high school students to maintain a 2.0 grade point average or higher to be prepared for college-level studies. Postsecondary enrollment rates for CBS Students suggest that the program is having a positive effect on their continuing education beyond high school. Figure 13 shows the postsecondary enrollment rates in the first year after graduation for CBS Students by High School GPA. The enrollment rates are substantially lower for

Figure 13: Postsecondary Enrollment Rate of CBS Students by High School Graduation Year and GPA



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

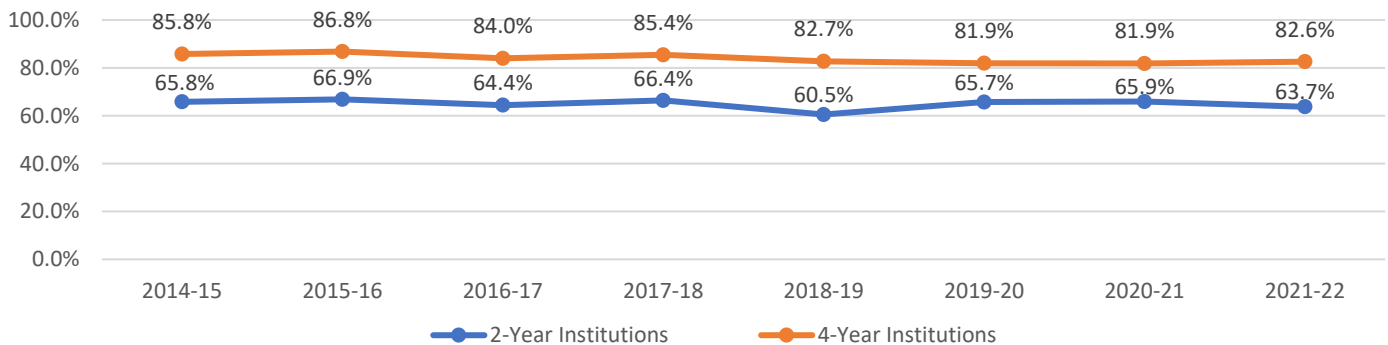
Note: High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. Enrollment is calculated for students who graduated high school within 4 years of entering 9th grade. Postsecondary enrollment is defined as enrollment in a four-year or two-year institution after a student’s high school graduation date.

students who had a GPA of less than 2.0. For example, in the 2017-18 high school graduation cohort, the percent of all CBS Students who continued on to enroll in either a two-year or four-year institution in the first year after graduation was 65.0 percent, compared to 39.0 percent for those with a GPA lower than 2.0. Enrollment rates have declined gradually in ensuing years, in part due to the effect of the COVID pandemic and then followed by the large influx of new CBS Students as a result of the introduction of auto-enrollment in 2020-21. As mentioned in previous sections, among the students that were entered in the program with auto-enrollment, many were less academically prepared than students who actively enrolled in the CBS program in previous years and, consequently, fewer enrolled in postsecondary programs after high school graduation. In the 2022-23 cohort, the postsecondary enrollment rate for all CBS students was 46.4 percent, compared to 18.9 percent for those with lower GPAs.

Persistence Rates for CBS Recipients Vary by Institution Type and High School GPA

An important key to success in pursuing education after high school is persistence, which is continuing to enroll in the year following the student’s first year. The persistence rates for CBS Recipients for the 2015-2022 high school graduation cohorts tend to vary by high school GPA and whether they are attending a two-year or four-year institution (see Figure 14). The percentage of all CBS recipients from the 2015-16 high school graduation cohort who enrolled for a second year at four-year institutions was relatively high, at 86.8 percent, followed by a gradual decline with some variability and the start of a rise in the 2021-22 cohort (82.6 percent). The persistence rate for high school graduation cohorts at two-year institutions was lower and showed a similar trajectory but with a bit more variability. Persistence rates ranged from a high of 66.9 percent in 2015-16 to 63.7 percent in 2021-22.

Figure 14: Persistence Rates of All CBS Recipients by High School Graduation Year

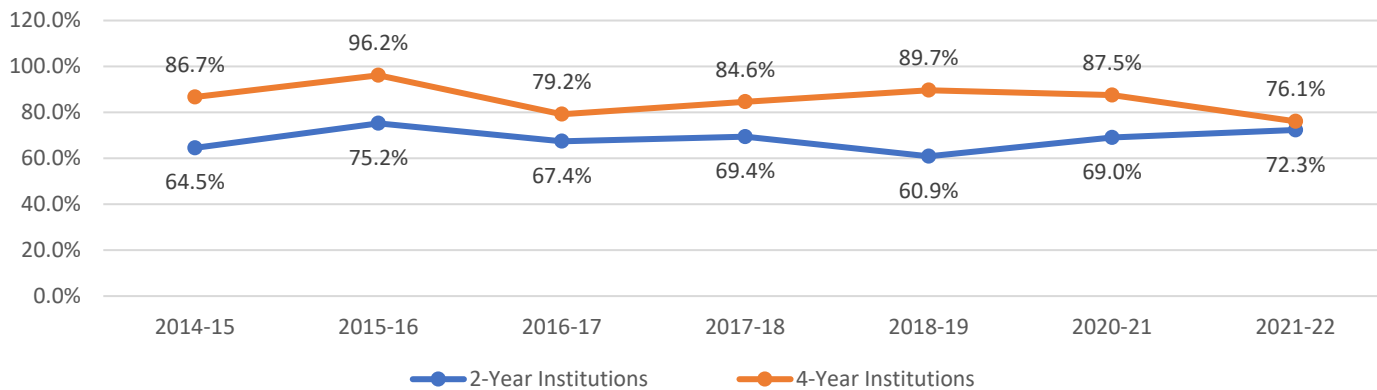


Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. Enrollment is calculated for students who graduated high school within 4 years of entering 9th grade. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Figure 15 shows persistence rates for CBS Students in high school graduation cohorts with less than a 2.0 high school GPA. For CBS Recipients with less than a 2.0 high school GPA, the persistence rate at four-year institutions declined sharply from a high of 96.2 percent in the 2015-16 cohort to 79.2 percent in 2016-17 cohort before rising to 89.7 percent 2018-19. This was followed by a decline and a low of 76.1 percent in 2021-22. At two-year institutions, persistence rates for CBS Recipients with less than a 2.0 high school GPA were lower, dipping from a high of 75.2 percent in 2015-16 to a low of 60.9 percent in the 2018-19 cohort before rising to 72.3 percent in 2021-22 cohort. More variability is shown here, due in part to the low number of students in this category. For example, in 2022, there were 182 CBS Recipients with less than a 2.0 GPA out of a total of 3,625 CBS Recipients.

Figure 15: Persistence Rates of CBS Recipients with Less Than 2.0 GPA by High School Graduation Year

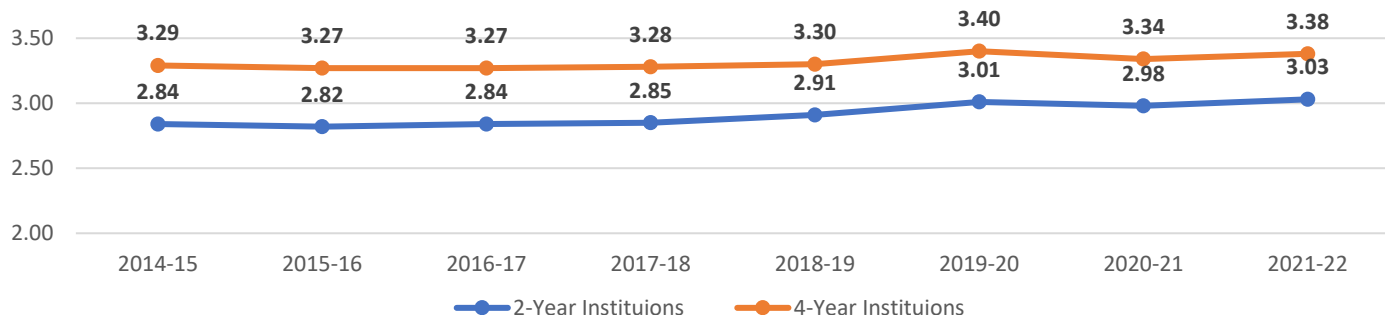


Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: Persistence is defined as a student enrolling in any postsecondary institution for a second year immediately following their entry into postsecondary. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Figure 16 shows the average high school GPA for CBS Recipients in postsecondary institutions by sector for high school graduation cohorts from 2015-2022. The average high school GPA for CBS Recipients attending four-year institutions have been rising gradually, ranging from 3.27 in 2015-16 to 3.38 in 2021-22. During this same period, the average GPA for CBS Recipients attending a two-year institution ranged from 2.82 in 2015-16 to 3.03 in 2021-22. For both groups, the average GPA for CBS Recipients was substantially higher than the 2.0 minimum.

Figure 16: Avg. High School GPA for CBS Recipients by High School Graduation Year and Sector

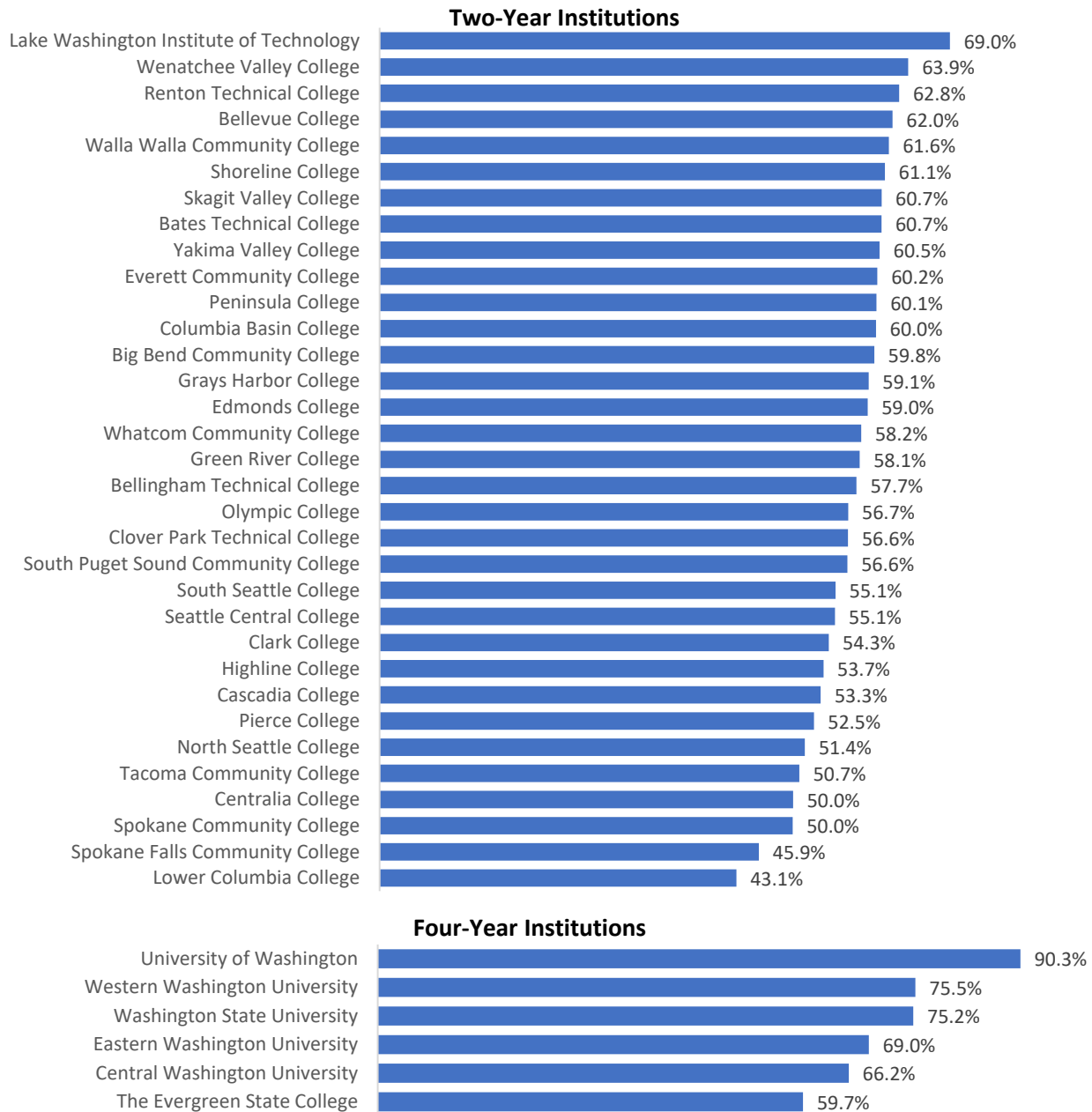


Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Figure 17 shows the retention rates for Washington public two-year and four-year institutions, which is defined as the percentage of CBS Recipients who enrolled for a second year at the same postsecondary institution. Retention rates at two-year institutions range from 45.9 percent to 69.0 percent. Retention rates are higher at four-year institutions, ranging from 59.7 percent to 90.3 percent.

Figure 17: Retention Rates of CBS Recipients at Public 2-year and 4-Year Institutions for High School Grad Years 2015-2022



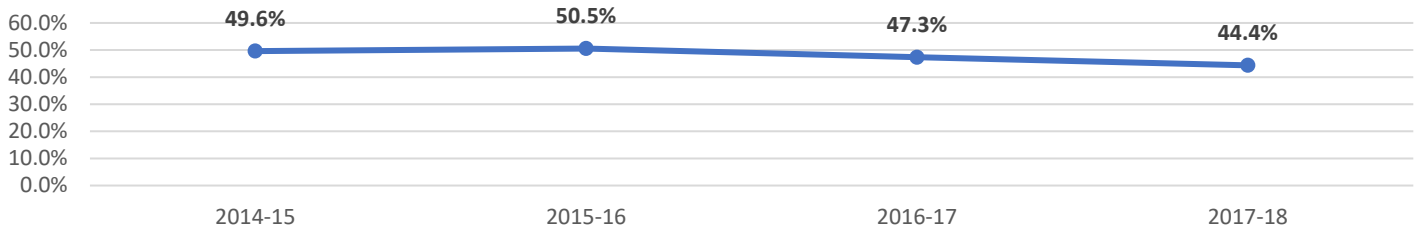
Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

Note: Retention is defined as a student enrolling in the same WA postsecondary institution for a second year immediately following their entry into postsecondary. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Most CBS Recipients Are Earning Postsecondary Credentials at Four-Year Institutions

Many CBS Students are taking advantage of the program, pursuing postsecondary education after high school graduation, and earning credentials (see Figure 18). In the 2015-16 high school graduation cohort, 50.5 percent of CBS Recipients completed postsecondary credentials within 150 percent of normal program time (6 years for a bachelor’s degree and 3 years for an associate degree or certificate). Completions have declined since then, with 44.4 percent of CBS Recipients from the 2018 high school graduation cohort completing postsecondary credentials.

Figure 18: Postsecondary Credential Completion Rate for CBS Recipients within 150% of Normal Program Time by High School Graduation Year

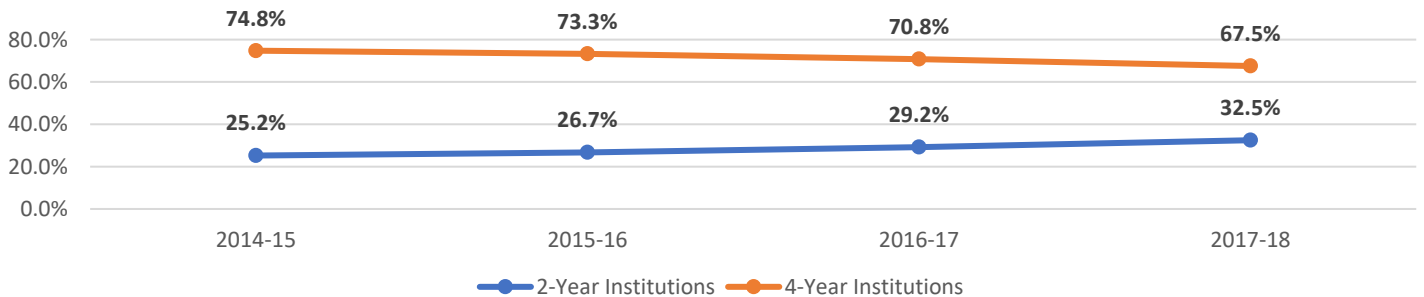


Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC)

Note: Postsecondary credentials include a student’s highest award conferred by a postsecondary institution. 150 percent of normal program time is 6 years for a bachelor’s degree and 3 years for an associate degree or certificate. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Figure 19 shows postsecondary completion shares for a student’s highest credential awarded by institution type. Most CBS Recipients complete credentials at four-year institutions. For example, among the CBS Recipients from the 2017-18 high school graduation cohort who completed postsecondary credentials, 67.5 percent completed their highest credential at a four-year institution, while 32.5 percent completed their highest credential at a two-year institution.

Figure 19: Postsecondary Credential Completion Share for CBS Recipients within 150% of Normal Program Time by Sector and High School Graduation Year

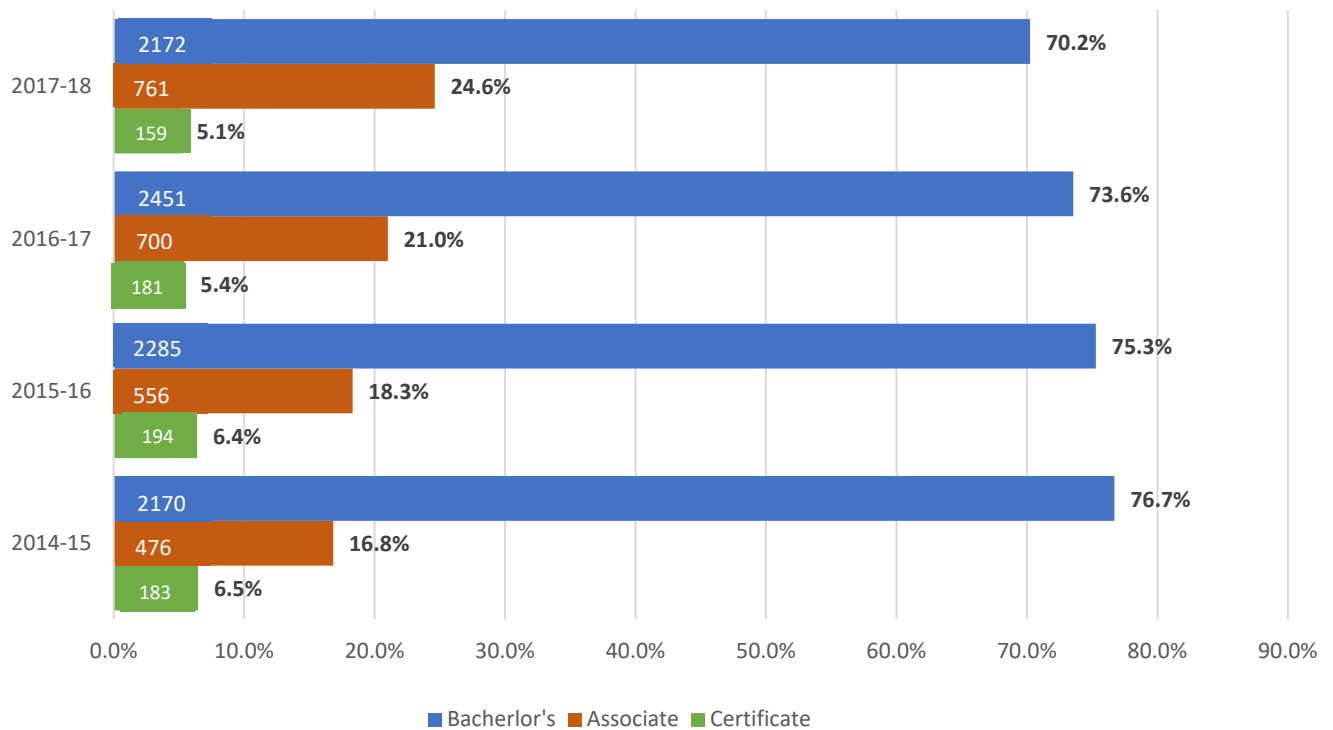


Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC)

Note: Postsecondary credentials include a student’s highest award conferred by a postsecondary institution. 150 percent of normal program time is 6 years for a bachelor’s degree and 3 years for an associate degree or certificate. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Figure 20 shows the distribution of postsecondary completions by credential type. A large majority of the highest credentials completed by CBS Recipients within 150 percent of normal program time are bachelor’s degrees. But in each cohort, since the 2015 high school graduation year, the percentage completing associate degrees as their highest credential has been increasing. Among CBS Recipients who earned a credential from the 2014-15 high school graduation cohort, 76.7 percent completed a bachelor’s degree, 16.8 percent completed an associate degree, and 6.5 percent completed a certificate program. Among CBS Recipients who earned a credential from the 2017-18 high school graduation cohort, 70.2 percent completed a bachelor’s degree, 24.6 percent completed an associate degree, and 5.1 percent completed a certificate program.

Figure 20: Postsecondary Credential Completion Shares for CBS Recipients within 150% of Normal Program Time by Credential Type and High School Graduation Year



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) data.

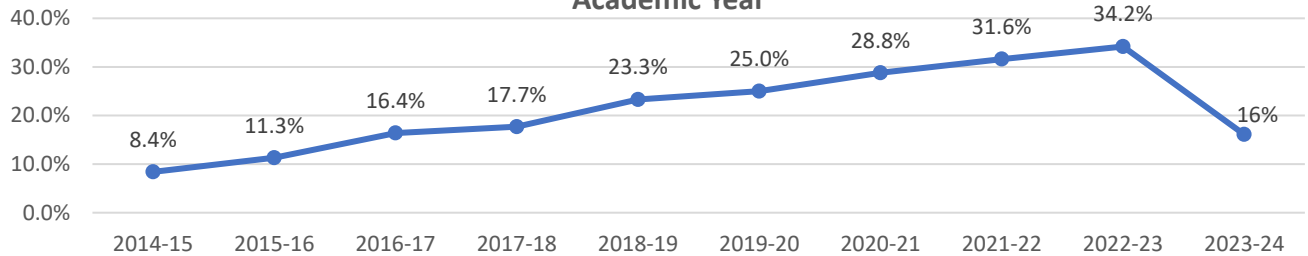
Note: Postsecondary credentials include a student’s highest award conferred by a postsecondary institution. 150 percent of normal program time is 6 years for a bachelor’s degree and 3 years for an associate degree or certificate. High school graduation year is the anticipated high school graduation year, four years after entering 9th grade for the first time. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

The Extension of CBS Eligibility Has Led to Fewer Recipients Timing Out

A number of College Bound Scholarship Recipients become ineligible to receive the scholarship in an academic year (see Figure 21). Some reasons for ineligibility are temporary and may only apply to a specific year. In other cases ineligibility may be permanent. Reasons for temporary eligibility include a Median Family Income (MFI) that exceeded the MFI cutoff for that year, not having filed a FAFSA or WASFA, not enrolling in college, not meeting satisfactory academic progress at

the institution, or not qualifying as a Washington State Resident in a given academic year. Reasons for permanent ineligibility include a student enrollment exceeding the five-year eligibility window, which was in place through 2023. In the 2023-24 academic year, the CBS eligibility timeframe was extended to six years (SB 5904). The numbers of recipients losing eligibility because they timed out has likely decreased significantly. This may explain the drop to 16 percent of CBS Recipients who lost eligibility overall in 2023-24.

Figure 21: Percentage of CBS Recipients at WA Institutions Who Lost Eligibility by Academic Year

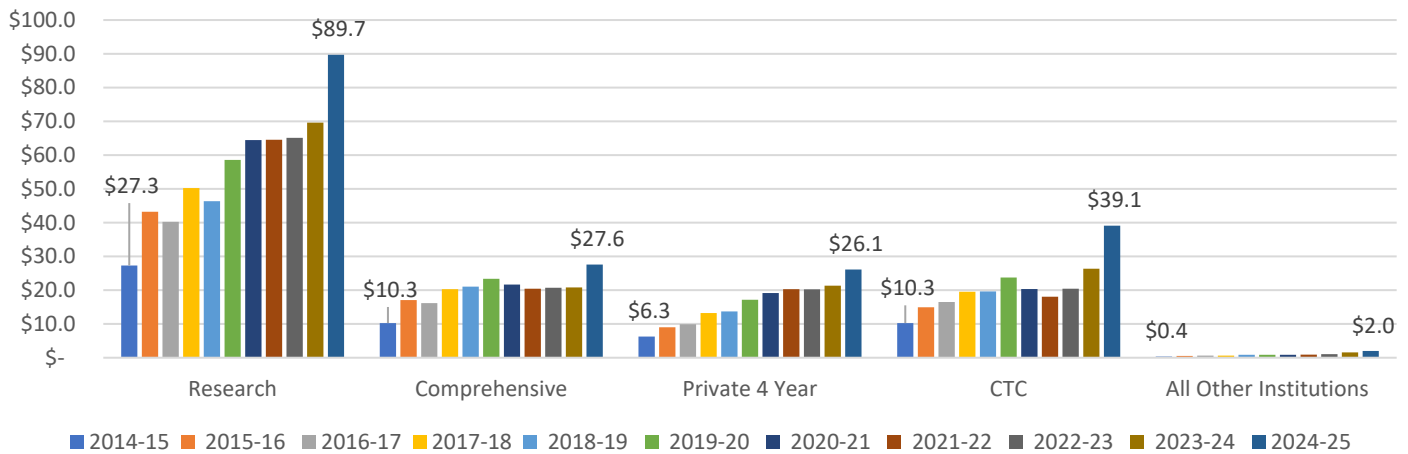


Source: WSAC CBS program administrative data.

WA Grant Expenditures in Support of CBS Recipients Have Grown Steadily

The postsecondary institution the student is planning to attend assembles an award package, incorporating all the grants and scholarships the student may have. Typically, award packages begin with a full Washington College Grant (WA Grant), and prior to 2019 with a full State Need Grant (SNG). Packages also incorporate any other applicable state aid programs. Only after taking all these other funding sources into account are CBS funds then used to make up any difference that might remain to meet the state’s aid commitment to CBS Students. Figure 22 shows the total SNG and WA GRANT funds that were used for awards to CBS Recipients from 2014-15 to 2024-25. They are broken out by sector, including research universities, comprehensive universities, community and technical colleges, four-year private nonprofit universities, and all other institutions. Expenditures from SNG and WA GRANT funding sources to support CBS Recipients have grown significantly during this period. For example, SNG and WA GRANT award expenditures in the research university sector expanded from 27.3 million dollars in 2014-15 to 89.7 million dollars in 2024-25. SNG and WA GRANT expenditures in the other sectors have also grown considerably.

Figure 22: SNG/WA Grant Awards to CBS Recipients (in millions) by Sector and Academic Year

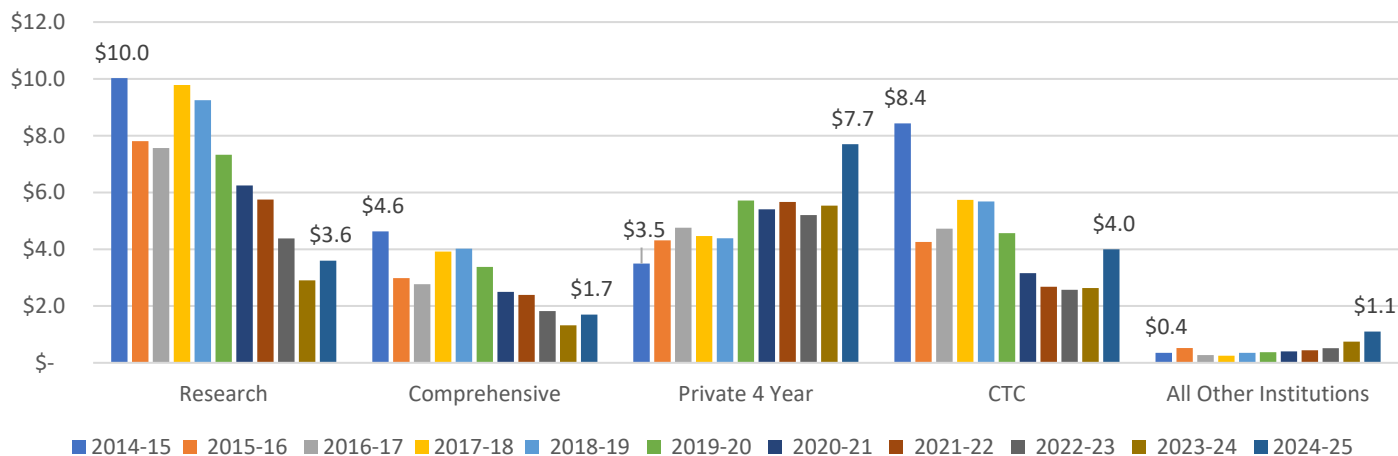


Note: SNG refers to the State Need Grant, which was renamed as the Washington College Grant (WA GRANT) in 2019, with funding beginning in the 2020-21 academic year. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

In the private four-year sector, SNG and WA GRANT expenditures have increased from 6.3 million in 2014-15 to 26.1 million in 2024-25. In the community and technical college sector, SNG and WA GRANT expenditures have increased from 10.3 million in 2014-15 to 39.1 million in 2024-25.

On the other hand, expenditures from CBS funding have declined over this period (see Figure 22). Expenditures from CBS funds in the research university sector decreased from 10.0 million dollars in 2014-15 to 3.6 million in 2024-25. Similarly, in the community and technical college sector, CBS fund expenditures declined from 8.4 million dollars in 2014-15 to 4.0 million in 2024-25. The significant decline beginning in 2019 is not surprising, coinciding with the creation of the WA GRANT as a guaranteed funding source, providing more of the state’s CBS commitment to students than the SNG.

Figure 23: CBS Awards to CBS Recipients (in millions) by Sector and Academic Year



Note: SNG refers to the State Need Grant, which was renamed as the Washington College Grant (WA GRANT) in 2019, with funding beginning in the 2020-21 academic year. CBS Recipients are students with at least one College Bound Scholarship award.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Overall, the College Bound Scholarship program is a key state financial aid program in the effort to connect with low-income students in middle school, encourage them to continue their education beyond high school, and assist them with key resources. It combines financial aid with effective communication tools such as OtterBot, a free chatbot texting service designed for CBS Students and parents and administered by WSAC. OtterBot provides them with timely information about financial aid and college planning with key reminders to help CBS Students stay on track. The CBS program advances more equitable education opportunities for historically underrepresented student groups by addressing college financial access barriers. Engaging with low-income students and encouraging their pursuit of higher education is crucial to reaching Washington’s statewide attainment goal of 70% of residents aged 25-44 earning a credential of value to allow them to compete for living-wage jobs.

Key policy changes, such as lifting the minimum GPA standard for students enrolling at community and technical colleges in 2023, extending the eligibility window to six years after high school graduation in 2024, and introducing automatic enrollment in CBS for qualified high school students in 2021 have effectively expanded access to CBS benefits. Overall, the trends for CBS Students reveal the effects of significant challenges they face in pursuing education beyond high school. Postsecondary enrollment for CBS Students have been declining in recent years, in part reflective of broader trends in enrollment and the lingering effects of the pandemic. Persistence rates have begun to rise in the four-year

sector with the 2021-22 high school graduation cohort after a downward trend in recent years. Credential completions within 150 percent of Normal Program Time have also been gradually declining in recent years but with the share of completions in the two-year sector rising compared to those in the four-year sector. However, while the overall trends in enrollment, persistence, and credential completion rates reveal a challenging environment for these students, the College Bound program remains an important resource for opening postsecondary opportunities and advancing equity for the state’s low-income and historically underrepresented populations.

To further support our attainment goals, WSAC provides a statewide infrastructure for increasing postsecondary access and enrollment for CBS Students and Recipients, their families, and the communities in which they live. We intentionally built and continuously adapt this infrastructure so that it is responsive to ongoing changes in financial aid systems, postsecondary institutions, and the communities where learners live. WSAC provides resources, training, and tools to partners, educators, and advocates to promote financial aid application completion and a college-going culture. Through these efforts, WSAC is connected in various ways to nearly every middle and high school in the state, advancing the College Bound program and supporting students in culturally and regionally responsive ways.

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