10.5 percent increase in financial aid completions

Results from the 2025–26 Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign

Report Snapshot | October 2026

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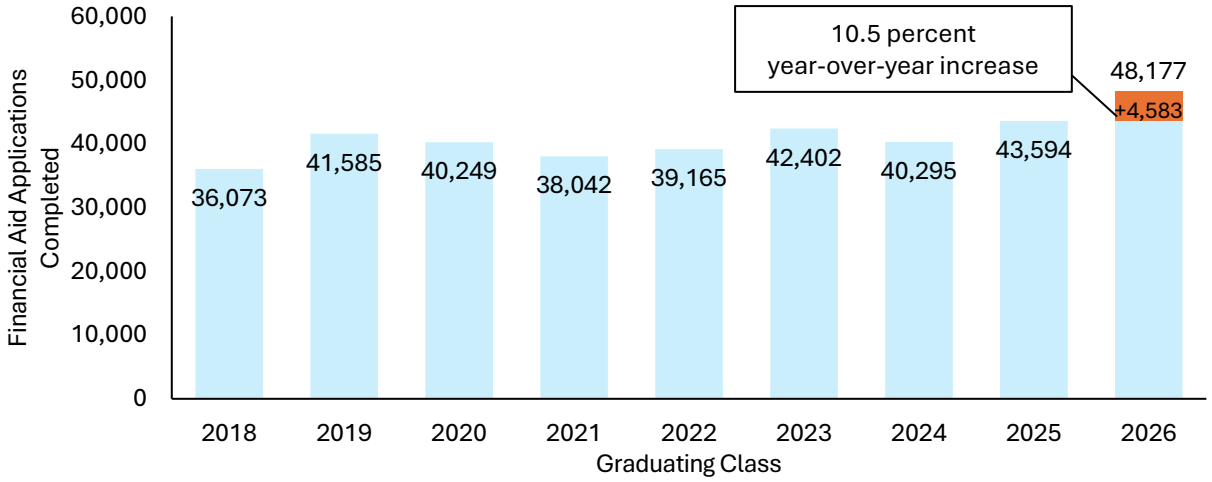
High school seniors can unlock Washington's generous financial aid for college and career training by completing one of two applications: the FAFSA or the WASFA. Even with recent changes to simplify the FAFSA and streamline WA Grant eligibility for low-income families, Washington's FAFSA completion rate continues to be one of the lowest in the nation.

In response, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) led the 2025–26 *Washington Completes FAFSA* Campaign. The campaign started in September 2025 after Governor Ferguson issued Executive Order 25-08. It paired clear goals with outreach from trusted messengers and community partners. The campaign met two of its four statewide goals, and results from partnership schools and communities showed promising progress toward the other two goals. Below are four findings that highlight this progress.

More than 48,000 high school seniors completed a financial aid application.

Washington met the first goal on July 21, 2026. By the end of the campaign, 48,177 high school seniors—55 percent of all expected graduates—had filed a FAFSA or WASFA. Filing slowed in the spring, as it does every year, but the campaign still finished well above the previous year's final count. Total FAFSA and WASFA applications among expected high school graduates exceeded the previous record by more than 4,500, a 10.5 percent year-over-year increase. FAFSA applications in the state also outpaced national growth (over 10 percent versus 7.5 percent, respectively).

Figure 1. Total Number of Financial Aid Applications Completed, by Graduating Class



Source: WSAC analysis of FAFSA data

Notes: Chart reflects final completion counts for each cohort. All final counts correspond to the last week for which WSAC actively monitors completion for each cohort. For the Class of 2026, that date was October 5, 2026.

At nearly 300 schools, FAFSA completions among FRPL-eligible students increased by at least 6 percent.

By the end of March, the campaign met its second goal: increase FAFSA completions among FRPL-eligible students by at least 6 percent at 150 schools. In total, 298 schools achieved this milestone by the end of September 2026. Schools participating in WSAC partnership programs were more likely to meet the goal: nearly 60 percent of schools supported through WSAC partnerships increased FAFSA completion among FRPL-eligible students by at least 6 percent, compared with about 45 percent of schools statewide.

- 18 of the 28 priority schools met the goal.
- 23 of the 44 schools supported by Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) partnerships met the goal.
- 8 of the 13 schools served by Washington GEAR UP met the goal.

Across GEAR UP schools, FRPL-eligible students completed the FAFSA at higher rates than non-FRPL-eligible peers.

Overall completion among FRPL-eligible students increased to 53 percent for the Class of 2026, up from 50 percent for the Class of 2025. This increase means an additional 1,370 FRPL-eligible students completed the FAFSA during the 2025–26 academic year. Although there is still a 5 percentage point statewide gap, FAFSA completion rates among FRPL-eligible students increased significantly at schools served by WSAC's partnerships.

Most notably, in schools served by the Washington GEAR UP state grant, FRPL-eligible students had a higher completion rate than non-FRPL-eligible students (67 percent vs. 63 percent, respectively). At priority schools and in schools supported by RCG, completion rates increased but did not reach the completion rates for non-FRPL-eligible students.

- At priority schools, the completion rates for FRPL-eligible and non-FRPL-eligible were only three percentage points apart for the Class of 2026 (50 percent vs. 53 percent).
- In schools supported by RCG, the final completion rates for FRPL-eligible students rose from 63 percent for the Class of 2025 to 68 percent for the Class of 2026. This rate is 15 percentage points higher than the statewide average for FRPL-eligible students.

FAFSA completion rates by race/ethnicity were more equitable in RCG-supported regions than statewide.

In October 2025, at the start of the campaign, the racial/ethnic group with the highest FAFSA completion rate was filing at approximately five times the rate of the group with the lowest rate. By the end of the campaign, that ratio had narrowed to 1.78 statewide; in regions supported by RCG partnerships, it was 1.46.

Year-over-year completion disparities by race/ethnicity narrowed in regions served by WSAC partnerships, but not statewide. The statewide equity score gap—the highest group's completion rate divided by the lowest group's rate—rose from 1.70 for the Class of 2025 to 1.78 for the Class of

2026. In regions supported by RCG partnerships, the equity score gap narrowed from 1.69 for the Class of 2025 to 1.46 for the Class of 2026. A score of 1.0 indicates parity.

What We Recommend and What Comes Next

The Advisory Board wants all students to see financial aid as relevant to their future, have multiple opportunities to complete the FAFSA or WASFA, and have access to support when they need it.

In practice, this vision means that every student:

- Receives clear, consistent financial aid messages tailored to their needs and those of their families.
- Has at least one individual conversation that connects applying for financial aid to their plans after high school.
- Is given dedicated time during the school day to file for financial aid.
- Can access additional support when needed, either for themselves or for their families.

The 2026–27 campaign will build toward the Advisory Board's shared vision through an intentional state and regional design powered by data and continuous learning. The campaign will focus on five strategies:

- **Build momentum throughout the year.** WSAC will create distinct moments for statewide action throughout the academic year.
- **Mobilize partnerships for coordinated action.** WSAC will strengthen coordination among K–12 schools and districts, nonprofit organizations, libraries, colleges and universities, and other community partners.
- **Put more support where it's needed most.** WSAC will strengthen the priority school pilot and continue to leverage statewide tools to monitor and partner with other schools that may need more FAFSA completion support.
- **Reach students and families directly.** WSAC will increase direct communication to students and families, sending messages tailored to each student's grade and application status.
- **Connect financial aid to each student's future.** WSAC will work with schools and partners to make sure that every high school senior has at least one individual conversation connecting financial aid to their plans after high school.