# College Bound FAQs for School Staff & College Access Professionals 2026-27

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The College Bound program was established by the Washington State Legislature in 2007 and is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council.

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# COLLEGE BOUND BASICS

## 1. What is the College Bound Program?

College Bound is an early commitment of state financial aid to help eligible students pay for education after high school. College Bound funds are based on average tuition (at public college rates), some fees, and a small amount for books. There are about 60 participating colleges, universities, and technical schools in Washington State that participate in the College Bound program. The state agency, Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), administers College Bound.

## 2. What are the College Bound requirements?

Students must meet eligibility requirements at two points:

**1.) When enrolling in College Bound** (based on income requirements for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch programs).

AND

**2.) While attending college** (students must meet all eligibility requirements to receive their College Bound funds).

# COLLEGE BOUND ENROLLMENT

## 3. How can a student be automatically enrolled in College Bound?

Students who meet one of the following requirements are automatically enrolled in College Bound:

- Students in a Washington State public school who are income-eligible and signed up for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) in 7th, 8th, or who become newly income-eligible in 9th grade.
- Students in Washington state foster care, or a dependent of the state, between 7th grade and high school graduation.

*Families should complete the Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit (CNEEB) application provided by the student's school and be income-eligible to be automatically enrolled.

Automatic enrollment for public school students happens through a partnership with WSAC and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Automatic enrollment for students in state foster care happens through a partnership with WSAC and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

**Private and homeschooled students do not qualify for automatic enrollment.** Please contact our office at 888-535-0747, option 1 to apply.

## 4. What makes a 9th grader newly eligible?

The requirements for newly income-eligible 9th graders are:

- Be enrolled in a Washington school (public, private, or home school) in 7th or 8th grade.
- Not income-eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) in 7th or 8th grade.
- Newly income-eligible for FRPL in 9th grade.

## 5. How do private and home school students sign up?

If an income-eligible student is enrolled in a private school or homeschool program in Washington State in 7th or 8th grade or becomes newly income-eligible in 9th grade, the parent/guardian can contact us at 888-535-0747, option 1, to start an application.

The parent/guardian and student must complete, sign, and return a form sent by our program staff to complete the application.

## 6. How will students know they have been enrolled in College Bound?

Students with up-to-date contact information will receive official College Bound notifications by mail and/or email letting them know they have been enrolled.

*__Please note__: A student does not need to receive that information to receive College Bound funds, and it does not guarantee a student will receive funds. Students must meet the eligibility requirements to receive College Bound funds.

Students and parents can contact the student's school counselor to confirm College Bound enrollment. Counselors can use our College Bound Portal, which provides a current list of their school's College Bound students. Use our College Bound student enrollment letter to inform those students of their enrollment!

Our College Bound program staff can also confirm a student's current enrollment.

## 7. Why are some income-eligible students not enrolled in College Bound?

It is likely that the students are not noted as income-eligible or signed up for FRPL. Multiple sources of information may be used to determine whether a student is income-eligible for FRPL, some of which are the CNEEB application, SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, foster youth (in a state-run foster youth program only), and migrant students.

There are OSPI resources to help income-eligible families apply for FRPL and help schools promote the importance of completing the CNEEB application each year. The info collected on this form can help schools receive funding for important programs.

If students are already noted as income-eligible and signed up for FRPL, be sure they have filled out the appropriate paperwork and are being reported correctly to OSPI. You can contact your CEDARS administrator to see if they have completed the paperwork and whether it has been sent to OSPI. If

you're unsure who the CEDARS administrator is for your school/district, here is the OSPI CEDARS District Administrator list.

### 8. What if the school is 100% Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (CEP/Provision 2)?

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2 schools are required to use the CNEEB application to report income eligibility to OSPI. The application is available in 11 languages. Students are auto-enrolled once they are confirmed to be income-eligible or meet other sign-up requirements.

### 9. What if families do not want to complete the CNEEB application or enroll in public assistance programs?

The school or district cannot confirm the student's income eligibility, and they will not be automatically enrolled.

Telling families about how the CNEEB or public assistance programs can benefit their student(s) can be helpful. Students and their families must provide income eligibility information for the student to be auto-enrolled.

### 10. If there is an income eligible student who was not automatically enrolled, can school staff or College Bound program staff enroll them ?

School staff and College Bound staff cannot enroll public school students. Parents of income-eligible students need to complete the CNEEB application.

OSPI has helpful information on how income-eligible families can apply for FRPL.

## RECEIVING COLLEGE BOUND FUNDS

### 11. What are the income requirements to receive College Bound funds?

Income reported on the student's financial aid application (FAFSA or WASFA) must be less than 65 percent of the median family income (MFI).

For more information, please see the table below. This number changes each year and is updated in the spring on the College Bound webpage.

**Note:** Income eligibility is based on annual gross income plus any non-taxable income as reported on the financial aid application. Dependent students' income is not included when determining College Bound eligibility.

| 2026-27 Median Family Income Chart | |
|---|---|
| **Household size** | **Annual Income*** |
| 1 | $47,000 |
| 2 | $61,500 |
| 3 | $76,000 |
| 4 | $90,500 |
| 5 | $105,000 |
| 6 | $119,500 |
| 7 | $122,000 |
| 8 | $125,000 |

| 2027-28 Median Family Income Chart | |
|---|---|
| **Household size** | **Annual Income*** |
| 1 | $49,500 |
| 2 | $65,000 |
| 3 | $80,000 |
| 4 | $95,500 |
| 5 | $110,500 |
| 6 | $126,000 |
| 7 | $129,000 |
| 8 | $131,500 |

*Household income must be less than or equal to this amount. Note: A student could be eligible for College Bound funding for some years, and not eligible for others, if the family's MFI level exceeded 65 percent in one or more years

## 12. Where can students use College Bound?

Students may use their College Bound funds at more than 60 eligible schools in Washington. The list includes public community or technical colleges, public four-year institutions, approved independent colleges or universities, and approved private career colleges or universities.

Students can use College Bound funds for online classes, summer classes, or study abroad programs at participating schools. Students should contact the financial aid office at their college or university for questions about funding a specific term or program.

If a student attends an eligible private college or university, the tuition may only be covered at public tuition rates. Private schools usually have higher tuition, so it's important for students and their families to explore additional financial aid options.

## 13. How many years can students receive College Bound?

College Bound can be used within six years (18 quarters/12 semesters) of college enrollment or until they earn their first bachelor's degree, whichever comes first.

Students must enroll in college within one year of high school graduation.

- For example, if the student graduates in June 2026, they must enroll in college by Fall 2027 to meet the enrollment deadline.
    - A student does not need to enroll in an eligible school to meet the enrollment deadline.
    - The enrollment deadline can be met if they enroll in an out-of-state/country school, as long as the student receives college credits.

*Please note that College Bound funds can only be used at an eligible college or technical school.

## 14. How much College Bound funding can a student receive?

The amount listed as "College Bound" on the financial aid package will look different at each college and for each student. The award is based on three specific costs.

- Tuition at public school rates
- Allowable fees
- A small amount for books.

The costs will be covered by state financial aid, such as College Bound and/or the Washington College Grant (WA Grant).

A student's College Bound amount is determined after the WA Grant and other state aid and/or scholarships have been awarded. The student may receive a reduced or no College Bound award when their tuition *need* (award amount) has been met with other state aid/scholarships because the commitment of state funding has been fulfilled. Colleges and universities determine a student's College Bound award amount. More info can be found in the "How to access College Bound funds" flyer. The table on the next page shows the maximum college bound award amounts when combined with the WA Grant.

| 2026-27 Maximum CB Award Amounts when Combined with the Washington College Grant for 3 Quarters/2 Semesters | | |
|---|---|---|
| Institutions | | Award |
| Public Research | University of Washington | $13,730 |
| | Washington State University | $13,200 |
| Public Comprehensive | Western Washington University | $9,304 |
| | Central Washington University | $9,115 |
| | The Evergreen State College | $9,140 |
| | Eastern Washington University | $8,535 |
| | CTC Applied Bachelor's | $8,634 |
| Private Four-year Colleges & Universities | | $13,452 |
| WGU-Washington | | $8,800 |
| Public Community & Technical Colleges | | $5,595 |
| Private Career Colleges | | $5,595 |

**Helpful Resource**: 2026-27 Maximum WA Grant and College Bound Awarding Chart

## 15. Are undocumented students eligible for College Bound?

The College Bound Program is a state financial aid program for Washington resident students. Washington residents can be both U.S. citizens and non-citizens, including undocumented students. Students must meet residency requirements.

Undocumented students are encouraged to complete the Washington Application for State Aid (WASFA) instead of the federal FAFSA application during their senior year in high school and each year they attend college. Students who complete the WASFA will only be awarded state financial aid.

## 16. Can a student graduate from high school earlier or later than expected?

Students are not penalized for graduating before or after their expected graduation date. Their College Bound eligibility period will start after their graduation date.

## 17. Can a student earn a GED and receive College Bound?

Beginning July 27, 2025, students can earn a GED in WA and receive College Bound. Students who earn their GED must meet the following requirements:

- Earn the GED before their 21st birthday.
- Enroll in college or career school within one year of receiving their GED.
- Meet the program requirements.

Students who earn a GED should contact College Bound program staff.

## 18. Can Running Start students use College Bounds funds?

Students will not receive College Bound funding for Running Start classes. They must graduate from high school before they can begin using College Bound.

## Questions? Contact College Bound program staff:

Visit: collegebound.wa.gov

Call: 888.535.0747, Option 1

Email: collegebound@wsac.wa.gov

College Bound
WASHINGTON