

Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

January 20, 2026
Virtual Zoom Meeting

Advisory Board Members Attending

Alyson Rotter, Bish Paul, Carolina Garza, Collin Bannister, Damien Pattenaude, Domanic Vanthom, Geraldine Donovan, Lilia Hueso, Nashua Johnley, Rebecca Wallace, Sienna Jarrard, Susan Rose

WSAC Staff Attending

Daniel Oliver, Isaac Kwakye, Isaac Rodriguez, Joel Anderson, Kathie Pham, Katie Tallman, Natalie Alvarado, Rashel Wise, Rathi Sudhakara, Rubi Diaz, Sarah Weiss, Sean Moran, Yaslin Torres

Public Attending

Ben Mitchell, Etienne Rios, Penny Quinteros, TVW Streaming

Welcome and Overview

Presenter: Natalie Alvarado

Key Points:

- Isaac Kwakye's introduction to Sarah Weiss and Natalie Alvarado.
- Natalie provided a brief overview of WSAC and its role.
- Natalie reviewed when the next meeting is and shared 'ask' between meetings.
 - Tuesday, Feb 17, 2:00 – 4:00 P.M.
 - Standing ask:
 - Share key updates and WSAC resources with your network & bring back learnings
 - Help shape statewide strategies, recognition of high-performing schools, and campaign adjustments
- Natalie shared today's objectives and focus:
 - Objectives:
 - Share progress since 12/16
 - Align priorities (Jan – June)

- Refine “Finish your financial aid app week”
- 2026 legislative session updates
- Confirm next steps
- January Focus:
 - Financial Aid Data
 - Strategy Highlight
 - 2B Regional Training for Trusted Messenger
 - 2C Expand OtterBot gen + basic needs
 - 3C Overhaul TM comms + FASFA dashboard & Leaderboard
 - Discuss and plan for “Finish your financial aid app week”

2025 – 2026 Academic Year Goals and Progress

Presenter: Natalie Alvarado

Key Points:

- Natalie reviewed this year’s campaign goals:
 - Increase financial aid completion for all WA high school seniors.
 - Ensure 46,000 seniors complete the FAFSA or WASFA.
 - Raise FRPL-eligible student completions by 6% or more in at least 150 high schools.
 - Close the gap in FAFSA completion between FRPL and non-FRPL students.
 - Reduce disparities in FAFSA completion rates, especially among those from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.
- Natalie reviewed progress towards Campaign goal #:
 - The campaign runs to September 2026; we have 37 out of 53 weeks to go.
 - As of January 19, the class of 2026 FAFSA&WASFA completion rate is 34%.
 - In just 4 months, we have 29,717 FAFSA and WASFA completions, more than halfway to the goal of 46,000 completions.
- Natalie showed the pie chart, in green, there is 29,717 at 65% of total completions, and in the grey, the remaining total completions are 16,283 at 35%.
- Natalie showed the chart representing completion momentum since the advisory board's last meeting in December of 2025.
 - For WASFA, the bar in bright green bar represents the December 16 total of 898 completions. The dark green bar represents completions added since: 122 completions.

- For FAFSA, the bar in the bright green bar represents the December 16 total of 23,350 completions. The dark green bar represents completions added since: 5,347.
- Natalie shared progress towards the remainder of the goals #2 - #4.
 - #2
 - 69 high schools have already experienced a 6% increase in FAFSA completions among FRPL-eligible students. We're up 24 schools since last meeting, 81 more to reach our goal of 150.
 - #3
 - FAFSA completion among FRPL-eligible students is 8pp below FAFSA completion for non-FRPL students (29% vs. 37%). The gap has widened since our last check-in. We're prioritizing strategies that remove barriers for FRPL students.
 - #4
 - By race/ethnicity, Equity Gap Score is 2.9 – the group with the highest FAFSA completion has a rate that is three times the group with the lowest completion rate (Asian 46% vs. NHPI 16%). Without action, existing disparities in filing by race/ethnicity may worsen.

Strategy Progress and Highlights

Presenter: Natalie Alvarado

Key points:

- Natalie shared WSAC's ask of the advisory board members and shared where we are with the action items discussed in December.
- Advisory Board Ask:
 - Share resources & boost completion in your area
 - Report back wins/challenges from the field
 - Join a recognition group or host a training
- Action Items:
 - OSPI partnership
 - Migrant support & additional WA Grant integration in HSBP
 - Expand statewide partners
 - "FA is easier than you think" messaging
 - Onsite admission & financial aid integration
 - FA Challenge Week

- Natalie shared the strategy highlights from 3 out of the 10 strategies, what we are seeing in those strategies and how we are adjusting.
 - 2B Regional Trainings for Trusted Messenger
 - What we're seeing:
 - In person trainings are the highest impact
 - Demand is growing beyond counselors
 - Trusted messengers want a clear “what I need to know” and “where to send students” model
 - Families increasingly need special topic support
 - How we're adjusting:
 - Eastside regional trainings – Wenatchee Public Library: 3 trainings in one (Feb. 3rd, 1-4 pm) and Walla Walla in progress.
 - Expanding messenger lanes – Washington Education Association
 - Launching income adjustments/appeal training to respond to emergent needs
 - 2C Expand OtterBot for students & parents + basic needs
 - What we're seeing:
 - 30,924: Total # of HS senior users statewide (since Nov)
 - 1,791: Total # of HS senior users at the 25 priority schools
 - Approx. 40,000 parents/guardians of College Bound HS seniors
 - How we're adjusting:
 - Adding 2025-2026 non-College Bound seniors (est. 14,000) and parents (not done before) from OSPI directory information into OtterBot. We are reaching adult learners, too, asking about interests and sending pathway options and new steps based on responses.
 - 3C Strengthen Trusted Messenger Communications
 - What we're seeing:
 - Schools respond when messaging is role-specific
 - Trusted messenger channels are driving follow-through when we pair them with to local authority and timely prompts
 - How we're adjusting:
 - Sent (Jan. 16) another round of outreach to trusted messengers, superintendents, principals, and counselor
 - 2,479 recipients with an average open rate of 54%

- Natalie shared an update on the FAFSA portal and College Access DSA Update.
 - What we're seeing:
 - Last year 47 districts without a DSA.
 - This year combined College Bound & FAFSA portal DSA
 - DSA is bringing in new districts:
 - 219 districts signed in 2 months, and 73 are currently unsigned.
 - If past signers re-sign, only 36 districts remain.
 - Portal access statewide: 513 active portal users
 - 88.5% of students are in schools with at least 1 portal user
 - 202 schools still have no portal users.
 - How we're adjusting:
 - Continue targeted outreach, especially to large districts that require more review, and create a short “how to use data” video (10min.), so portal users can take action fast.

2026 Legislative Session: Relevant Bills

Presenter: Joel Anderson

Key Points:

- Joel shared two bills that are relevant to financial aid, SB 5841 and HB 2132.
 - SB 5841 – requiring a completed FAFSA or WASFA as part of HSBP
 - Different approach to enacting a universal/mandatory FAFSA policy
 - Has generated good discussion and questions about how to link WSAC's FAFSA portal and OSPI's HSBP platform, SchoolLinks
 - Existing questions include (1) relevant limitations on FAFSA data sharing, (2) how to share data for WASFA applicants (and other opted-out students), and (3) costs associated with setting up data sharing infrastructure
 - Current status: scheduled for executive session in the Senate ELK12 Committee on Thursday, Jan. 22
 - HB 2132 – limiting the disclosure and retention of PII related to the WASFA
 - Intent is to standardize how long IHEs and WSAC retain PII submitted as part of the WASFA
 - Has generated lots of questions around existing data retention and sharing policies
 - IHEs typically retain student data for many years

- IHEs and WSAC have data-sharing agreements with various state agencies that may be impacted
- WSAC's third-party WASFA vendor (Regent) charges fees to purge existing student data, contributing to a large fiscal note for the bill
- Current status: scheduled for executive session in the House PEW Committee today, Jan. 20

Advisory Board Discussion

Presenter: Sarah Weiss

Key points:

- The group shared what they have tried since the last meeting (Dec.16), what is working and where students are getting stuck in the financial aid process.
- Sarah introduced an early outline for Complete Your Financial Aid Application Week (week of April 20) and asked members to describe what success looks like and how they can help.

Discussion Highlights (Part1: Share out)

- Schools are getting better results when FAFSA/WASFA help is highly visible (TV screens, posters, daily reminders)
- Using trusted messengers work well
- Incentives and “making it a bid deal” can get more students to ask questions and show up for help
- Some groups are using milestone tracking
- A challenge is confusing or inconsistent information across many partners and programs
- Many school staff get too many emails, so key messages can be missed or seen as spam

Action Items (Part 2: Planning for April 20 week)

- Create and share a school toolkit (posters, announcement scripts, screen slides, social media graphics).
- Start outreach before April 20 with a clear promotion timeline/countdown.
- Promote use of the FAFSA dashboard and WIAA leaderboard and offer a short training/webinar.
- Help schools set simple goals using prior-year and current data (benchmarks and progress checks).

- Provide a low-lift plan to reach every senior with at least one touchpoint that week.
- Include “what’s next” supports (award letters, comparisons, decision steps—not just completion).
- Offer a menu of incentive ideas that schools can choose from (including ways to recognize early completers).
- Share “social proof” ideas that create gentle peer pressure (pledges, progress updates, assemblies).
- Use Advisory Board members and partner networks as trusted messengers to spread materials (not only mass emails).

Public Comment

Presenter: Ben Mitchell – Foundation for Tacoma Students

Key Points:

- He commented briefly on Senate Bill 5841. He noted that his organization did not help write the bill and is not leading it but is watching it closely.
- Ben expressed general support for the bill’s goal and said the details and technical fixes (including a possible amendment) will matter.
- He encouraged the group to use the High School and Beyond Plan, especially the rollout of the new universal online platform, as a strong opportunity to boost FAFSA/WASFA completion.
- He highlighted positive momentum from coordination between WSAC and OSPI related to the platform rollout.

Sarah reiterated what the Advisory Board members can do to help the effort to increase financial aid completion within their school, organization, and networks by:

- Sharing out WSAC resources
- Sharing back successes, challenges, and other learning opportunities
- Promoting a resource, event, etc. In February for Financial Aid Awareness Month
- Host or join a regional training in their area
- Finish Your Financial Aid Application Week planning

Next Advisory Board meeting is scheduled for February 17, 2026 from 2 pm to 4pm.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following closing thanks from WSAC staff, with appreciation expressed to all advisory board members and partners for their contributions.

Appendix A

January 20, 2026 – Advisory Board Meeting Recording: [TVW Recording](#)

Appendix B

00:17:28 Domanic Vanthom: Dr. Domanic Vanthom - Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs - WSU Vancouver

00:17:43 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Hello! Rashel Wise - WSAC - College Access Initiatives

00:18:05 Carolina Garza (she/her): Carolina Garza - College Success Foundation (Central and Eastern Washington region)

00:18:06 Sean Moran: Hi all, my name is Sean Moran and I work as the data analyst for the WSAC College Access Initiatives team.

00:18:11 Penny Quinteros: Penny Quinteros - SRC K-12 education policy

00:18:14 Ben Mitchell | Foundation for Tacoma Students: Hi everyone. I'm Ben Mitchell, Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Foundation for Tacoma Students. Not a member of the Advisory Board, joining today to offer public comment.

00:18:17 Dr. Bish Paul (He/Him) Gates Foundation: Good afternoon, Bish Paul, Gates Fdn.

00:20:46 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: If you're just joining us, please introduce yourselves in the chat! We're glad you are here.


00:21:29 Nashua Johnley: My name is Nashua Johnley and I am a senior at Toppenish High School.

00:22:05 Rathi Sudhakara: Good afternoon, Rathi Sudhakara (she/her) | WSAC


00:22:33 Alyson Rotter: Hello everyone, Aly Rotter (she/her) from Olympic College.

00:23:49 Geraldine Donovan: Hello, my name is Geraldine Donovan and I am a sophomore at Seattle Preparatory School.


00:26:37 Collin Bannister: Do we have info on where this number was at in prior years at this point?


00:28:51 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "Do we have info on w..." with 

00:30:11 Sean Moran: Hi @Collin Bannister, thanks for checking about that. We still do not have the final week for January. Still, we have the public dashboard which shows previous years. As of December 2024 closing, we were at 15%. You can find this information on WA FAFSA Completion for High School Seniors | Tableau Public and click on the Menu at top right. You can then click on Trends in FAFSA Completion Over Time

00:30:16 Sean Moran: Reacted to "Do we have info on w..." with 

00:30:27 Kathie Pham | WSAC, College Access Initiatives: Reacted to "Hi Collin, thanks fo..." with 

00:30:33 Kathie Pham | WSAC, College Access Initiatives: Reacted to "Do we have info on w..." with 

00:30:37 Collin Bannister: Reacted to "Hi @Collin Bannister..." with 

00:30:39 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Reacted to "Hi @Collin Bannister..." with 

00:32:30 Sean Moran: Hi @Collin Bannister, I also wanted to share Class of 2023 since that was the last year we started at October 1st. These previous 2 years started a bit later. It was 27%

00:32:48 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Reacted to "Hi @Collin Bannister..." with 

00:39:25 Isaac Kwakye: FAFSA Completion for High School Seniors | WSAC












00:50:34 Alyson Rotter: Just curious if WSAC works with any HB 1835 sites/staff to help secure the DSAs for any districts within those regions?

00:51:09 Alyson Rotter: To be more specific, would we know if one of our districts didn't have a portal user or DSA in place so that we could help secure those?

00:52:26 Sean Moran: Hi Alyson, currently we have been working directly with the district offices to get folks signed up. We also reach out directly to counselors at those schools if we notice the schools do not have Portal users

00:53:06 Alyson Rotter: So if we are an HB 1835 site, we wouldn't know if one of our districts doesn't have a portal user or DSA in place.

00:53:07 Sean Moran: We could work with HB 1835 folks for this in the future.

- 00:53:14 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "We could work with H..." with 
- 00:53:24 Alyson Rotter: I think that would be wise given the relationship we have with them
- 00:53:41 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "I think that would b..." with 
- 00:54:06 Sean Moran: We could look into that. We would just need to figure out the cadence and check in with other HB 1835 entities. Thank you for bringing this suggestion up
- 00:54:10 Sean Moran: Reacted to "I think that would b..." with 
- 00:54:23 Carolina Garza (she/her): Reacted to "I think that would b..." with 
- 00:55:55 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: We'll plan to follow up, Alyson. Thanks!
- 00:56:09 Alyson Rotter: Reacted to "We'll plan to follow..." with 
- 00:57:21 Sean Moran: Reacted to "We'll plan to follow..." with 
- 00:57:34 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Thanks for sharing, Lilia!
- 00:57:43 Dan Oliver | WA WSAC: Reacted to "Thanks for sharing, ..." with 
- 01:10:51 Sean Moran: That is Isaac Rodriguez who provided those resources 
- 01:12:46 Dr. Bish Paul (He/Him) Gates Foundation: College Financial Aid night @ Mariners game & Gates Foundation partnership:
- The Mariners are current working to identify a date, likely be in mid-April
 - The Mariners are exploring an end of August game to invite students from across the state
- 01:12:53 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "College Financial Ai..." with 
- 01:13:13 Susan Rose: Reacted to "College Financial Ai..." with 
- 01:13:14 Kathie Pham | WSAC, College Access Initiatives: Reacted to "College Financial Ai..." with 

- 01:13:19 Kathie Pham | WSAC, College Access Initiatives: Reacted to "That is Isaac Rodrig..." with 👍
- 01:13:45 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Reacted to "College Financial Ai..." with ❤️
- 01:14:09 Lilia Hueso: Reacted to "College Financial Ai..." with ❤️
- 01:19:15 Susan Rose: Reacted to "That is Isaac Rodrig..." with 🙌
- 01:19:41 Sean Moran: That wasn't present in 2020-2021
- 01:20:18 Sean Moran: It may be CB-related
- 01:20:38 Sean Moran: We only got submitted data
- 01:20:46 Alyson Rotter: @Carolina Garza (she/her) I know we identified the challenge of no longer having the "old" view where we could see both the numerator and the denominator.
- 01:21:02 Alyson Rotter: But that's the only thing we know/recall that's changed in recent years
- 01:21:05 Dr. Bish Paul (He/Him) Gates Foundation: Regional WA Grant Awareness Campaigns- Update on Success
- The Financial Aid Awareness Communications Campaign Phase 1 (October, November and December 2025) has shown great performance so far.
- Topline: Almost 1 million visitors to the WA Grant Financial Aid page, and combined >500,000 visitors to the four Horizons regional campaign pages. There is now strong evidence that the campaign successfully drives users to the primary statewide application
- Pageviews increased from 275,616 → 961,774. That's a +249% increase (nearly 3.5× growth) year over year, compared to 2024 when there was no digital campaign.
- Additionally, regional campaign messaging that directs people to in person Financial Aid events in Walla Walla, Southwest WA, Peninsula and Puget Sound regions. Between October 6 and December 31, 2025, the Financial Aid awareness campaign drove more than 533,000 visits to regional financial aid resource pages, demonstrating flow from statewide messaging into localized support .
- 01:21:06 Alyson Rotter: *years
- 01:22:22 Alyson Rotter: Reacted to "Regional WA Grant Aw..." with 👍

- 01:26:33 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "Regional WA Grant Aw..." with 👍
- 01:27:05 Dr. Bish Paul (He/Him) Gates Foundation: Getting ready to launch! à Phase 2: February – June 2026 [regional campaign messaging including photos that directs people to in-person Financial Aid events]
- 01:28:25 Katie Tallman (she/her) | WSAC: Thanks, Bish! To clarify on regional marketing data, I believe those numbers are pageviews rather than unique visitors, but we can follow up with the marketing firm to confirm that.
- 01:29:04 Dr. Bish Paul (He/Him) Gates Foundation: Reacted to "Thanks, Bish! To cla..." with ❤️
- 01:32:35 Sean Moran: Reacted to "Thanks, Bish! To cla..." with 👍
- 01:36:49 Sean Moran: FAFSA Completion for High School Seniors | WSAC
- 01:36:53 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "FAFSA Completion for..." with 👍
- 01:37:08 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Reacted to "FAFSA Completion for..." with 👍
- 01:37:45 Sean Moran: We also have a piece on the school map where you can compare rates with other schools in the county/district
- 01:38:07 Isaac Kwakye: Reacted to "We also have a piece..." with 👍
- 01:38:18 Alyson Rotter: Reacted to "We also have a piece..." with 👍
- 01:46:40 Kathie Pham | WSAC, College Access Initiatives: Reacted to "We also have a piece..." with 👍
- 01:46:52 Dr. Bish Paul (He/Him) Gates Foundation: I think I missed the context for why April 20th as well. Could you remind us?
- 01:47:36 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Reacted to "We also have a piece..." with 👍
- 01:51:20 Alyson Rotter: This reminds me of the ol' "College Goal Sunday" efforts in WA. 😊
- 01:51:41 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Reacted to "This reminds me of t..." with ❤️
- 01:53:49 Kathie Pham | WSAC, College Access Initiatives: Reacted to "This reminds me of t..." with 💙

- 01:58:12 Ben Mitchell | Foundation for Tacoma Students: Thank you!
- 02:00:59 Rashel Wise | WSAC: Thank you, everyone!
- 02:01:06 Lilia Hueso: Thank you!!
- 02:01:13 Sean Moran: Bye everyone and hope y'all are taking care