

FAFSA Completion by High School Students: An Environmental Scan of Programs, Gaps, and Opportunities

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Introduction

Washington students who did not complete a FAFSA left about \$50 million in federal student financial aid money on the table¹. Further, Washington's national FAFSA completion ranking has been in the bottom five for several years. During the 2017-2018 school year, 46.7 percent of high school seniors completed the FAFSA, placing Washington 47th among all states in FAFSA completion. FAFSA completion can be a critical step for students seeking higher education opportunities. New policies in the state, such as the Washington College Grant, aim to make postsecondary tuition and fees more affordable. Students, however, must first complete the FAFSA to take advantage of this opportunity. Improving FAFSA completion rates has the potential to increase the impact of Washington's investment in college affordability, ensuring that more students have access to opportunities for higher education.

WSAC is exploring strategies to increase FAFSA completion in Washington. This environmental scan explores existing FAFSA completion efforts and programs and examines how resources provide assistance to students who are applying for college and financial aid. An online scan of programs and initiatives that serve students throughout the state reveals several engagement activities that lead to students receiving financial aid (a full list of organizations is listed in Appendix B).

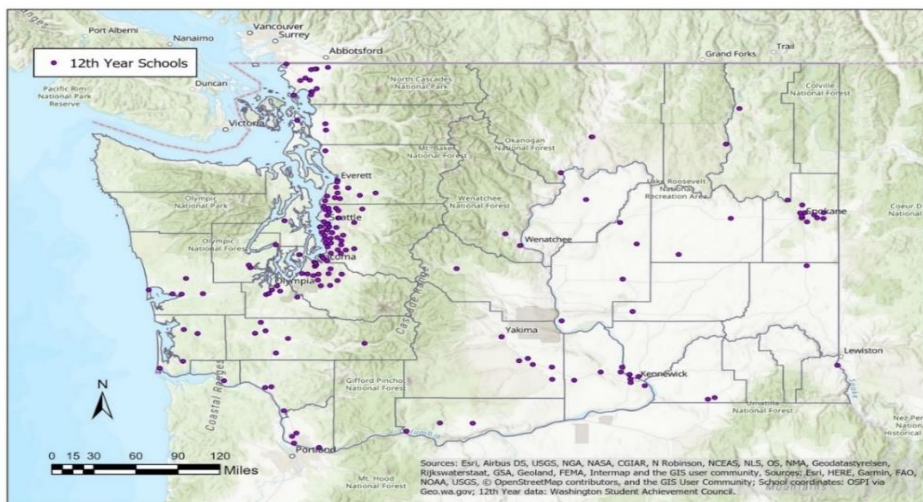
The following sections of this report describe existing programs at the state and regional levels and outline opportunities to expand program access to students in underserved areas.

What Programs Exist at the State Level?

Washington has generous state financial aid programs to help students afford college. However, students must complete FAFSA to receive aid. Maximizing the impact of state financial aid programs, and ensuring college access and affordability for more students, depends on more students completing FAFSA. WSAC administers several programs to assist students in applying for college and financial aid.

- The 12th Year Campaign aims to boost college and financial aid applications among high school seniors. During the 2018-19 school year, the program supported approximately 200 sites and partners (see participating school sites in Figure 1).
- Through the federally funded GEAR UP² program, WSAC provided postsecondary preparation services to over 5,500 students and their families in 26 high-poverty Washington school districts (see GEAR UP organizations and WSAC GEAR UP school locations in Figure 2).

Figure 1: Location of 12th-year Campaign Schools

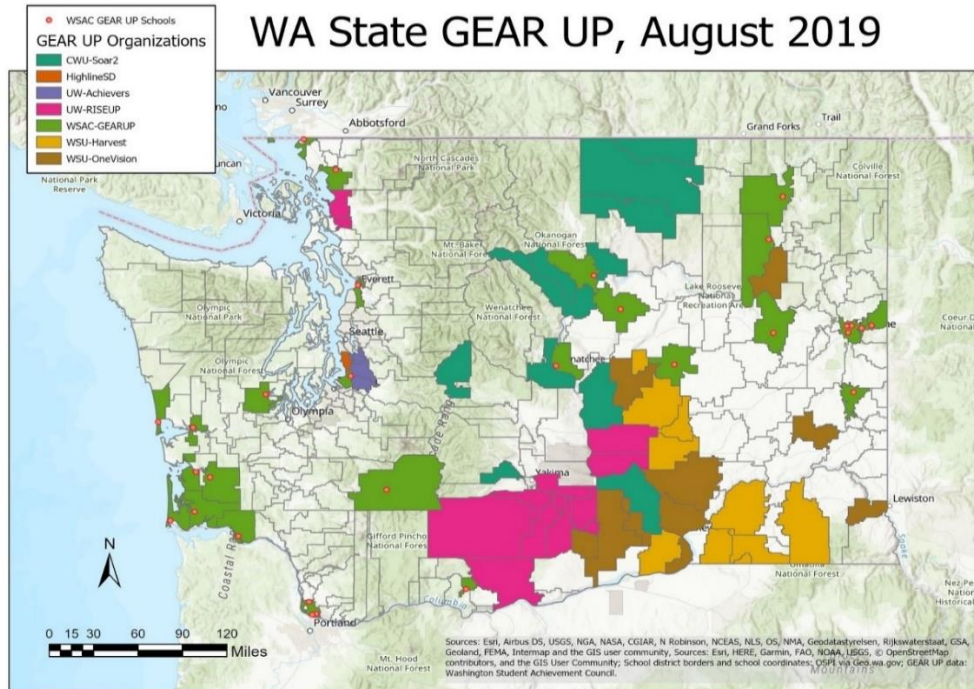


Fig

¹ Free Application for Federal Student Aid

² Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

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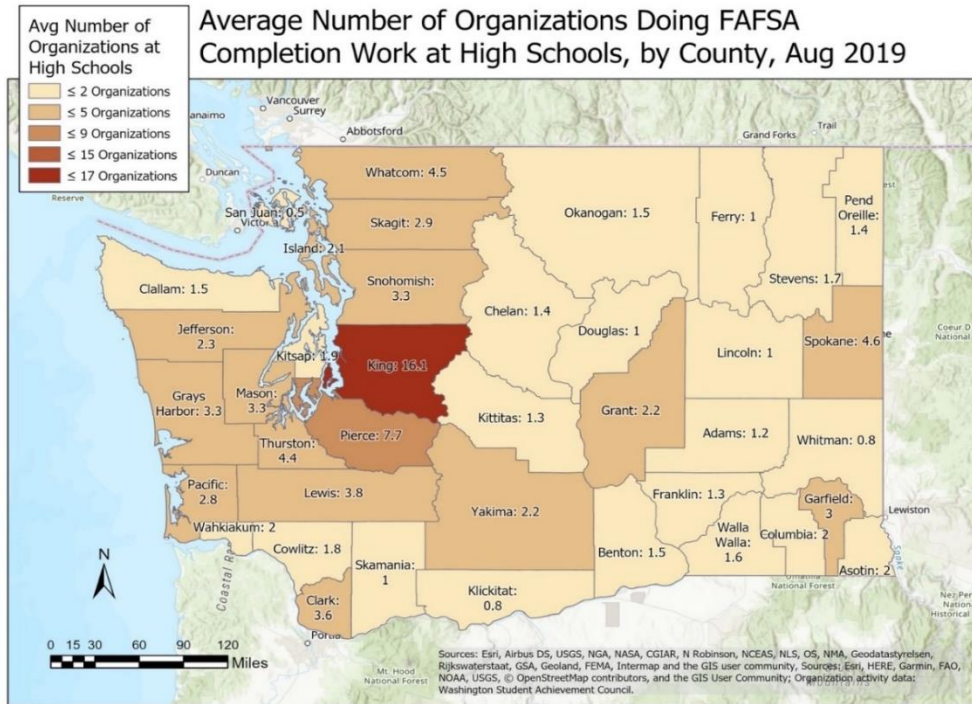
The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is also engaged in promoting FAFSA completion. Through curriculum development and the dissemination of relevant information, OSPI helps students understand financial aid options and other college enrollment steps. These activities help improve a college-going culture among middle and high school students in Washington.

- Career Guidance Washington (CGW) is a guidance and life planning curriculum for students in grades 6-12. It is designed to help students develop clear goals after high school and understand the steps they need to reach their dreams.

In addition to state agencies' programs, other organizations in Washington provide programs that directly and indirectly support FAFSA completion efforts and college access for students across the state.

- The Washington College Access Network (WCAN) is a statewide collective of professionals who work with K-12 districts and others to support low-income students in graduating high school and pursuing a postsecondary pathway.
- The Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling (PNACAC) promotes ethical standards and provides resources through its members to guide and empower students as they prepare for college admission.
- The Washington Financial Aid Association (WFAA) is a professional membership organization of individuals whose aim is to promote higher education through the availability, support, and administration of student financial assistance programs.
- The Washington Council for High School-College Relations (WCHSCR) is organized to assist all Washington State students in accessing and engaging in postsecondary opportunities at its member institutions.
- Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) engages thousands of educationally disadvantaged students, so they excel in math and science and graduate with math-based degrees. MESA partners with all segments of higher education as well as K-12 institutions.

Figure 6: Average number of organizations per high school engaging in FAFSA-related work, by county



What Programs Exist at the Regional Level? School and District Activity

Beyond those at the state and county levels, some programs operate more locally. These programs provide support to schools and districts to aid in FAFSA completion efforts. FAFSA completion rates vary widely across districts (Figures 7 and 8 demonstrate rates during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, respectively). As the county-level analysis above suggests, stark disparities in the availability of college access programs also exist at the district level. Extending the reach of programs to include students from areas with fewer resources could contribute to higher FAFSA completion rates and improve the college-going culture in Washington.

Figure 7: FAFSA Completion Rates for 2017-2018, by District

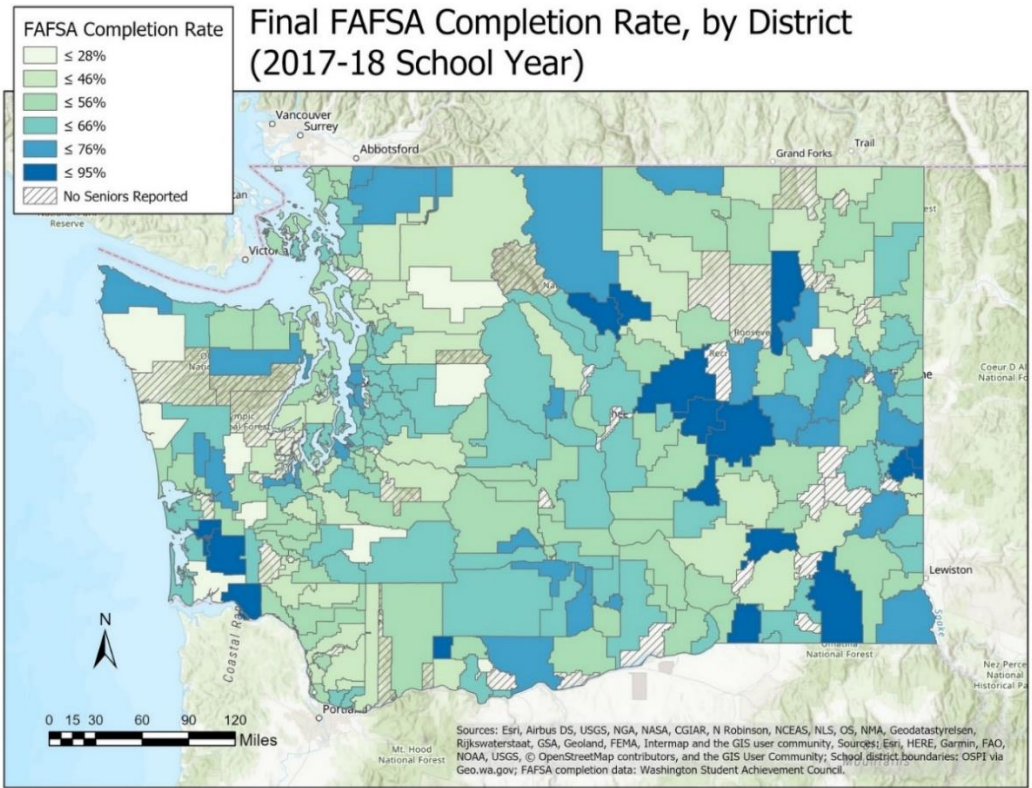
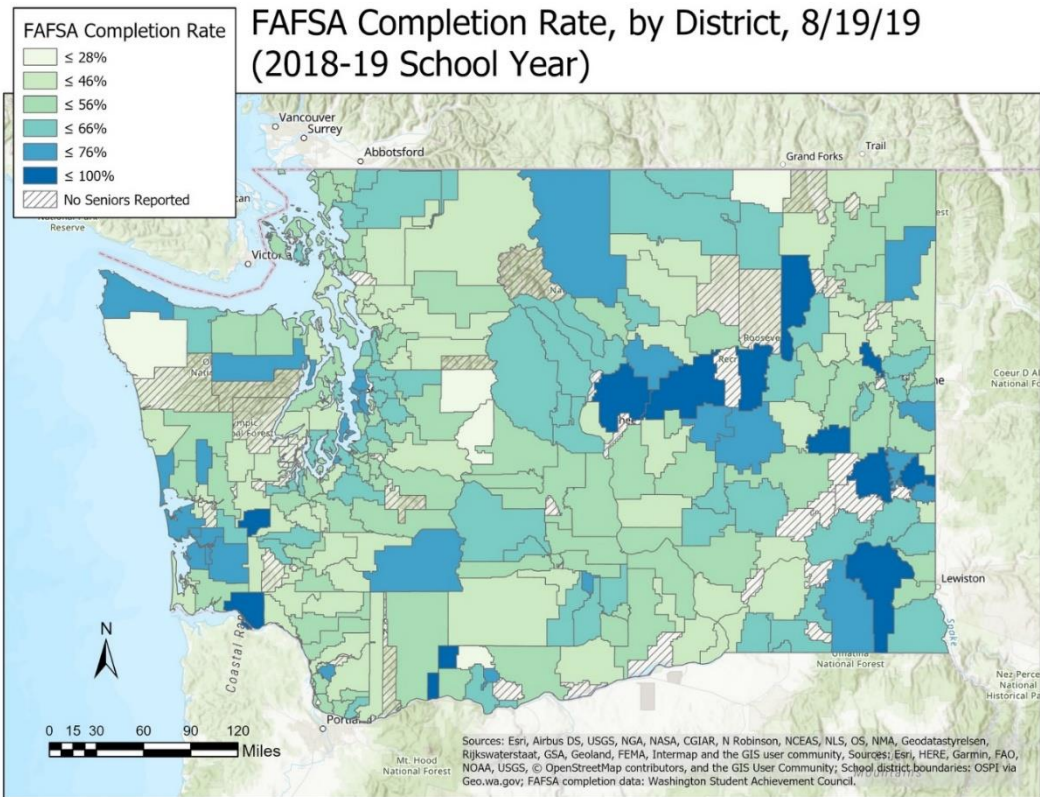


Figure 8: FAFSA Completion Rates for 2018-2019, by District



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At the school level, there are four organizations indirectly and directly engaged in FAFSA-related activity.

- The College Success Foundation (CSF) aims to improve underserved students' educational equity through an integrated system of supports and scholarships. Their HERO program serves students in eight schools in the Tacoma and Highline areas, while the CSF Achievers program works in 17 schools throughout the Seattle/Highline, Spokane/Yakima, and Tacoma school districts.
- The College Access Network/College Access Now (CAN) program builds intentional relationships with students to ensure they have the academic, financial, and socio-emotional skills and resources necessary to navigate the college journey and overcome barriers to college access and success. This program services students in two schools in the Seattle Public Schools district.
- The TRIO Talent Search Program identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who can succeed in higher education. The program provides academic, career, and financial counseling. TRIO services 44 schools in 19 school districts throughout the state.
- Upward Bound services a select number of students in selected schools throughout Washington. The program provides support to participants in their preparation for college entrance.

Nine programs work with local education agencies to enhance postsecondary enrollment and FAFSA completion at the district level.

- The Puget Sound College and Career Network (PSSCCN) serves high school juniors and seniors interested in specialized career and technical learning. PSSCCN services the 35 school districts located in the Puget Sound Educational Service District.
- The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative supports local after-school, before-school, and summer-learning programs to complement regular academic programs. The program operates in approximately 130 districts throughout the state.
- The Hilltop Scholars Program services students in Tacoma Public Schools and provides students with access to different support types during the school year. During their summer academic camp, for example, students can visit college campuses and engage with admission counselors.
- The OpenDoors program is a dropout reengagement system that provides education and services to older youth, ages 16-21, who have dropped out of school or are not expected to graduate from high school by the age of 21 years. The program services approximately 89 school districts throughout the state.
- The Rainier Scholars program provides intensive academic preparation, leadership development, and personalized support for low-income students of color. The program works with students in Seattle Public Schools.
- The Road Map Project is a collective impact initiative aimed at increasing equitable policies and practices so that at least 70 percent of South Seattle and South King County students earn a college degree or career credential by 2030.
- The Community Center for Education Results is a nonprofit created to serve as the Road Map Project's backbone organization. The team provides data, research, communications, program, logistical, and other support services to the initiative.
- The UW Dream Project provides middle and high school students in the greater Puget Sound area with college access and postsecondary planning through near-peer mentorship.
- The Rural Alliance emerged from college and career collaboration, focusing on postsecondary program completion & career readiness for rural students. The Alliance services approximately 72 school districts in Eastern Washington.
- The Highline School Foundation was established to support the work of Highline Public Schools and has a mission to unite community support for innovative and equitable learning across schools.

Community Organizations

Throughout the state, a handful of community organizations also contribute to FAFSA completion efforts and assist students through the college-going process. These programs provide services to students both inside and outside of school and support a broad array of students.

- The Southwest Youth and Family Service offers youth development programs in South King County.
- Neighborhood House in King County provides youth college and career readiness support.
- In Friday Harbor, the San Juan Family Resource Center matches first-generation high school juniors and seniors with a college graduate to provide guidance and mentoring toward a successful transition into higher education.
- Summer Search offers students mentoring and advising to support college success.
- The Seattle Jobs Initiative works with low-income individuals who want to obtain one- and two-year college credentials.
- Juma Ventures offers college preparation activities as part of its youth development initiative.
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters offer programs at their local offices designed to ensure that all Club members graduate from high school on time, ready for a postsecondary education and a 21st-century career.

Partnership Opportunities

Examining the number of programs that operate in high schools across the state reveals inequities in college access services for students. Following the county level pattern, high schools in Western Washington, and particularly around King and Pierce counties, have higher average numbers of providers per school. Schools in Eastern Washington tend to have fewer programs per school (shown in Figure 9). Expanding access to programs supporting high school students could improve FAFSA completion rates and college-going culture in Washington.

The patterns revealed in Figure 10 show a number of opportunity areas—schools with few programs nearby to schools with more. Perhaps organizational leaders in these areas can collaborate to serve more students. For instance, many rural schools east of the mountains are receiving FAFSA assistance from three organizations or less. However, Moses Lake and Coulee Dam each have schools with more service providers. The organizations in Moses Lake and Coulee Dam could expand their services to reach students at schools with fewer resources.

There is a similar pattern in other areas across the state. Yakima has several schools served by four to eight organizations, but many schools just outside of the city are served by three or less. The same pattern can be observed in Longview and Kennewick. There are many schools with only a few service providers in the city of Longview, just north of Vancouver, where schools have more support services for students. In Kennewick (specifically the Wenatchee, Walla Walla, and the Tri-Cities areas), several schools need supplemental support. It is striking how few organizations serve schools in Kitsap county, with Seattle across the Puget Sound. With increased capacity, organizations in Seattle could potentially expand their reach across the Sound. The same strategy might apply to Snohomish County. Nearby organizations in Seattle and Everett could expand their capacity to reach students in neighboring areas. WSAC could partner with organizations in these opportunity areas to help expand their services and reach more students.

Figure 9: Location of organizations doing FAFSA completion work at high schools

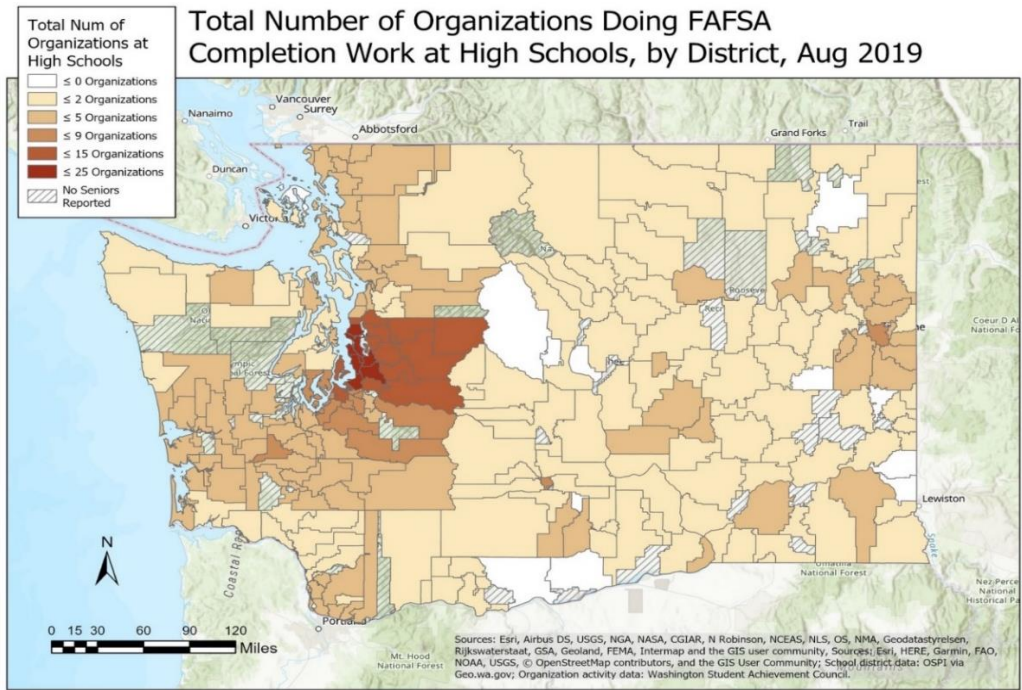
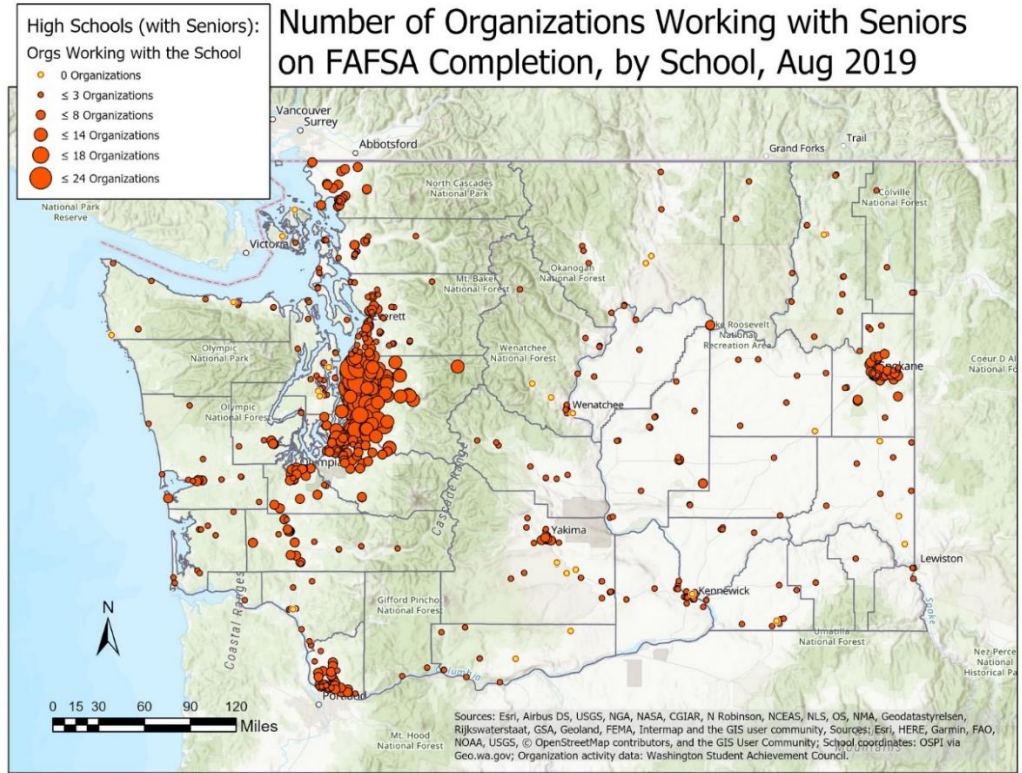


Figure 10: Location of organizations working with high schools



Conclusion

Affordability is among the main barriers to postsecondary access and enrollment, particularly for low-income and historically underrepresented students. Washington has made significant investments in financial aid programs to help students afford college costs, but completing the FAFSA is a requirement to receive aid. Historically, low FAFSA completion is an ongoing issue that must be addressed to open higher education opportunities for more Washington students.

While programs do exist to help Washington high school students in applying for college and financial aid, they are not broadly accessible. Creating collaborative networks and partnerships between organizations within and across regions will enhance programs critical to improving FAFSA completion rates. Increasing FAFSA completion can not only increase the impact of Washington's investment in financial aid programs, but it can also reduce barriers to postsecondary programs and ensure a brighter future for more Washington students.

Appendix A

Figure A1. Number of Schools and Average Number Organizations at the School, by County

County	Number of Schools in County	Average Number of Orgs Per School
Adams	5	1
Asotin	5	2
Benton	19	2
Chelan	14	1
Clallam	15	2
Clark	47	4
Columbia	1	2
Cowlitz	16	2
Douglas	5	1
Ferry	5	1
Franklin	8	1
Garfield	1	3
Grant	15	2
Grays Harbor	17	3
Island	9	2
Jefferson	7	2
King	131	16
Kitsap	23	2
Kittitas	9	1
Klickitat	10	1
Lewis	20	4
Lincoln	7	1
Mason	9	3
Okanogan	17	1
Pacific	10	3
Pend Oreille	5	1

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Pierce	66	8
San Juan	6	1
Skagit	18	3
Skamania	2	1
Snohomish	71	3
Spokane	60	5
Stevens	19	2
Thurston	22	4
Wahkiakum	1	2
Walla Walla	11	2
Whatcom	22	4
Whitman	10	1
Yakima	35	2

Appendix B

Figure B1. List of Organizations by the Level of Operation

Statewide
College Bound
OSPI Career Tech Education
Passport to College
Running Start
Supplemental Education Transition Planning Program (SETuP)
Washington College Access Network (WCAN)
Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling (PNACAC)
Washington Financial Aid Association (WFAA)
The Washington Council for High School-College Relations (WCHSCR)
Career Guidance
College Goal Washington
Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA)
County/City

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Access to College
Act Six
Washington Campus Compact
Seattle Education Access
The Tacoma College Support Network
FuturesNW
YMCA
School/District
College Success Foundation
College Access Network
TRIO Talent Search
Puget Sound Skills Center
Upward Bound
The 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Hilltop Scholars
OpenDoors
The Bridge to College
Rainier
Roadmap Project
CCER
UW Dream Project
Rural Alliance
Highline School Foundation:
Community
Southwest Youth and Family Service
Neighborhood House
San Juan Family Resource Center
Big Brothers and Big Sisters

Seattle Jobs Initiative
Juma Ventures
Summer Search

Appendix C

Figure B1. List of Organizations by County

County	Organization
Adams County	Century
Adams County	RuralAll
Adams County	UpwardBound
Asotin County	Century
Asotin County	OpenDoors
Asotin County	RuralAll
Benton County	Century
Benton County	Bridge
Benton County	RuralAll
Benton County	UpwardBound
Chelan County	Century
Chelan County	OpenDoors
Chelan County	Bridge
Chelan County	RuralAll
Clallam County	Century
Clallam County	Bridge
Clallam County	UpwardBound
Clark County	Century
Clark County	OpenDoors
Clark County	Bridge
Clark County	WACC
Clark County	RuralAll
Clark County	UpwardBound
Columbia County	Century
Columbia County	RuralAll
Cowlitz County	Century
Cowlitz County	OpenDoors
Cowlitz County	Bridge
Douglas County	Bridge
Douglas County	RuralAll
Ferry County	RuralAll
Franklin County	Century
Franklin County	UpwardBound
Garfield County	Century
Garfield County	Bridge
Garfield County	RuralAll
Grant County	OpenDoors
Grant County	Bridge
Grant County	WACC

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Grant County	RuralAll
Grant County	UpwardBound
Grays Harbor County	Century
Grays Harbor County	OpenDoors
Grays Harbor County	Bridge
Grays Harbor County	BBBS
Island County	OpenDoors
Island County	Bridge
Island County	BBBS
Jefferson County	Century
Jefferson County	OpenDoors
Jefferson County	Bridge
Jefferson County	UpwardBound
King County	Century
King County	Act6
King County	CAN
King County	CSFAchieve
King County	CSFCCC
King County	CSFHeros
King County	GSP
King County	OpenDoors
King County	Bridge
King County	Rainier
King County	RMP
King County	TRIOTS
King County	Dream
King County	WACC
King County	SEA
King County	RuralAll
King County	CCER
King County	PSCCN
King County	YMCA
King County	HighlineSF
King County	SYFS
King County	NeighHouse
King County	BBBS
King County	SJI
King County	Juma
King County	SummerSearch
King County	UpwardBound
Kitsap County	Century
Kitsap County	OpenDoors
Kitsap County	Bridge
Kitsap County	PSCCN
Kittitas County	WACC
Kittitas County	RuralAll

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Klickitat County	Century
Lewis County	Century
Lewis County	OpenDoors
Lewis County	Bridge
Lewis County	TRIOTS
Lewis County	RuralAll
Lewis County	BBBS
Lewis County	UpwardBound
Lincoln County	Bridge
Lincoln County	RuralAll
Mason County	Century
Mason County	OpenDoors
Mason County	Bridge
Mason County	BBBS
Mason County	UpwardBound
Okanogan County	Century
Okanogan County	OpenDoors
Okanogan County	Bridge
Okanogan County	RuralAll
Okanogan County	UpwardBound
Pacific County	Century
Pacific County	OpenDoors
Pacific County	Bridge
Pacific County	BBBS
Pend Oreille County	Century
Pend Oreille County	RuralAll
Pierce County	Century
Pierce County	Access2College
Pierce County	Act6
Pierce County	CSFAchieve
Pierce County	CSFCCC
Pierce County	CSFHeros
Pierce County	Hilltop
Pierce County	OpenDoors
Pierce County	Bridge
Pierce County	TRIOTS
Pierce County	WACC
Pierce County	TCSN
Pierce County	PSCCN
Pierce County	BBBS
Pierce County	UpwardBound
San Juan County	Bridge
San Juan County	SanJuanFRC
Skagit County	Century
Skagit County	OpenDoors
Skagit County	Bridge
Skagit County	TRIOTS
Skagit County	WACC
Skagit County	FuturesNW

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Skamania County	Century
Snohomish County	Century
Snohomish County	GSP
Snohomish County	OpenDoors
Snohomish County	Bridge
Snohomish County	TRIOTS
Snohomish County	WACC
Snohomish County	PSCCN
Snohomish County	BBBS
Spokane County	Century
Spokane County	Act6
Spokane County	CSFAchieve
Spokane County	CSFCCC
Spokane County	OpenDoors
Spokane County	Bridge
Spokane County	WACC
Spokane County	RuralAll
Spokane County	BBBS
Stevens County	OpenDoors
Stevens County	Bridge
Stevens County	RuralAll
Stevens County	UpwardBound
Thurston County	Century
Thurston County	OpenDoors
Thurston County	Bridge
Thurston County	TRIOTS
Thurston County	WACC
Thurston County	BBBS
Thurston County	UpwardBound
Wahkiakum County	Century
Wahkiakum County	Bridge
Walla Walla County	Century
Walla Walla County	OpenDoors
Walla Walla County	Bridge
Walla Walla County	RuralAll
Whatcom County	Century
Whatcom County	Futures
Whatcom County	OpenDoors
Whatcom County	Bridge
Whatcom County	WACC
Whatcom County	FuturesNW
Whatcom County	UpwardBound
Whitman County	Bridge
Whitman County	RuralAll
Yakima County	Act6
Yakima County	CSFAchieve
Yakima County	CSFCCC
Yakima County	OpenDoors
Yakima County	Bridge
Yakima County	TRIOTS

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Yakima County	RuralAll
Yakima County	UpwardBound