



Washington's **NEW** financial aid advising day

By: Sarah Weiss, Associate Director of College Access and Support, Washington Student Achievement Council, sarahwe@wsac.wa.gov

Financial aid matters. Nationally, seniors who complete a financial aid application are 84% more likely to enroll in postsecondary education. The rate is even higher for students from lower-income families.¹ From an apprenticeship program to a two-or four-year college degree, education beyond high school prepares students for jobs that move them beyond minimum wage. Even a one-year credential program at a community or technical college can increase future earnings.

Districts across Washington have an exciting opportunity to provide students with new support by sharing critical information for planning life after high school. Financial aid advising days, created with the passage of [ESSB 6141](#) in

the 2020 legislative session, are an opportunity to focus on educational equity related to students pursuing postsecondary education.

You may have heard the word “equity” frequently used lately. It is a critical lens to ground our support of students in their educational pursuits, especially when we are talking about access to postsecondary education. Last year, the Legislature passed [E2SHB 1599](#), which took steps to expand access to critical financial aid information for students through the High School and Beyond Plan. Financial aid advising day provides an opportunity to take this important work one step further by ensuring all students have specific access to this critical information.

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¹“National FAFSA Completion Rates for High School Seniors and Graduates—National College Access Network.” Accessed October 31, 2019. <https://collegeaccess.org/page/NationalFAFSACompletionRatesforHighSchoolSeniorsandGraduates>.

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What is a Financial Aid Advising Day?

A financial aid advising day is a day (or series of days) occurring by December 1 of each year, which includes, but is not limited to, dedicated time during regular school hours for staff to:

- Provide information to twelfth-grade students on the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA), the Washington application for state financial aid (WASFA), and the College Board's CSS profile;
- When appropriate and possible, assist twelfth-grade students in completing the FAFSA and WASFA;
- In conjunction with the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), distribute information on the Washington College Grant and demonstrate the use of the college financial aid calculator.

Model Policy
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Financial Aid
Advising (NEW)

Financial aid advising days are an opportunity to provide every senior and their family with key resources and knowledge for completing the financial aid application process. Access to this support is especially important for seniors who come from communities that have been historically underrepresented in higher education institutions.

This support is truly invaluable to young people in all our communities, especially during these unprecedented times. Many districts across the state may already be leading in this endeavor by offering financial aid support opportunities similar to the requirements of a financial aid advising day, which is great!

Financial Aid Advising Days and the Washington College Grant

The Washington College Grant changes the conversation with young people and expands their choices concerning access to opportunities after high school. From welding to nursing, from English to computer science — whether an 18-month apprenticeship or four-year college degree — whatever the student's goal, the Washington College Grant can help. By fully funding this program, expanding eligibility criteria, and extending funding to registered apprenticeships, the Washington College Grant is Washington state's groundbreaking commitment to provide access to financial aid for low- and middle-income people of all ages.

The first step towards accessing the Washington College Grant and other forms of financial aid is completing a FAFSA or WASFA. Applying for financial aid is also a key predictor of enrollment

in postsecondary education. Get to know your district's FAFSA completion rates at www.wsac.wa.gov/fafsa-completion

Have No Fear—the 12th Year Campaign is Here

Washington ranks low in financial aid application completion — 48th in the country as of July 2020. However, schools that participate in WSAC's 12th Year Campaign have a completion rate of 11 percent higher than schools that do not participate in this state-sponsored support program. The 12th Year Campaign boosts college and financial aid application rates in Washington by helping those working with high school seniors and their families to complete college admissions and financial aid applications. 12th Year Campaign sites receive free training, printed and digital materials, and other resources to support their students. WSAC is preparing to increase the number of sites utilizing these supports as we work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to coordinate a financial aid advising day opportunity in every district that has a high school.

The 12th Year Campaign's newly designed website is a one-stop shop for districts implementing financial aid advising days and the financial aid information components to the High School and Beyond Plan. Visit www.wsac.wa.gov/12th-year-campaign to access all that the 12th Year Campaign can offer. The supports of the 12th Year Campaign can be provided virtually, or with hard copy materials, in these unique times to ensure all students receive the information they need.

Let's Do This!

While WSAC and OSPI staff are currently collaborating with WSSDA to develop the guidance and resources to help districts implement the new financial aid advising day initiative, WSAC's 12th Year Campaign will be your district's primary support system. Please contact us with any questions, concerns, or to schedule a planning session. We are here to help you support the students in your communities to access their postsecondary dreams.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Weiss serves as the Associate Director of College Access and Support at the Washington Student Achievement Council. She previously served as the Director of Admission at Saint Martin's University and in several admissions roles at Southern Oregon University. She also served as the Membership Chair for the Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling. Sarah holds a BA from Willamette University and a MA in Higher Education Administration from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is also the proud daughter of a former school director!

