

## News release



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### **FAFSA season is here, and IT MATTERS!**

*Just going through the FAFSA process can be a game-changer for students' futures*

*"If students don't think they can pay for college, they won't apply for college. Giving more young people access to the tools they need to apply for federal student aid is a key part of our strategy to make America number one in the world for college graduates by 2020," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Duncan and others believe that boosting the number of students who have access to federal student aid will, "... help dramatically boost the number of high schoolers going on to college. **That's good for the economy, good for the kids, and good for the country.**"*

Three years ago, the district was chosen as one of [fewer than 100 districts in the nation](#) to test a new way of motivating students to set their sights on college and other learning after high school. In that test, the U.S. Department of Education supported and relied upon high school staff to encourage students to "fill out the FAFSA."

Because the FAFSA form can be complex, especially to those who have never before dealt with governmental forms, the test effort included college goal-setting events, seminars and workshops for parents. The test efforts included and continue to feature *College Goal* weekends like those kicking off at Everett High School in January.

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**District College Goal events**  
Kick off Sat., Jan. 10 at EHS

**Get help with Cash for College.** Filling out the [Free Application for Financial Student Aid](#) (FAFSA) is much easier with help. Three hours in a series to get that help launch on **Saturday, Jan. 10** at Everett High School, in the library from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

#### **Also that day:**

- 11 a.m. – noon – *All About Scholarships and College Bound Scholarship Updates* (Gear Up, 3rd floor computer lab)
- Noon – 1 p.m. – *Preparing for your Future with Naviance* (3rd floor computer lab)

**Cascade High School College Goal event, Thurs., Jan. 22,**  
5 – 8 p.m.

**Henry M. Jackson High School College Goal event,**  
**Sat., Jan. 31, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.**

More information available  
through high school counselors

"We want FAFSA to be a rite of passage for every high school student," explained Director of Student Support Services, Becky Ballbach. "It's a natural next step in the support and encouragement students have gotten beginning in elementary school when schools encourage students to dream big and set goals for what they want to learn and be in the future."

In 2012-13, when the district was one of the nation's first FAFSA focus districts, FAFSA work was concentrated at just two high schools. Jeanne Willard, who oversees the district's on-time graduation work, noted the work at those two schools was so successful, "Staff, students and parents were eager to begin that process at all four of our high schools."

The district does not have data on how many students completed the FAFSA before 2011-12 (that information was not available through the U.S. Department of Education until later). Last school year, during FAFSA season 2013-14, completion rates varied from 49 to 58 percent at Cascade, Everett, Henry M. Jackson and Sequoia high schools. "While it's good to know that we have a bit more than half of eligible students filling out the FAFSA, half is not good enough," said Willard. "We want that number to increase this year."

The improved FAFSA access in Everett Public Schools was one of the reasons Ballbach and Willard were invited to attend a White House convening on *Strengthening School Counseling and College Access*. The duo was part of a team from Washington state who joined 400 others from 32 states representing universities, K-12 schools, community agencies, non-profits, government agencies and donor and funder partnerships at San Diego State University in November.

"In a jam-packed, whirlwind two-day session we worked with others around the country who are making collaborative commitments to advance the college and career readiness objectives," said Ballbach. "This is work aligned to President Obama's college opportunity agenda and the First Lady's Reach Higher Initiative. Those of us from Washington state committed to working statewide to *'Provide opportunities to develop strategic partnerships with donors, funders, and researchers interested in evaluating or supporting any or all of this work, promoting new systemic change models, and discovering evidence-based practices to support school counselors and the students they serve.'*"

Willard notes that there is now a Washington state task force focused on that work. "We will meet regularly to build strategic partnerships so we will have a unified and collective impact. We will use statewide data to measure and to achieve college access and success for all Washington students. FAFSA season is a highlight in our efforts, but it's just one piece of pre-school-through-high-school-and-beyond collaborative work to prepare students for their futures."

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