



# **HB 1835 FINANCIAL AID OUTREACH AND COMPLETION PILOT REPORT**

***WASHINGTON STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY  
AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES***

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# Executive Summary

To help increase financial aid awareness and application completion among Washington students, the Washington state Legislature established the Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Pilot Program in 2022 with the passage of 2HB 1835. The bill included multiple intervention strategies across multiple organizations and regions to increase financial aid awareness and application completion among Washington students.

The bill specified that a financial aid outreach pilot would be launched in the two Educational Service Districts (ESDs) that had the lowest financial aid completion rates over three years — 2019, 2020, and 2021 — identified by Washington Student Achievement Council data.

Since the pilot's launch in the 2022-2023 academic year, each of the pilot regions has seen an increase in financial aid completion for both the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Washington State Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA). Each of the pilot colleges established outreach teams and immediately began providing high-touch and consistent support to students.

By providing a series of intervention strategies through high-touch support, community engagement with the state libraries, and marketing campaigns to increase financial aid awareness, 2HB 1835 is an innovative approach to increasing the number of students applying for financial aid. In less than one year, the pilot program has shown incredible success because of the dedicated and highly effective teams at the colleges.

## Introduction

The Financial Aid Outreach Pilot launched fall 2022 in the two Educational Service Districts with the lowest financial aid completion rates between 2019 and 2021, as required by 2HB 1835. These were ESD 114, which covers the north Olympic Peninsula and the Kitsap Peninsula, and ESD 123, which covers southeast Washington. ESD 114 partnered with Olympic College (Bremerton) and Peninsula College (Port Angeles), and ESD 123 partnered with Big Bend Community College (Moses Lake), Columbia Basin College (Pasco), and Walla Walla Community College.

The partner colleges established outreach teams, which were staffed at a ratio of one outreach specialist per 600 high school seniors. The primary focus of these outreach teams was to support students with completing financial aid applications.

The bill and pilot program are intentionally inclusive of all students. In Washington state, financial aid is available to students who are:

- U.S. citizens and/or students eligible for federal aid with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Undocumented resident students — also known as “dreamers” — who may not be eligible for federal aid due to immigration status but who can access state aid with the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA).

In the summer of 2022, when 2HB 1835 went into effect, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Student Services department immediately began coordinating with pilot college leadership to begin developing outreach teams. Pilot campuses were given

flexibility to determine where in their organization their teams were placed and how to determine the outreach regions for staff.

In the pilot’s first six months, each college established outreach teams, and by the end of the academic year, all the outreach teams were fully staffed. Additionally, the outreach staff were able to begin connecting one-on-one with students and families.

## Partnerships

Aim Higher Washington is a partnership between multiple higher education entities working together to share information, training, resources, and transparency. This partnership is inclusive of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), Council of Presidents, the Independent Colleges of Washington, the Washington State Library, financial aid directors from 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities across the state, and community-based organizations.

WSAC and libraries were critical partners in outreach efforts. The bill specified WSAC would conduct a statewide marketing campaign to increase awareness of the Washington College Grant and financial aid access. Similarly, libraries were to conduct community-based outreach in the same ESDs focusing on students and families who may be outside of the K-12 system – such as returning students and adult students – to complete FAFSA and WASFA completion rates. WASC and the libraries were provided funding in the state budget for these efforts.

A team of key leads from the State Board, WSAC, and the libraries met twice monthly to review the status of the pilot program, align efforts, and coordinate strategies to support the pilot program and look for ways to increase financial aid completion.

## Pilot Funding

Pilot program funding was directed by legislative mandate. Outreach teams were required to be staffed at a ratio of one outreach staff person per 600 high school seniors. Data provided by The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction showed high school senior headcounts for the identified ESD regions totaling 11,000. Thus, 19 outreach specialists were required to meet the one staff person per 600 students ratio.

The bill’s fiscal note concluded that \$1,500,000 would be necessary to hire the required 19 outreach specialists at a base \$80,000 salary and benefits. The State Board was allocated the full amount for fiscal year 2023, which was distributed directly to the pilot colleges. Colleges were distributed their allocations at the start of the fiscal year, July 2022.

ESD	College	Allocation	Expenditures	Remaining Balance
114	Olympic College	\$400,000.00	\$400,000.00	-
114	Peninsula College	\$240,000.00	\$240,000.00	-
123	Big Bend Community College	\$50,000	\$50,000.00	-
123	Columbia Basin College	\$700,000.00	\$438,333.45	\$261,666.55
123	Walla Walla Community College	\$160,000.00	\$80,151.80	\$79,848.20

Funding provided the guidelines in which the pilot colleges began to structure and create their outreach teams. Colleges were given broad flexibility to determine where their outreach teams sat within their institutions and established team structures to match their allocations.

ESD	College	Staff	Position(s)
114	Olympic College	5	1 Assistant Director, 4 Outreach Specialists
114	Peninsula College	3	3 Outreach Specialists
123	Big Bend Community College	1	1 Outreach Specialist
123	Columbia Basin College	8	1 Assistant Manager, 7 Outreach Specialists
123	Walla Walla Community College	2	2 Financial Aid Outreach Specialists

## Pilot Regions

After the State Board identified the pilot regions, staff began to assess the dynamics of each region. State Board staff had to identify which colleges were located within the identified ESDs. The service regions for the ESDs and community college districts do not directly overlap, which required some intentional partnership between the colleges to align regional territories. To contextualize the region at the K-12 level, State Board staff also looked at number of counties, schools, and school districts. Looking into each of the regional districts allowed for a clear understanding of the interconnected layers between the different organizations.

These characteristics helped pilot leads at the colleges understand the opportunities and challenges with developing outreach and engagement strategies. Outreach teams had to be mindful of these elements as they began providing direct support to students and families. Reviewing the multitude of attributes of pilot region allowed for outreach team leads to consider their community partners, college district partners, and how they wanted to assign regions to their outreach staff. Campus leadership began to establish their outreach specialist regional territories either by individual school, districts, or staff skillset.

An interesting element that was discovered in the first year of the pilot was that despite the geographic location of the two pilot ESD regions – one Olympic and Kitsap peninsulas and the other southeast Washington – at opposite corners of the state, we found a handful of unexpected similarities between the two.

- Each region had areas of population and resource density, as well as large territories with small populations and resources deserts.
- Each region had a college with a large team of five to eight staff members and a college with a smaller team of one to three staff members.
- Each had pockets of their region that had higher populations of undocumented students.

These similarities allowed for the outreach teams to see how they could share best practices, lessons learned, and strategize as a collective group within the pilot. Additionally, it provided a community of practice for problem solving, idea exchanging, and innovation. This connection gave the pilot staff at the State Board an opportunity to see how the work is applicable beyond the two pilot regions to the entire state.

# Financial Aid Completion Data

The first year of the outreach pilot program showed an increase in financial aid outreach and application completion rates. This is especially notable given that the pilot was launched just as financial aid applications opened for the year, which is the busiest time of year for financial aid access work.

Pilot colleges utilized WSAC’s Financial Aid Portal which houses the state’s financial aid completion data, giving outreach teams access to school-level FAFSA data, including applications that are complete, incomplete, and those with errors. This allows staff a comprehensive understanding of a school’s progress to better prioritize outreach strategies and regional needs.

WSAC does not provide or publish completion rate data for WASFA applications to ensure the identities of undocumented students and families remain protected. Therefore, colleges had to start tracking WASFA completion without the same level of data that is available for the FAFSA, like previous completion rates and population estimates. Colleges had to develop mindful, yet more nuanced and labor intensive, financial aid tracking practices to balance outreach efforts and identity protection. As this data is critical to the success of the pilot the colleges, the State Board partnered with WSAC to identify a solution for WASFA data. WSAC determined it could provide the pilot colleges monthly WASFA completion updates. This allowed colleges outreach teams to see how their tracking aligned with WSAC completion data.

## 2021-22 Completion Data

Region	College	Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD114	Olympic College	2021-22	41%	39
ESD114	Peninsula College	2021-22	33%	237
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2021-22	46%	133
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2021-22	43%	223
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2021-22	51%	63
				Total: 695

## 2022-23 Completion Data

Region	College	Year	FAFSA Completion Rate	WASFA Completion Count
ESD114	Olympic College	2022-23	45%	69
ESD114	Peninsula College	2022-23	36%	440
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2022-23	54%	242
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2022-23	50%	380
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2022-23	56%	120
				Total: 1,251

After the pilot year, both regions saw an increase in FAFSA and WASFA financial aid application completion. In 2021-22 the aggregate FAFSA completion rate for both ESDs was 42%, and in 2022-23 the aggregate completion rate was 48%, a six-point increase. In 2021-22, 695 students completed the WASFA, and in 2022-23, that number increased to 1,251, an 80% increase.

## Outreach Efforts

Pilot outreach teams immediately began providing direct support to students at the start of the 2022-23 academic year. In total, across both regions, the pilot provided support to 7,240 students, of whom 5,515 were seniors.

While pilot colleges focused their efforts on supporting seniors, the financial aid application process can and should start prior to a student’s senior year. Additionally, it is not uncommon for a student to include family members in their financial aid process, which may bring a younger sibling or peer along the way. Thus, many of the pilot colleges also supported juniors, sophomores, family members, and community members in addition to seniors. Outreach specialists treated their work as a holistic and inclusive process. Teams noted that making their support exclusive was not necessarily in the best interests of the pilot, and that including juniors and other students in their work allowed for early engagement for the second year of the pilot.

Region	College	Year	Seniors Served	Students Served
ESD114	Olympic College	2022-23	1,117	2,886
ESD114	Peninsula College	2022-23	403	703
ESD123	Big Bend Community College	2022-23	67	87
ESD123	Columbia Basin College	2022-23	2,453	2,453
ESD123	Walla Walla Community College	2022-23	1,111	1,111
			Total: 5,151	Total: 7,240

## Lessons Learned

After the pilot’s first year, colleges learned several important lessons, outlined here. The next section expands on what was learned and provides suggestions for next steps and areas of improvement.

### Technology

- Each of the outreach teams identified a plethora of technology-related issues. These included inconsistent internet access, Chromebook incompatibility with the FAFSA, school and school district firewalls, printers, or cell phones. All teams shared that technology was a consistent and exceptionally large barrier both for students and team members’ ability to provide outreach support.
- Outreach teams needed time and support to establish trust with schools and other partners around data and training. Some outreach staff were able to get access to building resources and others were not. This meant that a lot of work was put into finding workaround solutions for technology, such as finding ways to get printing privileges, hot-spotting internet in parking lots, and using multiple devices for one financial aid application.

## Time needed to build relationships with ESDs, districts, high school principals, and counselors.

- The pilot would have benefited from marketing or promotional efforts. Pilot regions were identified through the legislative direction, not through a self-selection or application process. This, at times, made the pilot appear to be punitive in nature rather than capacity enhancing. Additionally, the timing of the pilot's launch coincided with the end of the academic year and the start of the state's fiscal year. This led to a disconnect between the K-12 sector and pilot outreach teams.
- Consistency is key. The critical function of the pilot is to provide high touch support to students in the financial aid application process. When outreach staff had a regular and consistent presence, they had better outcomes with students and schools. All pilot colleges shared that where they had consistent and regular schedule in school buildings, it was easier to engage in their outreach efforts.

## Partnerships

- Partnership with libraries and CBOs proved to be a vital resource for current students, their families, and returning adult students. Library funding did not continue after the close of the 2023 fiscal year, a significant loss to the pilot as it cut off a potential partner for outreach events and space for students and their families. Libraries provide a necessary and critical safe space for community members that operate outside of the school day hours, enhancing accessibility for students and returning learners.
- Colleges were able to leverage partnerships with some CBOs and outreach partners to increase engagement and capacity. WSAC's 12<sup>th</sup> Year Campaign has had a regular and critical role in training and supporting all the pilot campuses.

## Recommendations

### Pilot funding

- As the pilot is subject to funding provided from the Legislature, prioritizing the continued investment into this pilot would allow the sector to see the full potential of the program. The pilot is still too early to know the significance of its impact on students.
- To meet the needs of the pilot's data tracking, the State Board and pilot colleges would benefit from an investment in staff and technology. Staff capacity at the State Board is limited without additional support to meet the emerging needs of the pilot program.
- Re-establish the funding for the Washington Library and the financial aid outreach pilot. The loss of this funding to a key partner cut short an opportunity to engage financial aid outreach at a holistic level.



## More effective outreach tracking

- Outside of WSAC's FAFSA portal and monthly WASFA data updates, all other data such as outreach efforts and student engagement were tracked manually by the pilot colleges. College teams commonly used Excel or Google Sheets to track outreach efforts, requiring a significant amount of manual work and creating a potential for data inconsistency. Investing in a tracking system compatible with ctcLink, the community and technical college's ERP software system, could more accurately track data and effectively support the pilot.

## Enhanced coordination with K-12 partners

- Increasing awareness about the pilot through enhanced relationships with schools and community partners is necessary for pilot success. Most of this 2022–23 academic year outreach teams focused on relationship building, as it takes a significant amount of time to build trust and rapport. Relationships would be enhanced with more marketing and promotion of the pilots from all levels.
- Maintain consistent access to space at K-12 school buildings. Outreach specialists indicated varied space to work with students across their regions and school buildings. This presented a challenging barrier as the pilot requires the outreach specialists to directly support students at their schools.

## Policy and program guidance

- Refine 2HB 1835 to clarify data collection guidelines, application and outreach tracking, outreach specialist roles, and the critical role of the K-12 system. This would ensure all partners understand the purpose of the pilot project and how it should be implemented and measured for success.

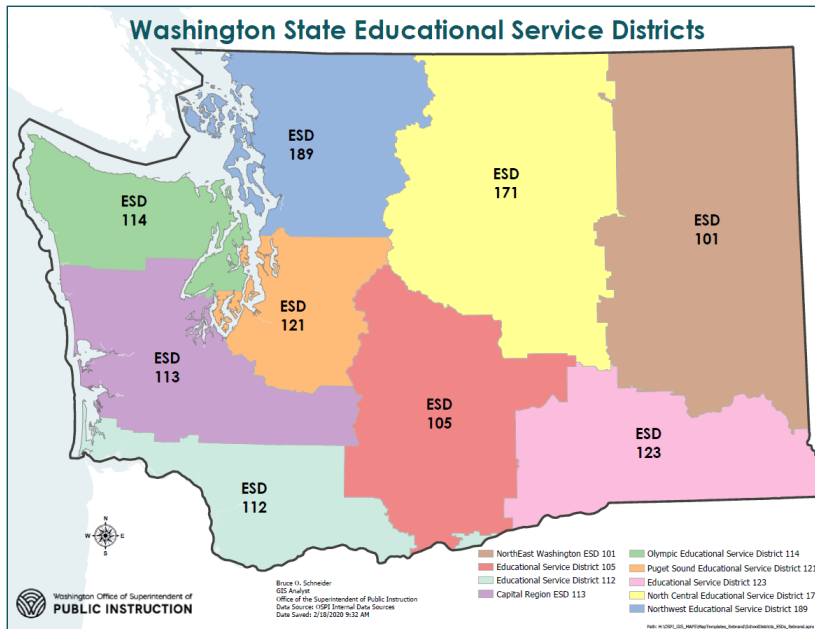
## Conclusion

The first year of the Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Pilot Program showed promising results. Outreach teams at five pilot colleges — Big Bend Community College, Columbia Basin College, Olympic College, Peninsula College, and Walla Walla Community College — along with their partners — Educational Service Districts 114 and 123, as well as the Washington Student Achievement Council, local libraries, and community-based organizations — built relationships with students, their families, and high schools to help more students complete FAFSA and WASFA applications. The teams' consistent and accessible support as trusted advisors removed stigma and fear about the financial aid process. The outcome was an increase in FAFSA and WASFA application completion rates between the 2021-22 school year and the 2022-23 school year.

The pilot program has the potential to increase financial aid application completion for Washington state, but, more importantly, it could lead to more positive outcomes for Washington students. Continuing to provide high-quality and intensive support to students and their families as they navigate the financial aid application process means more students could receive the support for which they qualify so they can attend college, advance their careers, and achieve their goals.

# Appendix

## 1. Education Service District Map



## 2. Pilot Region County, District, School Counts

### ESD 114 Olympic Peninsula

ESD	County	Schools	Districts
114	Clallam	13	5
114	Jefferson	5	3
114	Kitsap	16	4
114	Mason	3	3

### ESD 123 Southeast Washington

ESD	County	Schools	Districts
123	Adams	3	1
123	Asotin	2	2
123	Benton	19	5
123	Columbia	1	1
123	Franklin	8	3
123	Garfield	1	1
123	Walla Walla	11	5

3. Pilot FAFSA Completion Data – Provided from WSAC, November 1, 2023

<i>FAFSA Completion Rates of OSPI Seniors</i>		
<i>by CTC District</i>		
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>CTC District/Pilot Program</b>	<b>Completion Rate</b>
2021-22		
	District 01, Peninsula College	33%
	District 03, Olympic College	41%
	District 18, Big Bend Community College	46%
	District 19, Columbia Basin College	43%
	District 20, Walla Walla Community College	51%
2022-23		
	District 01, Peninsula College	36%
	District 03, Olympic College	45%
	District 18, Big Bend Community College	54%
	District 19, Columbia Basin College	50%
	District 20, Walla Walla Community College	56%

4. WASFA Completion Counts – Provided from WSAC, November 1, 2023

<i>Counts of WASFA Applicants in Pilot Program Districts</i>		
	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>
<b>Total</b>	695	1,251
<b>District 01, Peninsula College</b>	237	440
<b>District 03, Olympic College</b>	39	69
<b>District 18, Big Bend Community College</b>	133	242
<b>District 19, Columbia Basin College</b>	223	380
<b>District 20, Walla Walla Community College</b>	63	120



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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges