2SHB 1893 STUDENT EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE GRANT (SEAG) PROGRAM LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Student Emergency Assistance Grant (SEAG) Program

The Washington state Legislature established the Student Emergency Assistance Grant (SEAG) program through passage of [2SHB 1893](#) during the 2019 legislative session. The Legislature funded the program on a pilot basis, adopting the governor's budget proposal of $750,000 for the 2019-21 biennium. During the 2021-23 biennium, the Legislature approved an additional $8 million with the passage of [ESSB 5092](#) for the expansion of the Student Emergency Assistance Grant program in the community and technical college system. The additional funding allowed the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to expand the SEAG program from 16 to 26 community and technical colleges beginning July 1, 2021. A list of colleges that participate in SEAG and the amounts they were granted for fiscal year 2023 are provided in Appendix A.

The SEAG program, administered by SBCTC, allows community and technical colleges to provide monetary assistance to students experiencing unforeseen emergencies or situations that affect their ability to remain enrolled in their classes. The program delivery model requires colleges to demonstrate need, ensure students have low-barrier access to emergency funds, remain flexible on who may apply for funds, not require students to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and establish criteria for prioritizing emergency aid disbursement. Colleges have four business days from the application submission date to award SEAG funds to students whose funding requests were accepted.

Colleges must refer all SEAG applicants to on-campus and off-campus resources and follow up at 10- and 45-day intervals, regardless of whether the students were awarded SEAG funds. Following up at these intersections provides an opportunity to check with students about the extent to which funding met their emergent needs and make additional referrals to resources. Colleges report the results of those contacts to SBCTC.

Executive Summary

This report will focus on the number of students served during fiscal year 2023 through emergency assistance funds. In fiscal year 2023, the number of students who requested and received emergency assistance increased, the combined dollar amount of those requests decreased, and the gap between students' needs and funding remained wide.

Below are highlights of the SEAG program across the 26 colleges participating in the program. These numbers are rounded. For exact numbers, please see the charts on the following pages.

- **More students were served in fiscal year 2023**. Colleges received 16,685 student requests for emergency assistance in fiscal year 2023 and fully or partially funded 4,654 — or about 28% — of those requests. In contrast, colleges received 15,369 student emergency assistance requests in fiscal year 2022 and served 4,177 students that year.

- **The combined amount requested by students was less than the year before**. Combined, students requested $32.5 million in emergency assistance funds in fiscal year 2023 compared to $54 million in fiscal year 2022.

- **A wide gap remains between requests and available funding.** Even though the total amount of funding requested by students in fiscal year 2023 was less than in fiscal year 2022, students' needs continue to far exceed SEAG funding. Of the $32.5 million in student emergency assistance requests in fiscal year 2023, only $3.95 million — or 12% — was funded, leaving $28.5 million in requests unmet. Students also received less funding than they requested: In fiscal year 2023, the average amount per student request was $1,946 and the average amount awarded was $848.

- **SEAG grants make a difference.** Fiscal year 2023 data shows that 89% of students completed the credits and credentials they attempted in the same quarter after they received SEAG aid. Additionally, 66% of recipients who received emergency fund aid in the prior academic (2021-22) year enrolled and/or completed in the following fall 2022.

Statewide, the SEAG program is under additional stress because colleges are no longer able to provide emergency funds through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEER) passed by Congress in response to the pandemic. Also, the number of colleges participating in the SEAG program has increased from the original 16 colleges in 2019 to 26 colleges today. We expect this pressure on the SEAG program to continue as a fluctuating economy and inflation continues to cause hardships.

In both fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year 2023, the three most requested emergency needs were housing, transportation, and food.

1. The housing category represents student housing or shelter expenses and if the student is at risk of losing housing or shelter due to foreclosure, eviction, or loss of resources to remain housed. Housing reflects the highest number of student requests and dollar amounts requested. In fiscal year 2023, there were 10,651 student emergency assistance requests for housing totaling $13,492,627. Colleges were able to fund 2,080 student requests totaling $1,611,935 — about 12% of the total amount — leaving $11,880,692 in requests unfunded.

2. The transportation category represents any travel expenses related to education and most often includes public transportation, gas, and auto repair costs. Transportation was the second most requested emergency need in fiscal year 2023. There were 7,921 requests for transportation assistance totaling $4,398,787. Colleges were only able to fund 2,070 student requests totaling $710,291 — about 16% of the total amount — leaving $3,688,496 in requests unfunded.

3. The food category refers to any food or nutritional related expenses. Food was the third most requested category. In fiscal year 2023, there were 7,315 requests for food assistance totaling $2,900,745. Colleges were only able to fund 1,475 student food requests totaling $319,716 — about 11% of the total amount — leaving $2,581,029 in requests unfunded.

It is clear that Washington's community and technical college students are in great need of housing, transportation, and food support. Colleges continue to focus on providing immediate and equitable access to resources that meet students' basic needs. However, without additional resources, students are left with unfunded emergent needs that prevent them from focusing on continuing their education.

Emergency Assistance for Community and Technical College Students in Washington State

Washington community and technical college students

During the 2022-23 academic year, 273,051 students were enrolled in Washington's community and technical colleges. Among enrolled students in 2022-23, 9% had children or other dependents, 54% were 25 years old or older, 51% were female, 51% who reported demographic information were students of color, and of this population, 30% were historically under-represented students of color. During this same year, 89,036 students (32%), enrolled in an aid-eligible program also received need-based aid. According to the most recent financial aid data, 15,299 Washington community and technical college students were enrolled in one of the following student support programs: Basic Food and Employment Training (BFET), Early Achievers Grant (EAG), Opportunity Grant (OG), Passport for Foster Youth Promise Program, TRIO, WorkFirst, or Worker Retraining (WRT).

Washington community and technical college students' basic needs insecurity

In 2013, the Legislature approved Washington Student Achievement Council's (WSAC) goal that 70% of the state's 25- to 44-year-old residents earn a credential beyond high school. This goal was signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee.[1]

According to WSAC's *2023 Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students* report, about half of college students who took a survey in fall 2022 reported experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity or homelessness. WSAC's survey findings also showed American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American students were impacted at higher rates than White students while former foster youth were impacted the most.[2] WSAC's findings reinforce the concept that vulnerable student populations suffer the most with basic need insecurities.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area Consumer Price Index shows overall area prices are up 5.4% from October 2022-August 2023. Moreover, food cost has increased by 4%, with cereal and bakery items increasing by 6.4% and dairy and related products increasing by 5.7%. Similarly, rent of a primary residence was up by 9.1% and household energy costs were up by 10.5%.[3] Based on the increased cost of living in the Pacific Northwest, it should not be a surprise that Washington state community and technical college students struggle to survive and to stay in school.

The most recent SEAG data collected from the community and technical college system shows colleges fielded 16,685 student requests for emergency funds. Of the 16,685 student emergency requests, the system partially or fully funded 28% (4,654) of those requests. Today, most students need substantial financial assistance from federal, state, and institutional resources, even while working, to barely manage the cost of attending college. The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20) found students who

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[1] Washington Student Achievement Council: 2024 Strategic Plan https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06-13-0341-SAP.pdf#:~:text=In%202013%2C%20the%20Washington%20Student%20Achievement%20Council%20%28WSAC%29,was%20signed%20into%20law%20by%20Governor%20Jay%20Inslee.

[2] Washington Student Achievement Council: Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students, January 2023.

[3] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Consumer Price Index, Seattle area — August 2023 : Western Information Office : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov)

were awarded Pell grants were 22% more often receiving emergency funding from their educational institution than students who did not receive Pell grant funding and BIPOC students had experienced food insecurities up to 14% more often compared to their White and Asian peers.[4] Furthermore, populations who experienced basic need insecurities were the most overly burdened by administrative processes which required knowledge, access and compliance for eligibility and retention statuses.[5]

Undergraduate students who were first time and full-time degree/certificate seeking at 2-year institutions and who were awarded financial aid showed a 6.5% increase between 2010-11 and 2020-21 whereas at private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions showed no consistent increase.[6] On average, White undergraduates awarded federal student aid received $8,800 while significantly lower award amounts were received by Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native undergraduates.[7] Understanding how vulnerable student populations are disproportionately impacted by basic need insecurities is foundational to grasping the importance for basic needs policy within postsecondary learning. When basic needs are not prioritized, this severely impacts students' ability to complete their education, especially in BIPOC communities.

Comparing the number of students served (4,177) during fiscal year 2022 through SEAG emergency assistance funds to the number of students served (4,654) in fiscal year 2023, we see an overall increase of 10% in the number of students served. Additionally, the sum of unfunded emergency requests in fiscal year 2023 also indicates vast student emergent need: Nearly $29 million in student emergency requests went unfunded across the 26 SEAG colleges. The community and technical colleges simply did not have enough SEAG funding to cover all student emergency requests.

"It has been very helpful. It came at a time I was running low on baby milk and insurance was an issue along with bills drowning my thought…I was able to cover a few gaps that would have distracted me from wanting to sit down…trying to find resources that take up alot [sic] of my schooling time" — Student

The state Legislature continues to address the basic needs of Washington's community and technical college students. In 2023, the Legislature passed into law SSHB 1559, which requires all higher education institutions to implement a Benefits Navigator position to create a single point of contact for students to access resources such as public benefits (Working Connections Child Care, SNAP enrollment), emergency assistance grants, housing supports, and Basic Food Employment and Training. The bill also requires all higher education institutions to develop a Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan by April 1, 2024.

Additionally, SSHB 1559 included a new three-year pilot program to provide free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible low-income students at four community and technical colleges. SBCTC selected Columbia Basin College (Pasco), Everett Community College, Grays Harbor College (Aberdeen) and Walla Walla Community College to participate in the pilot program.

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[4] NCES 2021-456 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: IES Summary 2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20) 2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20): First Look at the Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic on Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Housing, and Finances (Preliminary Data) (ed.gov)

[5] Robert Wood Foundation: How Administrative Burden Can Harm Health; Brief October 2020 https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2020/10/how-administrative-burdens-can-harm-health.html

[6] National Center for Education Statistics: Fast Facts https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=76

[7] NCES 2021-456 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: IES Summary 2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20) https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2023/2023466_Summary.pdf

The implementation of SSHB 1559 will serve as an additional safety net to support students' basic needs. However, as evident in the large amount of unfunded SEAG student emergency requests during fiscal year 2023, more needs to be done to help support student basic needs in the community and technical college system.

Students served

Community and technical colleges administering the SEAG program focused on students' emergent needs and connected them with additional resources so they could persist in their educational programs. Because the SEAG program is intended to be as low barrier as possible, colleges focused on improving student access to emergency funding and prioritizing quick response times to students' requests. The most recent State Board enrollment data shows of the 4,654 students funded with SEAG funding in fiscal year 2023, 53% were female. SEAG funds were awarded to students who were 25 years and older which reflected 57% of the students who received funding while 56% of the students who received SEAG funds were BIPOC students. Additionally, 61% of students who requested and received SEAG funding in fiscal year 2023 were enrolled as full-time students.

Student outcomes for fiscal year 2023

The following data charts represent outcomes based on the most current available student data.

Chart 1: Student emergency requests funded or partially funded by fiscal year
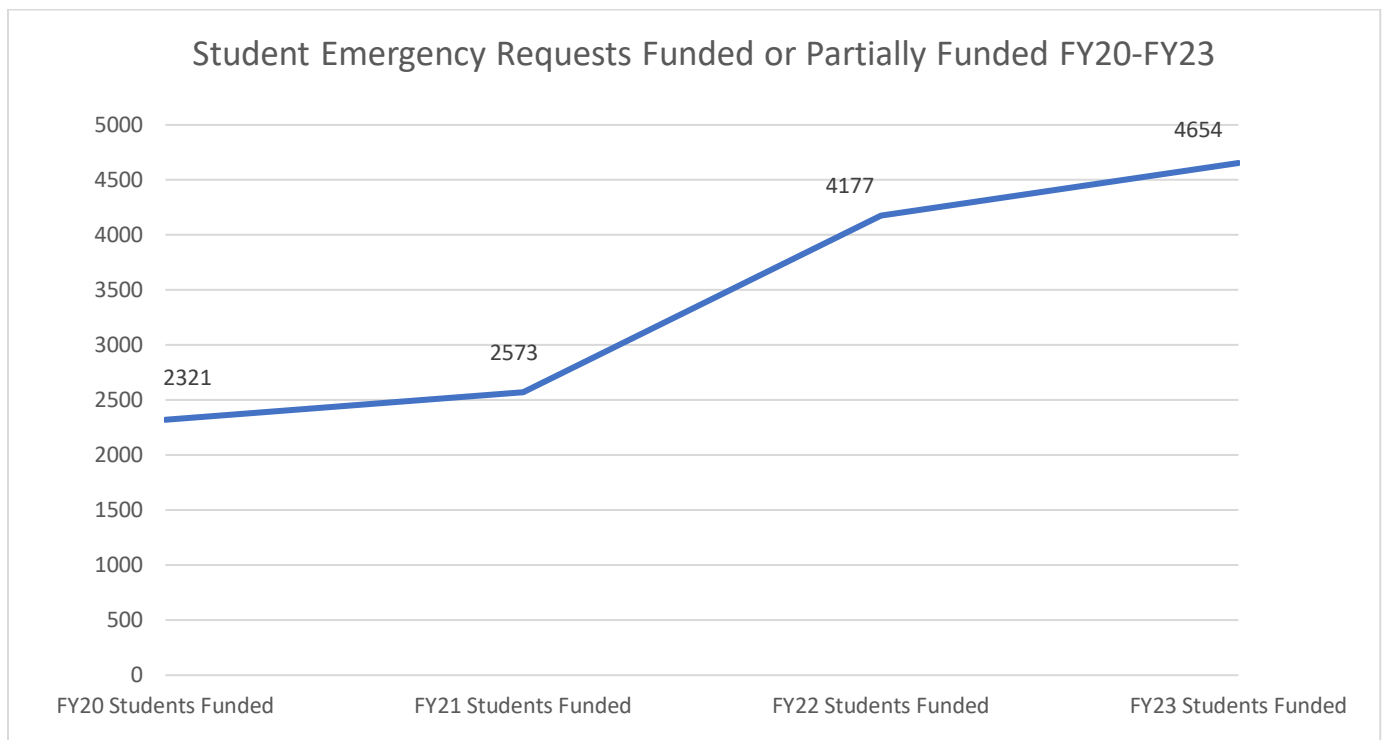

Chart 1 above shows 2,321 student requests were funded in fiscal year 2020 with SEAG funding. In fiscal year 2021, 2,573 student requests were funded, and in fiscal year 2022, there were 4,177 student requests funded. The total number of student requests funded in fiscal year 2023 demonstrates a 10% increase compared to fiscal year 2022.

In fiscal year 2023, colleges fielded 16,689 student emergency assistance requests. Of the total number of student requests, colleges were able to fund 28% (4,654) of requests. However, colleges were unable to fully fund all student requests, citing lack of SEAG funding, no additional room in students' financial aid award package, and access to other funding sources as the top three reasons SEAG student requests were not funded or only partially funded with SEAG funding.

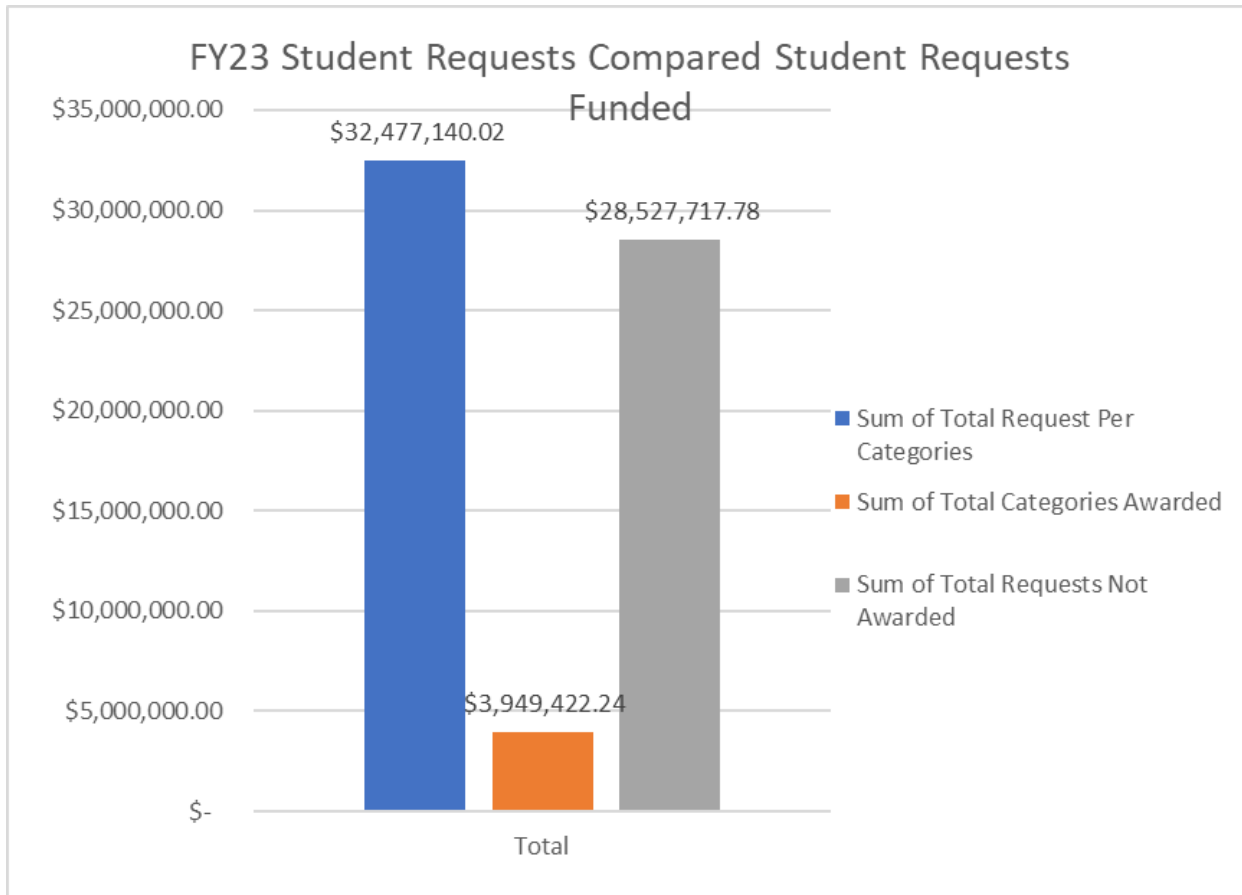*Chart 1: Sum of FY23 student requests compared to requests funded*

Chart 2 above demonstrates the total SEAG dollar amount requested, funded, and the amount left unfunded by SEAG. The total amount of unawarded student emergency requests in fiscal year 2023 was $28.5 million. The level of unfunded student emergency requests across the community and technical college system demonstrates an unprecedented amount of student emergency need. Colleges reported other funding sources were accessed which temporarily filled gaps, however other funding sources on campuses are limited as well. Limited funding sources forces college staff to make decisions about denying emergency funds or only partially funding student requests. This approach reinforces student poverty.

"This fund allowed me to finally pay for a computer to do my schoolwork! It didn't cover it completely but it helps out significantly, I just wanted to say thank you for the help, and allowing me to continue my studies now with my own computer!!!" — Student

Colleges worked hard over the fiscal year 2023 (the 2022-23 academic year) to connect students to resources and help them stay in school, especially when there were limited resources.

Chart 3: FY23 SEAG recipients who completed credits and credentials in the quarter they received SEAG aid (2022-23 academic year)

FY23 SEAG Recipients Completed Credits & Credentials In Quarter Received Aid
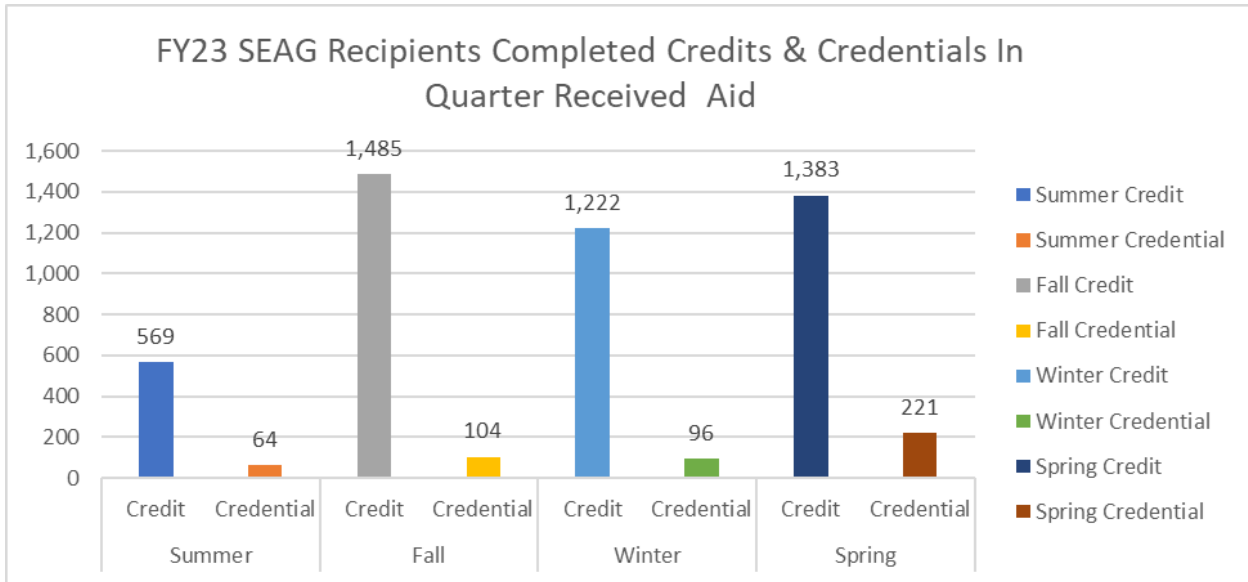
"The money I received definitely helped me complete the quarter but I cannot say that my emergency is completely resolved." — Student

Chart 3 above shows in fiscal year 2023, the number of SEAG recipients who completed credits and credentials in the quarter they received SEAG emergency aid. Fall and spring quarters had the highest number of credits completed and credentials earned by SEAG recipients. Additionally, in fiscal year 2023 data shows that 89% of students completed the credits they attempted in the same quarter after they received SEAG aid.

Chart 4: FY23 SEAG recipients who earned credits and credentials the following quarter after receiving SEAG assistance (2022-23 academic year)

FY23 SEAG Recipients Credits & Credentials Earned Quarter *After* Received Aid
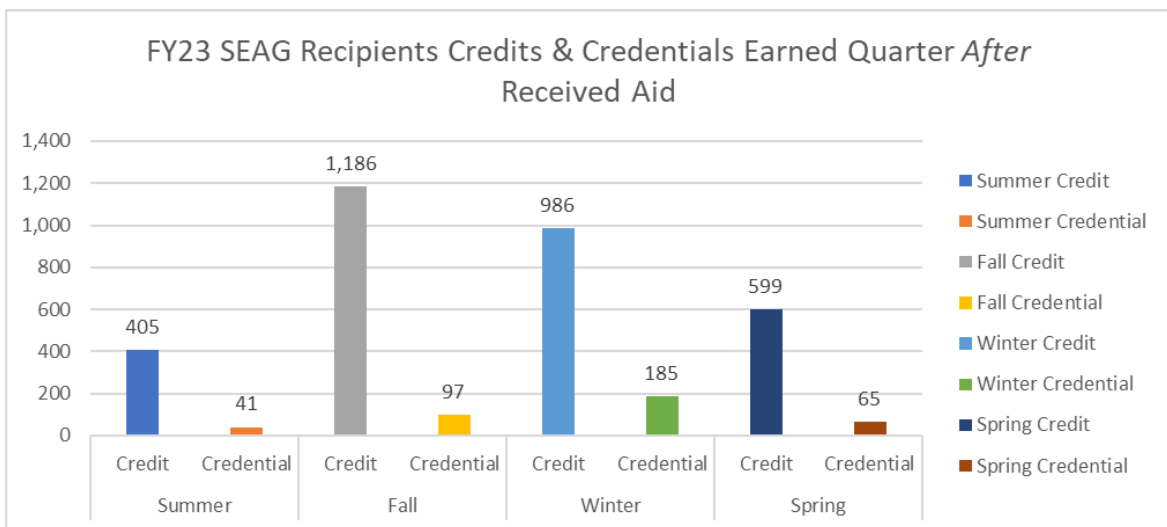
Chart 4 above demonstrates that fiscal year 2023 students who received SEAG financial assistance also completed credits or credentials in the following quarter after receiving SEAG aid. SEAG student recipients earned a total of 3,176 credits and 388 credentials during fiscal year 2023. The single highest percentage of student recipients who earned college credits in the quarter after aid was awarded was fall quarter at 37% (1,186) and the single highest percentage of student recipients who completed a credential was 48% (185) in winter quarter. All in all, fiscal year 2023 data shows 89% earned credit(s) and 11% earned a credential the quarter after aid was received.

Chart 5 FY23 SEAG students who earned credits and retained or completed into the next quarter (2022-23 academic year)
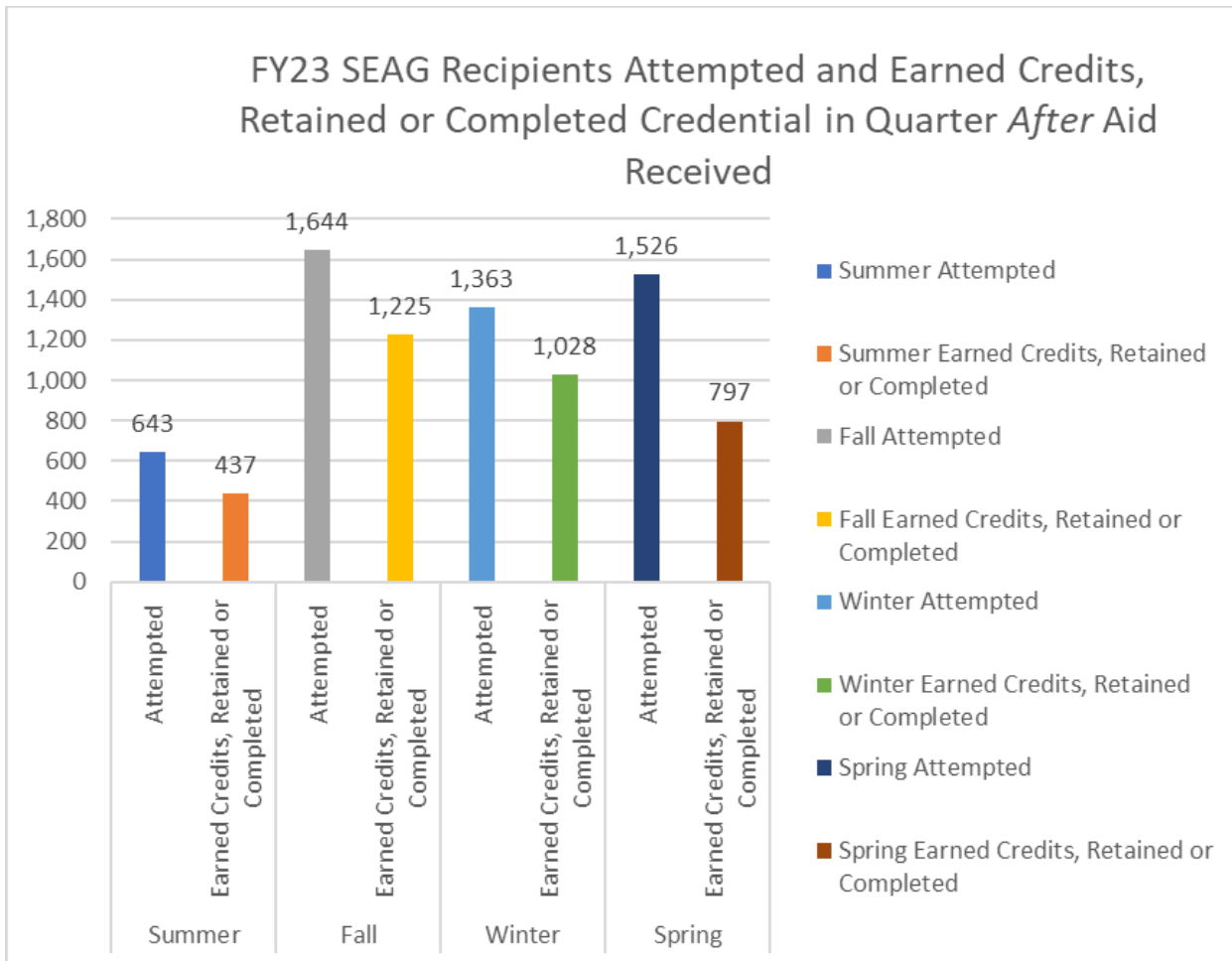

Chart 5 above shows the number of students who received SEAG assistance and who remained in college by completing credits or a credential in the quarter in which they received assistance and earned credits or a credential the following quarter. During fiscal year 2023 (the 2022-23 academic year), 67% of students earned credits or credentials in the quarter they received aid or in the following quarter.

Chart 5 also demonstrates that during fall quarter, 75% of recipients who attempted to earn credits or credentials also earned and completed credits or credentials during the quarter they received aid and in the succeeding quarter. Chart 5 shows winter quarter with 75% of recipients who in the quarter they received aid and attempted and/or earned credits or credentials also retained into the following quarter after aid was awarded and attempted and/or earned credits or credentials. Additionally, spring quarter shows 52% of
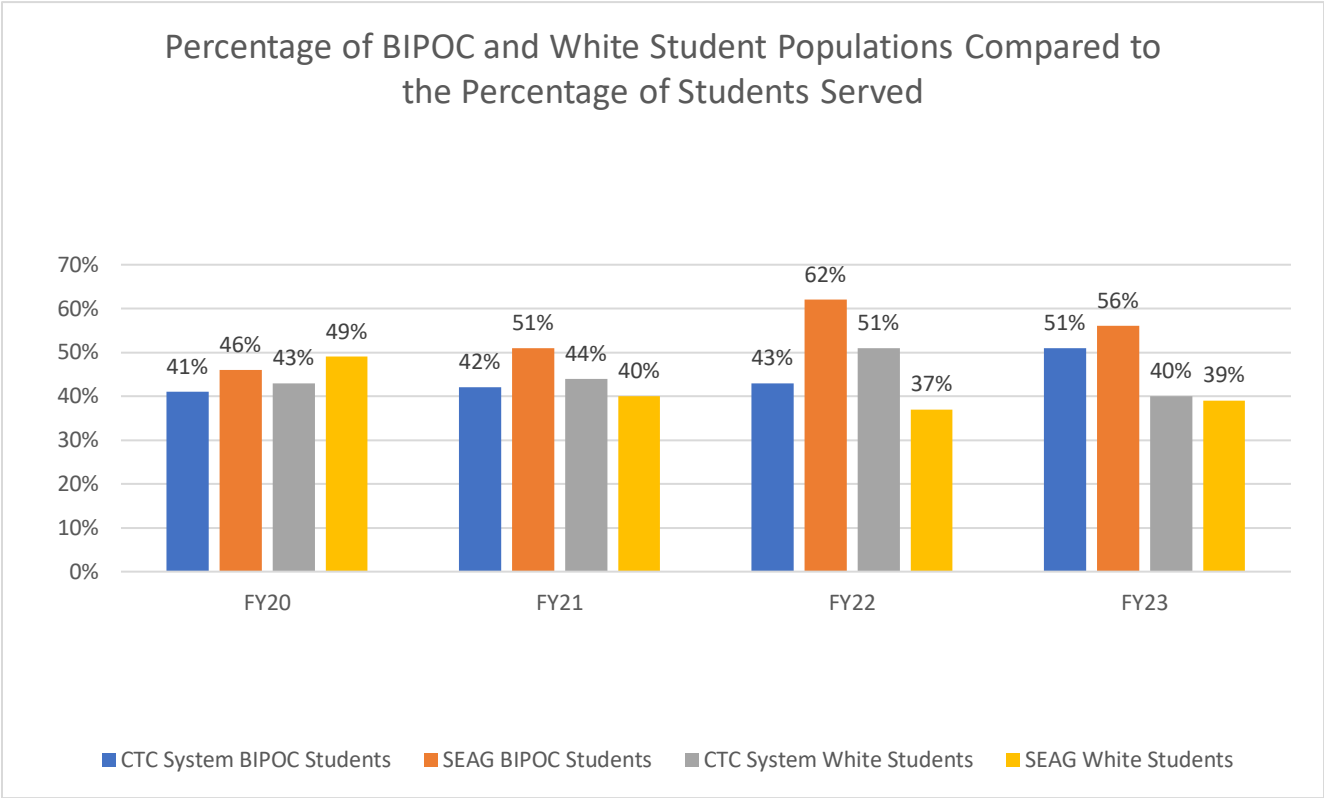
recipients in the quarter they received aid and succeeded to the next quarter after aid was received attempted to earn credits and credentials also completed credits or credentials in the quarter after they received aid.

Recipient demographics

As cited earlier in this report, WSAC's 2023 report on students' basic needs showed that American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American students were impacted by basic needs at higher rates than White students. [8] In fiscal year 2023, BIPOC students submitted requests for SEAG emergency assistance at a rate four times higher than White students. BIPOC SEAG student recipients were 56% of students served by SEAG aid while BIPOC students, who reported demographic information, are 51% of the general student population. Chart 6, below, shows a sharp increase in the percentage of BIPOC SEAG students in fiscal year 2023 compared to the prior three fiscal years, further illustrating the need for increased SEAG funding for community and technical BIPOC college students. Additionally, challenges in our current economy — such as rising costs of housing, food, and gas — will continue to impact all college students and continue to disproportionately impact BIPOC students.

"I appreciate the assistance I received that helped me remain focused on completing my degree this spring." — Student

Chart 6: Percentage of BIPOC and White student populations compared to the percentage of those students served through SEAG grants

Percentage of BIPOC and White Student Populations Compared to the Percentage of Students Served

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
CTC System BIPOC Students	41%	42%	43%	51%
SEAG BIPOC Students	46%	51%	62%	56%
CTC System White Students	43%	44%	51%	40%
SEAG White Students	49%	40%	37%	39%

Emergency Assistance Requested and Additional Student Needs

Chart 7 below shows the total number of SEAG emergency assistance aid requests listed by category. Housing was, by far, the most requested emergency fund category, followed by transportation and food.

Chart 7: FY23 number of SEAG student requests by category
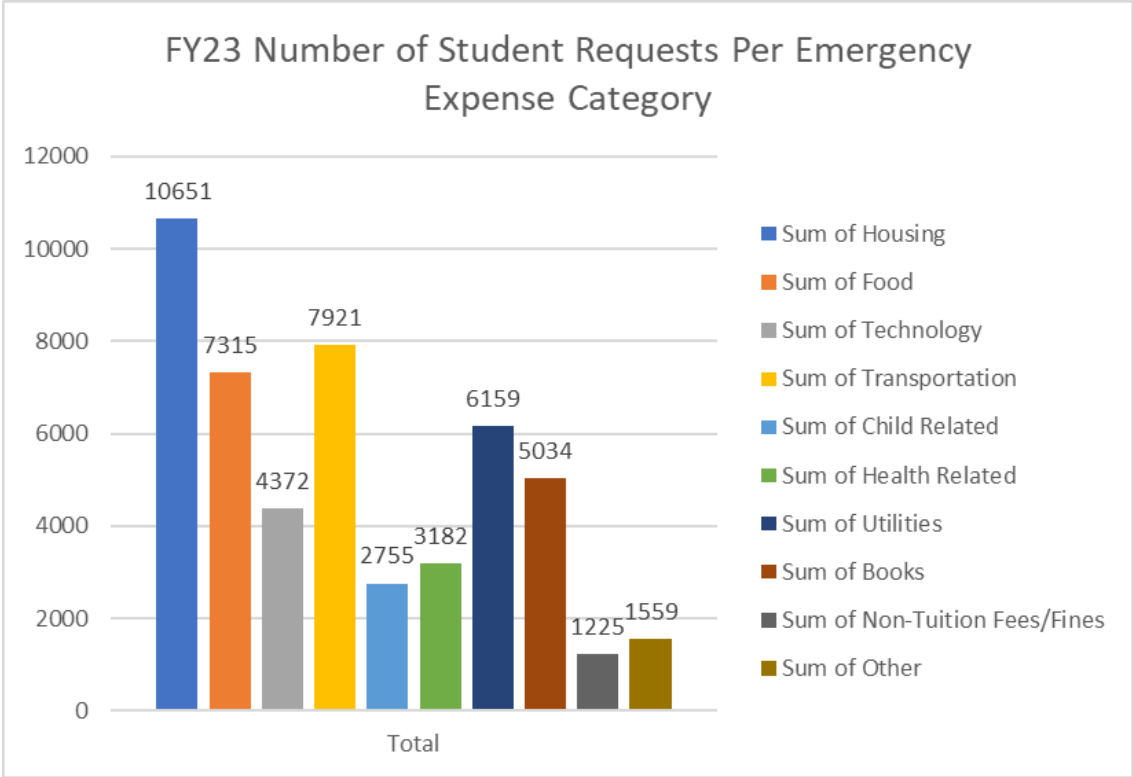
As shown in Chart 8, below, housing continued to have the largest dollar amounts requested compared to the other SEAG expense categories for emergency assistance in fiscal year 2023.

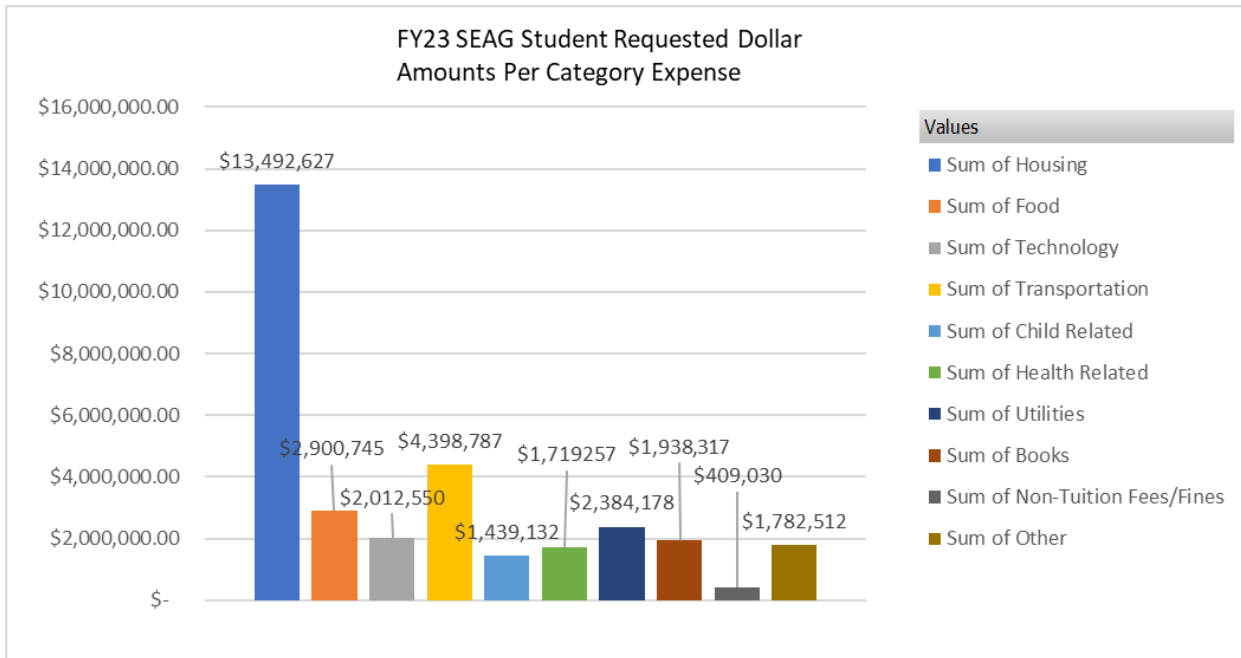*Chart 8: FY23 SEAG amount requested per expense category*

Chart 8 also shows fiscal year 2023 housing expense category accounts for 42% of the total amount of funding requested. This data suggests that continued investment in student housing support is necessary for students to persist through their educational goals. Additionally, this is seen year over year as the highest dollar emergency fund request trend.

"I have spread the funds between gas and helping to maintain my vehicle and groceries it has been a huge help, I am a single mother and humbly appreciative of this resource." — Student

Students face multiple emergent needs and rarely do students face only one emergent need. To identify additional needs, college emergency assistance applications include a section for students to mark additional needs and describe their emergencies in addition to their primary need. Once the student emergency needs are identified, colleges are then more able to help students with meeting multiple emergent needs.

"The college emergency fund helped me and my daughter with (a) grant to avoid homelessness"
— Student

Colleges reported they often learned of unresolved emergent needs through the colleges' 10- and 45-day post fund disbursement follow up with students. For reporting purposes, those additional emergency needs were tracked separately through the college emergency fund application process and marked as "additional need."

Total numbers described in Chart 9 refer to the additional needs identified by students, which were in addition to their primary need request for emergency funding.

Chart 9: FY23 number of additional needs requested but not funded per expense category
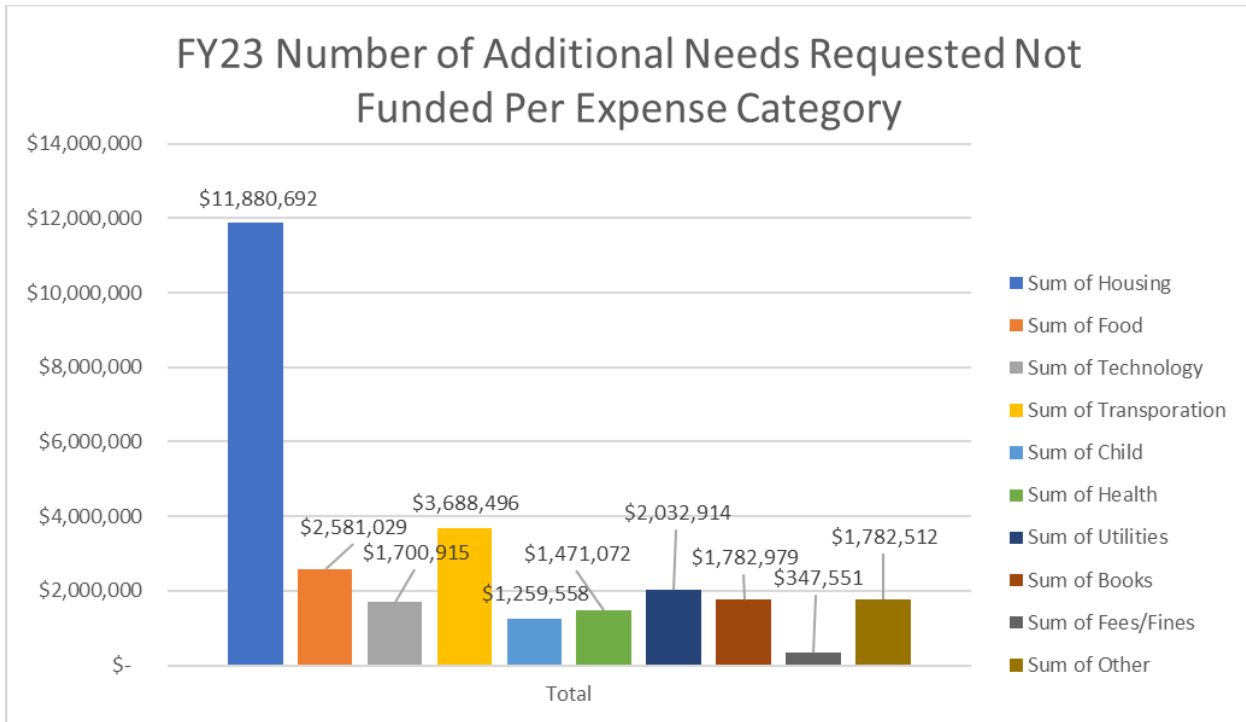
In charts 7, 8 and 9, above, housing reflects the highest number of student requests, dollar amounts requested and the dollar amounts of unfunded student emergency requested needs. The following describes each of the SEAG expense categories and data which demonstrates unfunded requests.

SEAG expense categories

SEAG expense categories are described below. In some cases, the numbers have been rounded for simplicity. Exact numbers are displayed in the charts above.

Housing

The housing category represents student housing or shelter expenses and if the student is at risk of losing housing or shelter due to foreclosure, eviction or loss of resources to remain housed. In fiscal year 2023, there were 10,651 student emergency assistance requests for housing totaling $13,492,627. Colleges were able to fund 2,080 student requests totaling $1,611,935 — about 12% of the total amount — leaving $11,880,692 in requests unfunded. It is clear there is a substantial student need for housing support in the community and technical college system.

Transportation

The transportation category represents any travel expenses related to education. It most often included public transportation, gas, and auto repair costs. Transportation was the second most requested category in fiscal year 2023. There were 7,921 requests for transportation assistance totaling $4,398,787. Colleges were able to fund 2,070 student requests totaling $710,291 — about 16% of the total amount — leaving $3,688,496 in requests unfunded.

Food

The food category refers to any food or nutritional related expenses. Food was the third most requested category. In fiscal year 2023, there were 7,315 requests for food assistance totaling $2,900,745. Colleges were able to fund 1,475 student food requests totaling $319,716 — about 11% of the total amount — leaving $2,581,029 in requests unfunded.

Technology

The technology category includes any technology expenses related to attending classes. Some examples include computers, cell phones, Wi-Fi connection and devices, printer, headphones, cables and cords. In fiscal year 2023, there were 4,372 student emergency requests for technology totaling $2,012,550. Colleges were able to fund 1,265 requests totaling $311,635 — about 15% of the total amount — leaving $1,700,915 in requests unfunded.

Child-related

The child-related category refers to any child-related expense to include childcare provider payments, emergency care or child healthcare. In fiscal year 2023, there were 2,755 requests for emergency child-related assistance totaling $1,439,132. Colleges were able to fund 521 student requests totaling $179,574 — about 12.5% of the total amount — leaving $1,259,558 in requests unfunded.

Health-related

The health-related category reflects any health-related expense or bills including medical, dental or vision. In fiscal year 2023, there were 3,182 requests totaling 1,719,257. Colleges were able to fund 799 student requests totaling $248,185 — about 14% of the total amount — leaving $1,471,072 in requests unfunded.

Utilities

The utilities category reflects any expense related to electricity, water, sewer, or garbage services. This category is the fourth largest student emergency need. In fiscal year 2023, there were 6,159 student emergency fund requests for utilities, totaling $2,384,178. Colleges were able to fund 1,054 student requests totaling $351,264 --- about 15% of the total amount --- leaving $2,032,914 in requests unfunded.

Books

The book category refers to any printed and online books, access codes, study and exam costs, and other course materials to include tools and supplies. This applies only when all other funding sources have been exhausted. In fiscal year 2023 there were 5,034 student emergency fund requests for books totaling $1,938,317. The colleges were able to fund 565 student requests totaling $155,338 in book emergency fund requests --- about 8% of the total amount --- leaving $1,782,979 in requests unfunded.

"Your programs available to assist students are so great. I was completely stressed out about my $750.00 power bill. It's hard to concentrate on school work when your [*sic*] stressed out. The assistance couldn't be more appreciated." — Student

Fees and fines (non-tuition related)

The fees and fines category refers to any non-tuition related fees and fines that create a barrier to the student continuing in courses. This category includes non-utility or non-housing related bills or debts. In fiscal year 2023 there were 1,225 student emergency fund requests for non-tuition related fees and fines, totaling $409,030. The colleges were able to fund 248 requests totaling $61,479 — about 15% of the total amount — leaving $347,551 in requests unfunded.

Other

The "other" category is a category used by colleges to collect data on any emergency expenses that did not fit into the defined expense categories. These expenses include non-utility bills or debt, non-child family expenses, hygiene and clothing, and tuition. Student requests in the "other" category were mainly for tuition. Tuition is not an allowable SEAG expense. In fiscal year 2023, the system fielded 1,559 emergency requests totaling $1,782,512. The college system funded no student requests in the "other" category, leaving $1,782,512 requests unfunded.

Understanding reasons requests were not funded

The community and technical college system was unable to award all student emergency requests. According to colleges, the top two reasons requests were not fully funded were the lack of SEAG funding and no unmet need in a student's financial aid award. Of the 16,685 student emergency requests, the system funded 28% (4,654) of student requests. Many requests were denied or partially funded because of rules related to financial aid unmet need. Financial aid is impacted by the cost of attendance, and thus, how much room is available in a student's award for disbursement of emergency funds. Unfunded requests were often funded or partially funded through other funding sources.

Chart 10, below, shows other reasons for non-disbursement of SEAG funds. For example, large fund requests went unfunded or were only partially funded due to lack of SEAG funding, excess number of student emergency requests, lack of student enrollment, submission of non-emergent requests, and incomplete applications.

Chart 10: FY23 SEAG reasons emergency assistance requests were not awarded
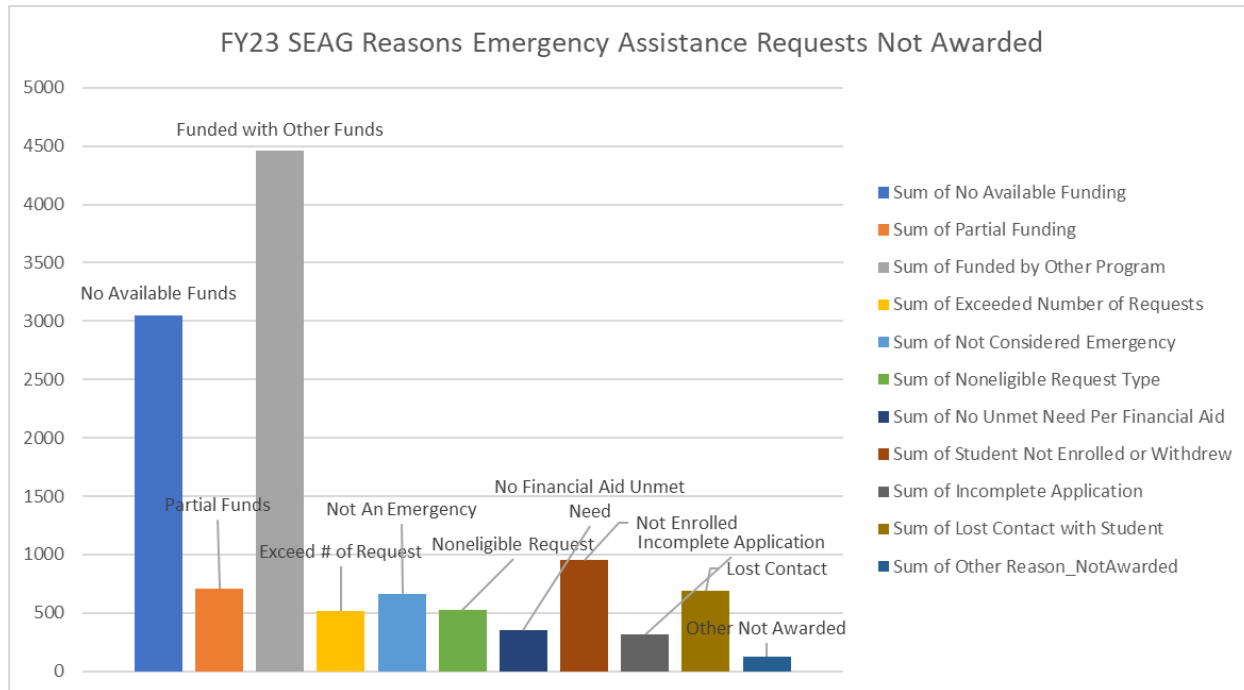
SEAG Program Evaluation

Since fiscal year 2020, the community and technical college system has implemented SEAG funding to assist students with emergent needs and has maintained a system of general and targeted outreach and low-barrier access to students who request emergency funding. The college system's SEAG program delivery model requires colleges to identify students with financial emergencies, provide an accessible and low-barrier emergency assistance request process, build an equitable review and decision process for student emergency assistance requests, provide timely notifications of the decision process to students making requests, ensure timely disbursement of SEAG funds, and provide a follow up system to collect student feedback about emergent need resolution. Additionally, colleges are required to conduct personalized follow up and provide referrals.

The SEAG program evaluation is an essential operational process that helps college staff evaluate and make mid-course corrections when necessary. In fiscal year 2023, colleges, through the grant summative and formative evaluation process, identified gaps and put measures into place to ensure a continuity of operations for the SEAG program and improve students' access to the grants.

Outreach

Colleges used a variety of targeted outreach approaches in fiscal year 2023, including social media, texting, newsletters, websites, Canvas, syllabi, College 101 classes, staff signature lines with links to applications, and on-campus resources. Colleges also spread the word about the SEAG program using bookmarks, tabling events, emails, and in-classroom presentations, and by and staffing Sunday markets. All college websites provide a centralized location for students to find important and general SEAG information about access points along with links to online applications.

In addition to online access, colleges have formed in-person funding teams to reach at-risk students needing emergency assistance. The teams provide information on basic needs access and program eligibility, answer questions, and help students fill out low-barrier emergency fund applications.

Colleges set up evaluation infrastructures to collect student feedback about the emergency assistance process and have made mid-course changes using this important student feedback. Students provided recommendations such as asking for larger disbursement amounts like what was received during the pandemic (HEER funds) and more funding for colleges so the number of requests per academic year are not limited. Students asked for more frequent communication from college staff, such as email receipts confirming applications had been received. In response, colleges have revised applications, simplified student eligibility requirements, centralized intake processes, and pursued other changes to better meet students' needs. Increased visibility of the program can be seen through the increased number of student emergency assistance requests in fiscal year 2023. Most colleges have standardized their online applications to meet accessibility needs. Additionally, some colleges have identified the need to scale up emergency assistance outreach to first generation, limited English speakers, and refugee students, and to include translation and interpretation services.

Accessible and low-barrier request process

SEAG colleges use a low-barrier approach to the application process, which does not require additional documentation of student need beyond the application. Colleges are encouraged to trust students. Colleges engage funding teams as an accessible and low-barrier approach to reach more students who might be at risk of needing emergency assistance. Year after year, colleges have experienced a lack of staffing and staff turnover which has impacted funding teams' ability to quickly disperse funding to students. However, turnover has seemed to have leveled off in fiscal year 2023. College funding teams do their best to identify students' basic needs and help them fill out low-barrier emergency assistance applications. College funding teams review student applications and triage needs across multiple funding sources to fully support students' needs as much as possible. Most colleges have returned to in-person staffing, so students can submit an emergency assistance application online or in person.

Equitable review and decision process

In addition to college centralized application intake and vetting processes, colleges developed priority funding models with funding criteria. For example, the models may consider full or partial funding, additional emergency assistance resources provided through other college sources, local funding, and off-campus resources. The funding models disburse funding from many funding sources to reach as many students as possible with emergent needs. Colleges' funding models prioritize requests in a variety of ways, such as limiting requested amounts and/or the number of quarters a student may request emergency funds. The funding criteria are necessary to address limited SEAG funding and a high demand for assistance, but the result is often that students' requests are denied, partially funded, or unfunded altogether.

College staff field large volumes of student emergency fund requests each quarter and find it difficult to provide quick turnaround times during the vetting process. This was described in the Accessible and Low Barrier Request Process of this report. Many colleges are trying to solve this challenge by increasing staffing, however, colleges struggle to fill open positions. This has put pressure on current staff to meet fund disbursement turnaround timelines.

Colleges also found that large amounts of disbursed HEER funding during the pandemic changed students' expectations about requesting large amounts of aid in comparison to much smaller SEAG disbursements. HEER funding was quickly dispersed because the federal emergency aid did not count against a student aid award or "unmet need" which required less administrative processing time and effort.

Efficient disbursement and timely notification

Nearly all colleges disburse funds directly to students' BankMobile accounts or send the students gift cards or checks for a quick turnaround time. There is an option to submit emergency assistance funds via third party or voucher payments, however, the processing time on campus takes much longer for voucher payments. With the implementation of a college statewide centralized student tracking system, the process of awarding and disbursing funding to students has become more administrative and at times may create longer processing times. This situation continued in fiscal year 2023 and, for many colleges, created lengthy disbursement times which significantly impacted students' ability to access emergency funds and stay enrolled in classes.

Additionally, colleges identified challenges in administering and disbursing SEAG funding to students, citing extensive staff time required to check student financial aid awards for "unmet need" prior to disbursing SEAG funds. If a student's financial award "unmet need" is low, this impacts financial award packaging and other funding opportunities in the student's award. This requires an additional step for staff to consult with students to accept or deny SEAG funds as part of their overall financial aid award. This financial aid processing time was frequently reported by colleges as a challenge in disbursing assistance within the four-day requirement.

Colleges also report delays when disbursements are made directly to BankMobile accounts when students do not have a BankMobile account set up. Setting up new BankMobile accounts can add several days to disbursing funds electronically.

However, despite challenges in meeting the four-day turnaround, many colleges have made creative changes to expedite the disbursement process, such as providing immediate gift cards with partial funding so students can meet their most emergent needs. The remainder of the funds are then disbursed a few days later to meet the four-day turnaround requirement.

Follow up assessment and evaluation findings

In addition to the four-day turnaround requirement, colleges follow up with students at different intersections and intervals. These interactions help college staff identify when to make referrals to on- and off-campus resources if students need more support. Colleges often check in through emails and surveys to assess if the student's needs were fully addressed and if they need additional support. Colleges have found students' needs are not always fully resolved.

Colleges also used student feedback to make mid-course corrections such as revised and simplified applications and simplified eligibility requirements. Colleges adopted centralized emergency funds application intake sites with internal operations processes by establishing funding teams to vet a student's emergency fund application request. Internal processes include application of appropriate funding sources to the student request which reduced processing time for fund disbursement.

Additionally, colleges found through post disbursement follow up that the student emergent need was not always resolved and learned of multiple emergent student needs in addition to what the student initially requested SEAG funds to resolve. Colleges have since revised their centralized application to include all the SEAG funding categories, encouraging students to identify multiple emergent needs. This type of infrastructure lessened the onus on students to submit multiple applications for different funding sources and repeatedly retell their stories.

Conclusion

In fiscal year 2022, an additional 10 community and technical colleges offered SEAG funding, bringing the total number of colleges participating in the program to 26. Over the course of fiscal year 2023, colleges continued to be inundated with student emergency assistance requests. The colleges were able to serve 4,654 students out of 16,685 student requests. Fiscal year 2023 saw a 10% increase in the total number of students served. Many colleges made mid-course corrections to their operations based on important student feedback they collected to improve processing time and disbursement of SEAG funds. Overall, the community and technical college system was successful in administering fiscal year 2023 Student Emergency Assistance Grants to students and connecting them to other resources.

As cited in this report and identified through fiscal year 2023 SEAG data and conversations with SEAG staff, the pandemic negatively impacted students' ability to successfully stay in school. However, colleges have put student support systems in place to better support students' basic needs. The Legislature approved an additional $8 million during the 2021-23 biennium, with the passage of ESSB 5092 for the expansion of the Student Emergency Assistance Grant (SEAG) program in the community and technical college system. This expansion was passed with no addition of administrative funding which has become a roadblock to administering funding to more colleges. However, there are new programs to help fill gaps in basic needs funding such as the Basic Needs Navigator position on campuses to create a single point of contact for students to access resources such as public benefits. Additionally, the new three-year pilot to provide free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers at four community and technical colleges, along with a requirement for all higher education institutions to develop strategic plans to address hunger and basic needs, will help students stay in school college.

"I would not have been able to stay in college without this support. I would definitely not have achieved a 3.6."— Student

College data demonstrates colleges are fielding far more requests than available SEAG funding can support. Additionally, nearly all colleges have fully expended HEER funding dollars, which puts pressure on staff to find and administer other emergency funding to support students. Colleges worked diligently over the course of the 2022-23 academic year to meet students' emergency assistance needs but were only able to award 28% of student requests — often due to lack of funding. Many SEAG staff reported the loss of pandemic financial assistance and increasing costs of living have left students in financial stress. The increased number of emergency funding requests and nearly $29 million in requests left unfunded point to a high level of need and among Washington community and technical college students and the necessity of programs like SEAG. SEAG funding is a critical source of support for students and an important lever to reach Washington's goal of having 70% of adults achieve a credential past high school.

Appendix A: FY 21-23 College Allocation Funding

The SBCTC received 26 applications of which all 26 colleges were funded for the 2021-23 biennium. Funding amounts listed below are for July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

College	Funding
Bates Technical College	$275,000.00
Bellevue College	$177,452.00
Bellingham Technical College	$66,500.00
Centralia College	$180,000.00
Clark College	$300,000.00
Clover Park Technical College	$220,000.00
Columbia Basin College	$230,000.00
Edmonds College	$300,650.00
Everett Community College	$200,000.00
Grays Harbor College	$150,000.00
Green River College	$207,379.00
Highline College	$151,333.00
Lake Washington Institute of Technology	$177,000.00
Lower Columbia College	$135,000.00
Olympic College	$141,100.00
Peninsula College	$115,000.00
Pierce College District	$300,000.00
Renton Technical College	$220,000.00
Seattle Central College	$200,000.00
North Seattle College	$200,000.00
South Seattle College	$115,000.00
Skagit Valley College	$120,036.00
South Puget Sound Community College	$300,000.00
Spokane Community College	$200,000.00
Tacoma Community College	$115,000.00
Walla Walla Community College	$100,000.00
Totals	$4,707,450.00