

Background:

Each year Washington GEAR UP conducts exit surveys for high school seniors. These surveys collect data on student's future plans and the past experiences in school and GEAR UP. Results from these surveys allow Washington GEAR UP and their partner schools to continually improve and grow services offered to their students.

The following report explores how High School seniors responded to the survey and how those responses compare to last year's graduates. Results centered around future plans, college prep, and the impact of COVID-19.

Survey Results:

Two hundred and eight seniors from WAGU High Schools participated in and completed the WAGU senior exit survey for the 2021-2022 school year. This is a slight drop in the number of surveys recorded in 2021, which had 214 seniors complete surveys. Each of the key areas of the survey - future plans, college prep, and COVID-19 impact – are highlighted below.

Postsecondary Expectations:

Over half (58%) of WAGU seniors indicated that they would be attending some type of postsecondary education (4-year, 2-year, or trade) following graduation. Pursuing a 4-year degree was the number one plan for 2022-2023, while attending a 2-year institution was second.

Compared to the 2021 graduating class, 2022's seniors reported a higher overall rate of postsecondary expectations, increasing from 50% of seniors to 58% planning to pursue some level of postsecondary education. Increases in the percentage of seniors planning to attend college increased for each level of postsecondary education: 4-year (27% to 30%), 2-year (15% to 18%), and trade school/certificate program (8% to 10%). This represents a 16% increase in the percent of high school graduates indicating they are continuing their education beyond high school.

Seniors were also asked "What is the highest level of education they plan to complete?" Completing a 4-year degree was the top answer, this is in-line with 4-year college being the top answer for future plans as seen above. The second highest picked choice, undecided, accounted for 17% of responses. Overall, 58% of seniors expect to complete some level of postsecondary degree (4-year, 2-year, or trade).

What is the highest level of education you plan to complete?

Looking back at the previous year's responses, there are identical rates of seniors indicating they plan to complete some level of postsecondary education. Where there is a significant difference is in the number of students saying they expect to complete a bachelor's degree, jumping from 24% in 2021 to 41% of 2022 graduates. There are also slight decreases in the percentage of seniors still undecided (from 22% down to 17%) and those only planning to complete high school (from 16% down to 14%). The WAGU class of 2022 appears to have higher educational expectations for their future than the previous year's graduates.

If you are not planning to continue your education after high school (two-year, four-year, trade/apprenticeship) what are the reasons?

With just over two in five WAGU seniors (42%) indicating that they plan to complete less than a postsecondary degree or are still undecided, understanding why seniors do not expect to continue their education is important. The top reasons seniors gave for not pursuing further education were “I don’t like school” and “I need to have an income”.

The number of seniors saying they do not plan to continue their education due to academic reasons (not prepared, low grades, etc.) saw a slight drop from 2021 to 2022 (16% down to 12%). The biggest difference between the two graduating classes is the percent of seniors indicating that they are not continuing their education due to financial reasons. Thirty-four percent of those surveyed in 2022 gave a financial based reason (need income or can’t afford it), compared to 0% of seniors in 2021. While not liking school continues to be the top reason seniors do not want to continue their education, doubts of being able to finance a postsecondary education appear to be on the rise.

College Prep

Research continues to show that visiting college campuses has a very positive impact on students’ decision to continue their education after high school. Not only boosting students’ college knowledge and efficacy, but also increasing students’ grit and participation in advanced coursework.¹ With just 31% of WAGU seniors reporting that they visited a college campus, working to get more students on campuses should be a goal for WAGU and partner schools. This is a drop from the previous year, when 40% of WAGU seniors said they had visited a college campus.

Completing the FAFSA is an important step in pursuing a postsecondary education and can also have a positive impact on student’s pursuing continued education. Nearly all (92%) WAGU seniors said they are aware of the FAFSA, with 57% stating they had completed the FAFSA. These results are essentially the same as those reported for 2021 graduates. In comparison a recently conducted student survey for high school Juniors indicated just 67% percent of those surveyed stated they were aware of the FAFSA and 52% said they need support around financial aid applications.

For the recent 2022 graduates indicating that they did not submit the FAFSA, the top reason given was that they are not attending college (38%). A quarter of those not filling out the FAFSA reported it was because they did not understand the financial aid process or they missed the financial aid workshops. This is an area to continue to work on in order to get all students in a financial aid workshop or other FAFSA resource in hopes of increasing FAFSA completion rates again next year.

Covid 19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented recent high school graduates with a unique challenge as they move in to the next chapter of their lives. WAGU seniors were asked how the pandemic has affected their plans for the future and ability to prepare for that future. As expected as we get further removed from the pandemic, slightly more seniors reported that COVID-19 has not changed their postsecondary

¹ Swanson, E., Kopotic, K., Zamorro, G., Mills, J. N., Greene, J. P., & Ritter, G. W. (2021). An Evaluation of the Educational Impact of College Campus Visits: A Randomized Experiment (No. 1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858421989707>

plans. Seventy-three percent of graduates in 2021 said covid did not impact their plans, up to 79% of graduates in 2022.

Out of the 26 students reporting that COVID-19 has changed their plans, 48% indicated it has led to them no longer pursuing a postsecondary education. On the other hand, 31% of seniors said that they have now decided to attend college due to the pandemic.

Takeaways

- The majority (58%) of seniors planned to continue their education after high school, an increase from the previous year.
- 58% of seniors indicated they expect to obtain some level of postsecondary degree.
- Not liking school continues to be the top reason seniors give for not continuing their education after high school. Financial based reasons showed the largest increase over the previous year, for why seniors are not pursuing college.
- Less than a third of surveyed seniors visited a college campus in the last year.
- Just over half of WAGU seniors completed the FAFSA, despite nearly all students (92%) being aware of the opportunity and process.
- The majority of seniors continue to report that their plans have not changed due to the pandemic, seeing a slight increase over the previous year.
- For most students that have changed their plans because of covid, they have chosen to no longer attend college following high school graduation