



College Access Considerations for Diverse Populations

A Primer for College Access Professionals

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Special population students: As defined by Perkins IV, special population students are individuals with disabilities, individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children, individuals preparing for nontraditional training and employment, single parents, including single pregnant women, and individuals with other barriers to educational achievement, including individuals with limited English proficiency.

College: Any type of education or training after high school. There are many options for students after high school including apprenticeships, military, on-the-job training programs, community college certificates, 2-year degrees, & 4-year degrees. The term college includes all of these things.

Introduction

Students and their families come from various backgrounds and experiences related to ethnicities, race, country of origin, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and other identities. College access professionals can use this guide to understand post-high school considerations for unaccompanied homeless youth, undocumented students, those currently in or alums of foster care, and LGBTQ+ students. Learn how to identify needs and build support systems. Explore the college application and financial aid processes and learn ways to help students successfully transition into education after high school. NOTE: This guide is not intended to be legal advice.

GEAR UP provides services to diverse populations. Note: This population is sometimes called special populations in reference to the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV). These support services aim to increase academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education while increasing high school graduation and postsecondary participation rates, and increasing students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary options, preparation, and finances.

GEAR UP program service areas include:

- Tutoring & Homework Assistance.
- Comprehensive Mentoring.
- Financial Aid Counseling/Advising.
- Counseling/Advising/Academic Planning/Career Counseling.
- College Visit/College Student Shadowing.
- Educational Field Trips.
- Job Site Visit/Job Shadowing.
- Student Workshops.
- Tests/Test Preparation.
- Summer Programs.
- Student Orientation.
- Family Events.

Understanding & Identification of Unique Needs

Identifying and understanding the unique needs of students from such diverse backgrounds can be challenging in a school environment. Their circumstances may have impeded or could impact future academic progress. Often, a student's circumstances outside school can result in behavioral challenges. These students may also be reluctant to share their personal stories or circumstances with school personnel.

Sometimes, it can be challenging to identify the students in your school or program who belong to special populations. If you do not have a system, you can build a network of colleagues within and outside the school environment and educate them on what to look for to help ensure students get the support they need.

Potential Indicators

- Chronic tardiness/attendance problems.
- High mobility.
- Food insecurity.
- Hygiene issues.
- Signs of physical abuse.
- Chronic exhaustion.
- Signs of homelessness (moving from place to place, carrying all belongings).

Recommended Practice: Identification

Does your school have formal or informal processes for identifying and referring special population students? If yes, does it include the populations that you serve? Could it be improved? Is it a safe, ethical, and confidential manner that helps you refer students to appropriate support?

Are the school staff aware of this process? If not, can you provide training? If not, can you develop one that you can use to identify special population students? If so, consider the following: What information might be readily available to you to help identify students, such as school records, information in the student information system, IEPs, or registration forms? How might you gather information directly from students and their families/guardians and let students and their families know that it is safe to communicate this type of information?

Guiding Identification Questions

- What brings you to our school (or organization)?
- Are there any special circumstances that we should be aware of? We have several supports that we want to make sure all our families know how to access.
- Are you currently in transition between living situations?
- Is there anything I can do to help you transition into our school (or community)?
- Are there any services that you received at your prior school that we should be aware of?
- Consider how you might develop a confidential record keeping system for your own personal use in assisting students.
- Consider appropriate school/district approval process for finalizing a referral process to ensure compliance with student privacy and other laws/regulations.

Build a Support System

Connect to community resources to better support the needs of your students. Discuss the identification and unique needs and support of your students and their families with your colleagues. Build awareness of how to create a safe and supportive environment for students from various backgrounds and experiences. Create a plan to inform the community of your services. Examples include family nights, fact sheets, bulletin boards, special events, banners, websites, newsletters, brochures, and/or a community guide.

An accessible school or community, a guide to community resources for students and their families, is a great way to connect population students and families to the resources in your local community. If you have a guide, review it to see if it needs to be updated or improved to serve special population students better. If you do not have a guide, contact your school social worker, the United Way, DSHS, faith-based organizations, community centers, or a local community foundation.

Your school should strive to create a safe and supportive environment for students. You may review data from a school climate survey to assess how safe and supportive your school is for special population students. If you do not have access to school climate data, you may be able to glean information from your latest Healthy Youth Survey results at <https://www.askhys.net>.

Referral Network Questions

- What are the special populations of unique needs within my school?
- Where are my students?
- Who else serves similar populations? Common goals?
- How do we currently help these students develop self-advocacy skills and resilience? How can we improve?
- What strategies do we have in place to help students from diverse backgrounds overcome challenges that may impede their academic progress? Are they sufficient?
- Does everyone in the referral network have an awareness of state or local policies and procedures regarding credit recovery, alternative graduation options, and appeals processes for graduation?
- What are their challenges?
- How do we identify and refer students? To whom?
- How can we communicate with sensitivity?
- What resources available in my community to support populations of students with unique needs and circumstances? How do we advertise/attract students and families?

Referral Networks

Who are your referral partners? Networks could include personnel at your school or within your community or organization who have knowledge of (and are trusted by) students with unique needs and circumstances.

Network could include:

- Parent/guardian.
- Teachers, administrators.
- School counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses.
- Community mental health counselors and social workers.
- McKinney-Vento liaison.
- Foster care liaison.
- Attendance/enrollment staff.
- Coaches.
- Bus drivers.
- Administrative assistants.
- Cafeteria staff.
- Custodial staff.
- School safety officers.
- Extracurricular/after school activity staff.
- Volunteers (family or community).
- Special education case managers.
- Vocational rehabilitation counselors.
- Local immigration support services.
- Community agencies.
- Community cultural organizations.
- Youth serving shelters.

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

About

First-generation (or "first-gen") students face substantial challenges in college access, success, and completion. Their parents/families may not know how to prepare the student for college or what to expect once enrolled. This lack of college knowledge and navigation can negatively affect even academically prepared students.

First-generation students often experience additional challenges, which puts them at a greater risk of not persisting. For example, students may lack support and/or understanding from family and friends, be low-income, and struggle to balance work, classes, and personal obligations. Many first-generation students lack resources in a variety of areas.

First-generation: A first-generation college student is defined as someone whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not attend college or graduate without a degree.

Strategies for Working with First-Gen Students

College access professionals and school counselors can help support and guide these students. They can educate students about college and financial aid options, procedures, and timelines, as well as, self-advocacy skills, growth mindset, and available resources. Examples of tasks include:

- **Identify students and provide information about GEAR UP services** to teachers, counselors, and other school staff.
- Provide information about GEAR UP opportunities to special population students and their families.
- **Coordinate with teachers to promote recruitment of students** in GEAR UP activities.
- Encourage first-gen students to apply to more than one school.
- Help students determine what school is a good fit.
- Arrange for fee waivers.
- Assist with financial aid and scholarship applications.
- Demystify college and its lingo.
- Talk about imposter syndrome.
- Encourage students to identify, to take advantage of resources, and to ask questions.
- **Facilitate in-service training for school personnel working with students** within special populations to improve their abilities and techniques in meeting the special needs of these students.

College access professionals can inform students of the TRiO program and educate students on how to find and apply to the program. TRiO Student Support Services is a college program targets first-gen, low-income students, and or those with disabilities. TRiO offers mentoring, career counseling, and can help students at two-year colleges then transfer to four-year schools.

STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

About

Homelessness is found in every community and is increasing. More than 40,000 students in Washington are classified as homeless. This amount has doubled in the past ten years.

Homeless: According to the McKinney-Vento Act, a child or youth who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence is considered homeless. In addition to the fixed, regular, and adequate wording, which is the definition's guiding phrase, the definition includes examples of living arrangements that would not be considered fixed, regular, and adequate and, therefore, would meet the definition of homeless.

Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) are youth whose living arrangement meets the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Single Point of Contact (SPOC): The SPOC is designed to be an ally- a safe and supportive college administrator who is committed to helping unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) successfully navigate the college-going process. They are ideally knowledgeable of federal guidance, and state laws impacting higher education access and success for unaccompanied homeless youth. Having an ally allows UHY to have support finding campus and community resources and reduces the number of times student must repeat, or relive, situations that led to them becoming homeless.

Youth become homeless, whether with their family or on their own, for various reasons. Students experiencing homelessness face barriers to meeting enrollment requirements (school records, immunizations, proof of residence, and guardianship) and may lack transportation, school supplies, and clothing. They may experience poor health, fatigue, hunger, prejudice, and misunderstanding. They tend to have a higher rate of absenteeism and school mobility harming academic achievement and increasing their odds of dropping out.

Strategies for Working with Youth Experiencing Homelessness

College access professionals can provide help in the college search and application process. Examples of tasks include:

- **Find out who your school's homeless liaison is.**
- **Learn how homeless students are identified** and what educational barriers they are facing.
- **Determine if the student has ever been in foster care after age 13.** If yes, their college classes will likely be paid for at most Washington colleges.
- **Support study skills.** Connect student with tutoring and mentoring programs.
- **Assist with obtaining fee waivers** for such things as Advanced Placement (AP) exams, college entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT, and college applications.
- **Assist with college and career exploration. Discuss additional considerations** that students may need to take into account when exploring college options such as housing options, including during school breaks; employment options, if needed; transportation options, if needed; and availability of no-cost tutoring, and academic and other student supports.

- **Encourage them to participate in campus visits** hosted by their school.
- **Assist students in completing the FAFSA or WASFA** and finding scholarships for school. They may have difficulty completing financial aid without assistance; this is particularly true for UHY, who may be unable to access information on their parents' income and assets or get a parent signature.
- **Provide information on specific opportunities** for homeless students. If the student has been in foster care, there are additional scholarships that they may qualify for.
- **Assist them in securing sufficient financial resources** to cover college expenses. Ensuring that a student has sufficient aid, including through federal and state sources, private scholarships, and the prudent use of loans, will reduce their work burden.
- **Help students learn how to navigate challenges and self-advocate.** For example, if a student gets a bill for a housing deposit before their aid is dispersed, encourage them to ask if fees can be waived, deferred, or included in their financial aid application.
- **Assist students in understanding award letters and next steps.**
- **Provide information about various supports that may be available** to them, for example support service programs like TRiO.
- **Introduce them to the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) or an adult ally** on the campus.
- **Encourage them to explore other areas of assistance** that may be on or off campus such as food banks, food stamps, etc.
- **Help students plan** for transportation and housing.

College Exploration & Fit for Independent Youth

The needs of students experiencing foster care and homelessness often overlap; moreover, students who identify as LGBTQ disproportionality experience both the foster care system and homelessness at higher rates than their peers do. Therefore, many overlapping strategies and resources will apply to students in these circumstances.

College access professionals can help students research and determine what school is a good fit. They can also help students think through their needs and make a transition plan.

- Help students find where they can find a mentor or advocate on campus.
- Find out if there are any foster peer groups at preferred colleges.
- Do they provide year-round housing, including during winter breaks? Or do they provide gap housing available during school breaks?
- Can a student have housing fees waived, deferred, or included in my financial aid package?
- Do they offer LGBTQ-safe housing options (if applicable)?
- Does the preferred college offer an orientation? Is there anything the school can do to help with the cost of transportation?
- Does the campus offer a summer transition program? Is there help with transportation?
- Is free or cheap transportation available?
- How does a student access tutoring and academic support services?
- Is there a Passport Navigator here?

- Where does a student go to register for disability services (if applicable)? What documentation is required?
- If available, how can I apply for a TRiO SSS program?
- Are there food or clothing banks on campus or nearby?

Financial Aid for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Students should file a financial aid application during their senior year and every year they attend college. All federal financial aid programs, most programs offered by the State of Washington, and many programs offered by colleges require that a student complete and submit the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Suppose they do not have a Social Security Number or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. In that case, you should complete the WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid) instead of the FAFSA. Students should complete the FAFSA or WASFA as close to October 1st because financial aid dollars are limited and often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

An unaccompanied student, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting also qualifies as an independent student on their financial aid application. If they answer "yes" to the general homelessness question on the FAFSA or WASFA, they will be asked whether they have received a **homeless youth determination**. If they indicate that they have, their college financial aid administrator may request the determination to prove that they are "unaccompanied" and homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Students should contact one of the following individuals to ask if they can provide you with a homeless youth determination:

- The high school or school district homeless liaison.
- The director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- The director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program.

At risk of homelessness and self-supporting are defined as follows:

- **At risk of homelessness:** When a student's housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
- **Self-supporting:** When a student pays for his own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing.

If the student answers "yes" to the general homelessness question on the financial aid application but has not received a homeless youth determination, they can still submit their application. Once they apply, the student must request a homeless youth determination from the financial aid administrator at the college they plan to attend. While not required, the student may want to submit documentation from any of the following:

- Local school district personnel.
- State homeless education coordinators.
- The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE).
- Third parties such as private or publicly funded homeless shelters and service providers.
- Financial aid administrators from colleges other than the school to which you present the documentation.

- Staff from college access programs such as TRiO (e.g., Talent Search or Upward Bound) or GEAR UP.
- College or high school counselors.
- Mental health professionals, social workers, mentors, doctors, or clergy.

If the student does not have written documentation of their homelessness status, the financial aid office must still review the request and determine if the student qualifies. The financial aid office's decision may be based on other information available to them through resources like the state or local government, community organizations, or services provided by the college.

In Washington State, the **FAFSA-Independent Student Verification form can be used for homeless youth determination**. The school's homeless liaison can complete this form, which is found on the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's website: www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/Resources.aspx.

Confirm that the Financial Aid Office received the FAFSA and inquire if other paperwork or a subsequent determination by your financial aid administrator is needed.

Resources

- [SchoolHouse Connections](#)
- [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth \(NAEHCY\)](#)

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

About

In Washington State, over 10,000 school-age students are living in foster care. Research shows that 70% of youth aging out of foster care plan to attend college — but more than half do not graduate high school and only between 3% and 11% complete a bachelor's degree.

Foster youth are also disproportionately Native American, African American, or multiracial and two and a half times more likely to participate in special education programs than their peers. Youth in care have a much higher rate of school mobility.

If a student has been in foster care after age 13, money and resources are available to help them go to college—including vocational training and 2- and 4-year options—for most Washington State schools. These students should complete the FAFSA as independent students. They do not need to include parental information (even if adopted after age 13). They are also auto enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship program.

Foster youth: A youth who has been removed from the custody of their parent(s) or guardian(s) by the juvenile court and placed in a group home or foster home.

Strategies for Working with Foster Youth

College access professionals and school counselors can help support and guide these students. They can educate students about college and financial aid options, procedures, and timelines, as well as, self-advocacy skills, growth mindset, and available resources. Examples of tasks include:

- **Encourage students to take advantage and participate in college prep programs**, such as SETuP and GEAR UP.
- **Explore support services.**
- **Ask if the student has considered Extended Foster Care, Independent Living, or Medicaid to 26.**
- **Review the state and federal financial aid programs** available.
- **Assist with financial aid application.**
- **Assist with scholarship searches** and application.
- **Help student enroll in TRiO or other support programs.**

College Preparation Programs

Supplemental Education Transition Planning Program (SETuP): SETuP can inform students and their foster families about post-high school education and training opportunities. For more information, visit www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth. Regional SETuP providers may be able to help prepare your students for college by offering:

- Financial aid application assistance.
- College application coaching and assistance.
- Pre-college testing guidance is based on educational goals.
- Connecting you to other support services.

Support Services

Extended Foster Care Program: This program provides an opportunity for foster youth at the age of 18 to voluntarily agree to continue receiving foster care services, including placement services. At the same time, they complete a high school or post-high school academic or vocational program or participate in a program or activity designed to promote employment. For more information, visit www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth

First-Year Supportive Programming: When helping students choose a college, investigate their Equal Opportunity Programs (EOPs), often labeled as First-Year Experience Programs, Summer Bridge Programs, Freshman Seminars, etc. These programs support youth in making a successful transition to college.

Foster Care Alumni Services: Some schools offer services for foster care youth, such as housing during holiday breaks. Help foster youth find out if the college they want to attend offers services for former foster youth.

Housing: Some colleges have priority housing and year-round options. The Independent Youth Housing Program is available in certain parts of the state. It provides rental assistance and case management services to eligible youth aged out of the foster care system. This program may be able to help your students in foster care find a safe, affordable place to live and help them become independent. Learn more about eligibility and its services at www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth

Independent Living Program (ILP): This program can provide foster youth essential life skills and support. It is designed to enhance their ability to live independently by increasing their skills, knowledge, and ability in the following areas:

- Educational stability, advocacy, and achievement
- Post-high school education preparation
- Income maintenance
- Employment/vocational readiness
- Housing
- Daily living skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Self-advocacy
- Bridging of healthy/supportive relationships

ILP is voluntary and is open to all youth who meet eligibility. Youth can be anywhere on the spectrum of transitioning to adulthood. Services are provided through local community-based agencies and federally recognized Tribes throughout Washington. For more information, email ILSKIDS@dshs.wa.gov, contact your local DCFS office, or visit www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth

Medicaid to 26: Youth may be eligible for continued foster care benefits even if they are no longer in foster care or other eligible out-of-home placement. To find out if they qualify, have them call 1-800-562-3022 extension 15480.

TRiO Student Support Services Program (TRiO SSS): This program is offered at many community colleges and four-year schools. If a student is low-income, first-generation, foster youth, and/or has disabilities. This program can be a great support. In TRiO, students can get tutoring and academic counseling and learn study skills. This program can help students navigate the college system. It also offers social and cultural events to help them build a supportive social network.

Financial Aid Programs for Foster Youth and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

College Bound Scholarship: The College Bound Scholarship is an early promise of state financial aid to help pay for education after high school. The scholarship combines with other state financial aid to cover college tuition at similar public college rates, some fees, and some money for books at over 60 colleges and universities in Washington. If a student has been in foster care from grade 7 to age 21, they are automatically enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship program. Beginning their senior year, they will still need to apply for financial aid with a FAFSA or a WASFA. More information is available at www.collegebound.wa.gov

Passport to Careers Program: The program helps foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth prepare for and succeed in college, apprenticeships, or pre-apprenticeship programs. Through the Passport to College program, students receive a scholarship that assists with the cost of attending college (tuition, fees, books, housing, transportation, and some personal expenses), support services from college staff, and priority consideration for the State Work Study program. The Passport to Apprenticeship Opportunities program will assist students participating in registered apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs by covering occupational-specific costs such as tuition for classes, fees, work clothes, rain gear, boots, and occupation-related tools. Students with questions about eligibility for the Passport to Careers program should contact 1-888-535-0747 (option 3), email passport@wsac.wa.gov, or visit <https://wsac.wa.gov/passport-to-careers>

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program: This national program offers financial assistance to eligible youth to attend an accredited* college, university, vocational or technical college. You may receive funding for qualified school-related expenses, including Running Start. Funding is limited and available to eligible students on a first-come, first-served basis. ETV can help pay tuition, fees, books, housing, food, transportation, and other educational costs. For more information, visit www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth, email ETVWASH@dshs.wa.gov, or call 1-877-433-8388.

*For a list of accredited colleges, universities, and technical or vocational institutes in Washington State and to view eligibility requirements, visit: <http://wsac.wa.gov/colleges-and-institutions-washington>

Washington State Governors' Scholarship for Foster Youth. This scholarship helps youth in foster care continue their education and earn a college degree. Scholarship amounts vary depending on the college you attend and are available for up to five years. They must be enrolled full-time and maintain satisfactory grades to renew the scholarship each year. Learn more: <https://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/scholarship/governors-scholarship-for-foster-youth/#about>

Resources

- Resources for Washington State Foster Youth www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth
- [Fostering College Knowledge](#)

LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

About

Students who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, or queer may be nervous about applying to/choosing a school. These students may have had some negative experiences in high school. They may be looking for a school or program where they will feel welcome, comfortable, and secure in their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

For LGBTQ+ students, however, their sexual orientation or gender can bring added challenges during the college admissions process. For transgender students who are early in their process of transitioning, there may be many different reasons for wanting to use (or not use) their legal name. Students should be aware that procedures and policies vary from institution to institution, so it is essential to know the requirements. The college process also represents a good opportunity for students to find a friendly and welcoming campus.

Gender-fluid: A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Gender Non-conforming: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer: Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories. **Also known as non-binary.**

Gender Transition: The period in which a person begins to live in a gender role that is in accordance with his or her internal gender identity. Transition is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition may include some or all of the following cultural, legal and medical adjustments: informing one's family, friends and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; undergoing hormone therapy; and/or seeking surgical alteration (see Sex Reassignment Surgery).

LGBT: An acronym, which stands for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender." Other versions may add "Q" for Queer or Questioning, "I" for Intersex and "A" for Allied. Some may prefer to list the acronym as TBLG to place trans people in a position of importance and to rectify the way trans has historically been omitted, devalued or excluded.

Queer: Queer is a term that has been reclaimed by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities to describe people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender traditionalism. Although still a derogatory term in many cases, many queer-identified people have taken back the word to use it as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity.

Transgender: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This group includes, but is not limited to, transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Strategies for Working with LGBTQ Youth

- **Help them assess the LGBTQ friendliness or climate of a campus** and its housing options.
- **Encourage students to visit campuses** (some schools offer travel scholarships), talk to students who don't work for the admissions office about the campus climate, and reach out to students through the campus LGBTQ center or a dean of multicultural affairs.
- **Help students find LGBTQ resources on campus.** Does the school have an employee to provide resources and services (e.g., LGBTQ center, student groups, and organizations) to LGBTQ students? Does the school offer health and counseling services designed for LGBTQ students?
- **Learn about laws, what name and gender marker students should use** on their college application, and FASFA/WASFA.

College Application Process

There is no fixed rule concerning being out during the application process. Ultimately, disclosing an LGBTQ identity to schools depends on the individual. Many schools appreciate having the fullest possible sense of all of their applicants, including that they are LGBTQ.

It is possible to be out to admissions staff members but not your family. Not everyone comes out before leaving high school for a variety of reasons. LGBTQ students not currently out to their families may want to consider whether they want to come out in their written application materials. If students choose not to disclose information to admissions through the written application, they may opt to call admissions officers at a school or come out during an interview with a staff member.

Completing the FAFSA or WASFA

The FAFSA and the WASFA are official government forms. According to Federal Student Aid, applicants must enter their information as it appears on official government documents (e.g., birth certificate and social security card). If the student has not changed their legal name and gender marker on Identity Documents (e.g., birth certificate, license, passport, Social Security Card), they must use the original information.

If students do not use their legal name and official gender designation, their application will not be processed successfully, and their financial aid may be in jeopardy. Unsure of what to do? Contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center by email, chat, or phone. Students can find out how to get a legal name change where they live and update their name/gender on state and federal IDs and records at the National Center for Transgender Equality ID Document Center for Washington State:

www.transequality.org/documents/state/washington.

Resources

- [Supporting Transgender Students: College Admissions & Financial Aid](#)
- [Campus Pride Index](#)
- [Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse](#)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities represent about 16% of the K-12 student population in Washington State. These students may face challenges transitioning through the educational system that others do not. Despite efforts to improve graduation rates and post-school outcomes for all students, students with disabilities still graduate at lower rates than the average student population. Additionally, postsecondary enrollment and completion rates are substantially low.

Students with disabilities face challenges that prevent them from entering and succeeding in postsecondary education programs. Because postsecondary institutions differ significantly from high school, it is imperative that students with disabilities know their rights and responsibilities and self-advocate to be successful. Responsibility shifts from the school system in K-12 to the student in postsecondary education. In K-12, the school identifies students needing specialized support or services. However, in college, the student is responsible for seeking out the disability services office and self-identifying to request accommodations. Students may also have insufficient knowledge of available support systems and resources they may need to obtain services and/or accommodations.

In addition, students may lack the financial resources necessary for obtaining a professional evaluation. Professional evaluations provide documentation of a disability, which is usually required to receive accommodations in postsecondary education.

The demands at the college level are higher than in high school. For students to be successful at the college level, they need the ability to employ effective learning strategies and strong skills such as time management, communication, and self-advocacy.

After entering postsecondary environments, students with disabilities face additional challenges. Some struggle with the adjustment to independent living. Transition planning should prepare students for the rigor and independent nature of college life.

Strategies for Working with Youth with Disabilities

- **Assist students in exploring the differences between K-12 & college.**
- **Explore common accommodations in college & how to request them at college.**
- **Identify and share issues related to students with disabilities** preparing for and transitioning into college.
- **Make sure that students with disabilities know their rights and responsibilities and self-advocate** in order to be successful.

Accommodations for College Admissions Testing

If students need accommodations (extra-large test book, extra testing time), they can apply for them.

- Have students work with their school counselor to apply.
- Usually, the paperwork must be submitted **six months in advance**.
- Remind students that some accommodations mean that they will be testing for a longer timeframe.

Documentation of a Disability

If a student would like the postsecondary school to provide an academic accommodation, they must identify as having a disability. Likewise, the student should let the school know about the disability to

ensure that they are assigned to accessible facilities. In any event, the disclosure of a disability is always voluntary.

When Should a Student Request an Accommodation?

Students may request academic accommodation at any time; however, it is preferable and highly recommended to request it as early as possible. Some academic accommodations may take more time to provide than others may take, e.g., transcribing a textbook into Braille. Students need to be aware of the postsecondary school's procedures to ensure the school has enough time to review any request and provide an appropriate academic accommodation. Additionally, most postsecondary institutions will require that a student show current documentation showing that they have a disability requiring adjustment/accommodation.

What Documentation is Required?

Schools may establish documentation guidelines to determine eligibility for accommodations. Some schools require more thorough documentation than others do. An IEP or 504 plan may help identify services that have been effective for you; however, this is generally not sufficient documentation. Contact the school's DS office to find out their documentation guidelines.

Required Documentation Must:

- Be current (postsecondary testing is preferred).
- Make a clear connection between the disability and the requested accommodations.
- Be performed by a qualified evaluator- such as a medical doctor, psychologist, or other qualified diagnostician.
- Clearly state the diagnoses.
- Clearly state the functional limitations resulting from the diagnoses.

Who Has To Pay For A New Evaluation?

Neither the high school nor the postsecondary school must conduct or pay for a new evaluation to document a disability and need for academic accommodation. Therefore, students may have to pay or find funding to pay an appropriate professional for an assessment. A student eligible for services through the state vocational rehabilitation agency might qualify for an evaluation at no cost. See Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at DSHS. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights

Resource

- [Preparing Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Education: A Resource Guide](#)

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

About

Washington State has the tenth-largest population of undocumented individuals in the U.S., approximately three percent of Washington's population. Most of these people have lived in this country for over a decade. Mexico, Guatemala, India, Vietnam, and Korea are the top five countries of origin.

Washington is one of a handful of states (including the District of Columbia) to offer in-state tuition AND financial aid to undocumented students.

Undocumented: An umbrella term. This term is preferred by students and families based on their feedback to WSAC. Beyond people who knowingly came to US without documentation, undocumented individuals also include:

- DREAMers: Typically, people who entered US without immigration documentation as children (and still do not have legal status). The term DREAMer originated from several bills introduced in Congress since 2001 referred to as the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act).
- People with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- People who entered US with legal immigration documentation but are now “out of status”.

High school educators are often the first stop an undocumented student makes when finding college information, especially how they will pay for it. Research shows that 70% of families and students say the school counselor is their first resource for financial aid information.

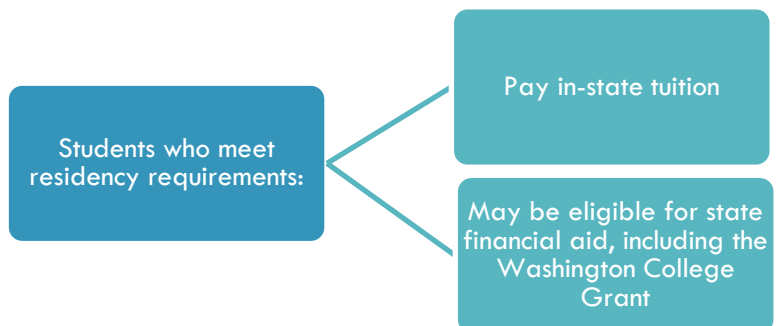
Frequently, students might have just learned about their status, and their counselor might have been one of the first people they confided in. They may be confused about their future and wonder if all their hard work in high school was a wasted effort. Fortunately, undocumented Washingtonians who have lived in Washington for a year may qualify for in-state tuition and money for college and apprenticeships.

Both U.S. citizens and non-citizens can be Washington residents, and Washington residents pay less for college. In most cases, a Washington resident is someone who lives in the state for one year immediately before starting college. Learn more about in-state tuition and financial aid at bit.ly/wa-residency

College Affordability & Residency

How does residency impact college affordability in Washington? Many state-funded programs are only for WA residents or charge a lower fee for Washington residents. Tuition and financial aid have 25+ ways to prove residency, five of which are used for the Washington e Grant.

**Undocumented students who have never had DACA can access only one way (new residency law - SB 5194).



New Residency Law Eligibility Criteria (SB 5194 - 2021)

Of the 25+ ways to prove residency for tuition and financial aid, SB 5194 is the most accessible path to eligibility. It is now easier for all Washingtonians, especially undocumented students, to meet residency requirements for in-state tuition and all state aid financial aid programs, including the WA Grant.

Before their first term at the college determining residency, students must:

- Earn a high school diploma, GED, or diploma equivalent before their first term at the college determining residency.
- Maintain a primary residence in Washington for at least 12 consecutive months immediately before their first term at the college, determining residency, and sign an affidavit saying they meet the above requirements and that one of the following is true:
 - They will apply to become a permanent resident of the United States as soon as possible. And that they are willing to engage in activities designed to prepare them for citizenship, including citizenship or civics review courses or
 - They are a U.S. citizen, U.S. nationals, or U.S. permanent residents.

The affidavit is on the WA State Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA). Students who will use the FAFSA to apply for financial aid or who do not want to apply for financial aid can get a separate affidavit at wsac.wa.gov/student-residency or ask for one from their school.

State Financial Aid

Students must meet program and residency requirements to qualify for state financial aid. Those who meet the new residency law get in-state tuition and meet residency requirements for all state aid programs, including the Washington College Grant and the College Bound Scholarship. However, they must still meet program requirements.

The Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) is for people who don't file a [federal FAFSA application](#). If you have completed the FAFSA, you have already applied for federal and state financial aid and do not need to complete the WASFA unless your college asks you to.

A person should complete the WASFA if they are undocumented or do not qualify for federal financial aid because of their immigration status. The WASFA can also be used in limited circumstances by [other select applicants](#) who cannot or choose not to file a FAFSA.

People who complete a WASFA are applying only for state aid. If students are [eligible for federal aid](#), they should complete the FAFSA to maximize financial aid awards.

If students are unsure if they should complete a FAFSA or a WASFA, they can complete the [WASFA Eligibility Questionnaire](#).

Strategies for Working with Youth Who Are Undocumented

- When planning Financial Aid Nights - **avoid using the term FAFSA nights.**
- **Share with students and families that in-state tuition and state aid are not the only funding available** to undocumented students. Some schools even give full rides to undocumented students.
- **Share with students and families how they can save money through dual credit** if they are academically ready.
- Remind students and families that in Washington State, live in a state where the governor and attorney general have made it clear that we stand by undocumented students. **Schools are prohibited from releasing student information without a subpoena/warrant, including to ICE.**
- **Show that you are an ally and your office is a safe space**, where students can access resources.
- **Provide translated materials.**
- **When hosting a campus visit, visit the undocumented student center** or multicultural center on campus.
- **Normalize and be inclusive when talking about resources. Do not make assumptions about who is in the audience.**
- **Update all pages on your websites and print materials that reference financial aid to include FAFSA and WASFA.** WASFA often is left out of financial aid information that schools and departments provide; mentioning it any time FAFSA is mentioned can be a helpful to ensure students have all the information they need. Don't forget to include information for foster youth and unaccompanied youth.
- **Create—and regularly update—an undocumented student resource page on your website**, with links to the latest information and the resources available on your campus such as mental health services, healthcare, emergency funding, and legal assistance. **Remember, the issues that affect special populations students go beyond just financial aid and college admissions.**

Resources

- [Washington Student Achievement Council](#)
- [United We Dream](#)
- [Northwest Immigrant Rights Project](#)

Pre-College Application Strategies: All Special Populations

- **Learn about the specific needs of special population students** in the postsecondary environment (e.g., what documentation is needed to request an accommodation or what name and gender marker should go on a college or financial aid application).
- **Identify postsecondary institutions that offer the support needed for special students to be successful on campus. Share this information with students and their families.**
- **Create a plan for a campus visit with a targeted special population of students** that you work with to introduce them to campus services.
- **Learn how to assist special population students in selecting postsecondary options** that will provide the best fit and support.
- **Learn about or review accommodations and the fee waiver process** for admissions testing for special population students.
- **Help students best communicate their special circumstances on applications** and in college essays.
- **Learn or review considerations for completing financial aid applications** for special population students and learn how to research financial aid, grants, and scholarship supports specific to special population students.
- **Encourage dual credit.** Dual credit is another way undocumented students can get college credit at a reduced cost. Caveats – these should only be undertaken by students who are academically ready. There can be major harm if a student does poorly in Running Start and then transfers to a 4-year college. It also can affect their financial aid eligibility. Note: Books, transportation and fees are not covered. College may have aid available; however, if not, it is the student's responsibility.

Fee Waivers

If paying for the postsecondary entrance exams is difficult, students have options. Fee waivers are available via school counselor and are typically based on free and reduced-price lunch qualifications. There may also be GEAR UP fee waivers available.

Make sure students take advantage of these opportunities well before the registration deadlines. Share information about the various college entrance exams and the availability of fee waivers and testing accommodations. Consider sharing this information via student presentations, advisory lessons, family workshops, and mailings (electronic and hard copy).

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams: AP test fee waivers are available for eligible students, and there is no limit on the number of waivers per student. To qualify for an AP exam fee waiver, the student receives or is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or meets other criteria. Waivers are administered at the school; speak with your AP test coordinator. Eligible students qualify for the Test Fee Program through **one** of five methods: Free Lunch Program, Reduced Lunch Program, Social Security Program, Medicaid Program, or Declaration of Income. Learn more: <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/dual-credit-programs/exam-based-dual-credit>

ACT: To qualify for an ACT fee waiver, the student must be enrolled in high school in the 11th or 12th grade and be a United States citizen or testing in the United States, U.S. territories, or Puerto Rico. The student must also meet one or more of the following indicators of economic need:

- The student is receiving free/reduced lunch.

- Family income is below the USDA reduced-price lunch level.
- The student is enrolled in TRIO or a similar program.
- The family lives in subsidized housing or receives public assistance.
- The student is experiencing homelessness.
- The student is living in a foster home.
- The student is a ward of the state or is an orphan.

A student can use the waiver to take the ACT twice. Students must access the waiver from the school counselor, not the ACT. The student and school counselor must sign the waiver. This waiver covers the basic test fees, including sending the test score(s) to up to 4 colleges. It does not cover late registration fees or change fees. See: www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/FeeWaiver.pdf

SAT: To qualify for an SAT fee waiver, the student must be enrolled in high school in the 11th or 12th grade (SAT) or grades 9-12 (SAT Subject Tests). They must be a U.S. citizen or be tested in the U.S., Puerto Rico, or a U.S. territory. Students must also meet one or more of the following indicators of economic need (same as for the ACT)

- The student is receiving free/reduced lunch.
- Family income is below the USDA reduced-price lunch level.
- The student is enrolled in TRiO or a similar program.
- The family lives in subsidized housing or receives public assistance.
- The student is experiencing homelessness.
- The student is living in a foster home.
- The student is a ward of the state or is an orphan.

A valid waiver must be obtained from the student's high school counselor or an authorized agency, not from the College Board. The student can receive up to four waiver cards: Up to two waivers for the SAT and two waivers for SAT Subject Tests. It covers the basic test fees, including sending the test score(s) to up to four colleges. College application fee waivers should be included with the student's college applications and sent to colleges in the *Directory of Colleges Cooperating with the SAT Program Fee-Waiver Service*. Additional information is available at <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-fee-waivers>

Post-Admissions Strategies

Several tasks must be completed between Senior Signing Day and the fall before students attend. These tasks can be challenging because students no longer have access to school counselors and do not know how to navigate this new system.

Nationally, about 20-40% of students melt. These rates are higher among special populations and students: those from low—**and moderate-income families**, those with **lower academic achievement**, and/or who intend to enroll at **community colleges** compared to their peers planning to enroll at four-year colleges and universities.

After students receive acceptance letters and make their springtime decisions to attend a particular college, many tasks must still be completed to enroll successfully. Many of these tasks may be challenging for students without access to high school counselors. They may not be familiar with the support resources available at their intended college, and their families may lack experience with the college-going process. Several tasks relate to financing higher education, such as making sense of and paying deposits and identifying and budgeting expenses like health insurance and course textbooks.

Colleges expect students to access, digest, and respond to considerable correspondence over the summer. Students are often required—but do not always correctly anticipate the need—to register for and attend orientation, take placement tests, and complete housing forms.

Many of these tasks may be challenging for students who no longer have access to their high school counselor and whose families may lack experience with the college-going process. These tasks may include:

- Determining the cost of attendance.
- Making sense of financial aid award letters.
- Understanding tuition bills and required deposits.
- Identifying and budgeting for expenses (i.e., health insurance, textbooks, meals).
- Registering for and attending orientation.
- Receiving required immunizations.
- Taking placement tests.
- Completing housing forms.
- Registering for classes.
- Arranging transportation.

Accessing and navigating online portals—More recently, access to this information has often been provided through institution-specific online portals. These portals can sometimes be challenging to navigate. In addition, they create an extra barrier for students with limited internet access, causing some to miss timely access to essential information.

Transition Support Strategies

- Use student alumni panels so that seniors hear from near peers.
- Set realistic expectations.
- Identify which students are attending the same institutions and form a cohort or support system for next year.
- Share accurate and timely information with students and families about expected knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that are needed to be successful in college.
- Explaining common challenges. Demystifying these issues.
- Review the differences between K-12 and higher education.
- Share how students can find support on campus can help them be successful. Help students identify resources and support services on campus.
- Address challenges of commuters and those not living on campus.
- Help students plan for the summer and next steps before enrollment.
- Use a text messaging campaign to assist students after graduation. Focus on important dates, actions, and problem solving.

On-Campus Supports

Postsecondary campuses have multiple supports available to support special population students. There are also free tutoring and writing centers, career counseling, and academic advising for students. Most schools have a mental health counselor and health facility on campus. Typical support services include:

- **Summer Bridge Programs** are designed to ease the transition to college and support postsecondary success. They occur in the summer between high school and college and provide students with the academic skills and social resources needed to succeed.
- **TRiO Student Support Services Program (TRiO SSS)** is offered at many community colleges and four-year schools. This program is for students who are low-income, first-generation, or have disabilities. TRiO provides tutoring, teaches study skills, and offers academic counseling. This program helps students navigate the college system and offers social and cultural events to help students build a supportive social network.
- **College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)** helps students who are children of seasonal workers. CAMP offers counseling, tutoring, skills workshops, financial aid stipends, health services, and housing assistance.
- **Campus Disability Service Offices** help assist (placement testing, classroom, assistive technology, and more) students with disabilities.
- **First-Year Experience** is a free and open program offered by many schools. It can help students transition to college throughout their first year.

Remind students that successful college students use various resources such as tutoring, informal student study groups, meeting with professors during office hours, meeting with an academic advisor, and asking for help when needed.

Resources

- [Graduate Handbook: Next Steps for First-Year Students.](#)
- [A Family Guide: Supporting Your Child After High School.](#)

Notes:

