



# **REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE WAC 110-300-0100**

**Early Achievers Grant**

***NOVEMBER 30, 2024***

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# Executive Summary

Since 2012, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) has successfully partnered with the Department for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to support employed early learning educators in meeting their education requirements. The Early Achievers Grant (EAG) program provides eligible students with scholarship support for tuition, books, wraparound support services, and funds for colleges to employ staff who recruit, advise, and help students complete their educational requirements.

## Key program achievements

**Support for underserved populations:** The program has been particularly impactful for those who have been historically underserved by institutions of higher education:

- 91% of Early Achievers students identify as female, 61% as non-white.
- Courses are offered in students' home languages, such as Spanish, Mandarin, Somali, and Arabic.

**Higher retention and completion rates:** Through relationship-based advising and personalized support, Early Achievers students persist and complete their education requirements at higher rates compared to their peers:

- In 2023-24, 77% of EAG students persisted or completed their studies, compared to 68% of peers. Retention rate difference has been as high as 20% in some years.
- Students earned more than 1,200 credentials in 2023-24, with many students achieving multiple certificates/degrees.

**Expanding reach:** Since its inception, the EAG program has grown significantly. Consistent enrollment growth reflects the program's reputation among early learning professionals:

- Program participation has grown from just 69 students in 2012 to its highest level of 2,065 in 2023-24.
- 27 colleges currently participate, awarding 34,502 credits in 2023-24.

The financial and relationship-based assistance has been the cornerstone of the program's long-term success and is a model recommended for other programs with incumbent workers. Students regularly cite the program contacts and their help navigating college as the key to successfully juggling the many challenges of attending college as a working adult. Demand for the Early Achievers Grant program has grown significantly over the years.

In 2024, [\\$801,000 of the Workforce Education Investment Account \(WEIA\) state appropriation](#) was made available directly to SBCTC to support colleges with staffing costs associated with recruitment, advising, and support of Early Achievers Grant scholars working to complete their education requirements. The proviso included priority for colleges with longer wait lists for funding.

The additional WEIA funds and increased scholarship funding from DCYF helped colleges increase student support staff and decrease the waitlist for Early Achievers Grant funds by 83%. As the staff qualification deadline for early learning educators approaches, there is anticipated to be an increased need for both staff time and scholarship funding.

# Background

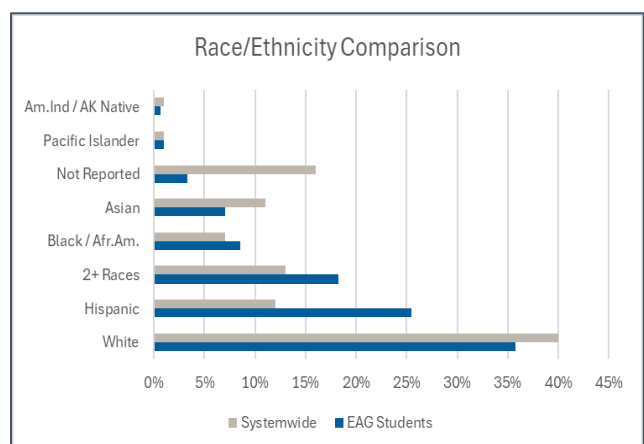
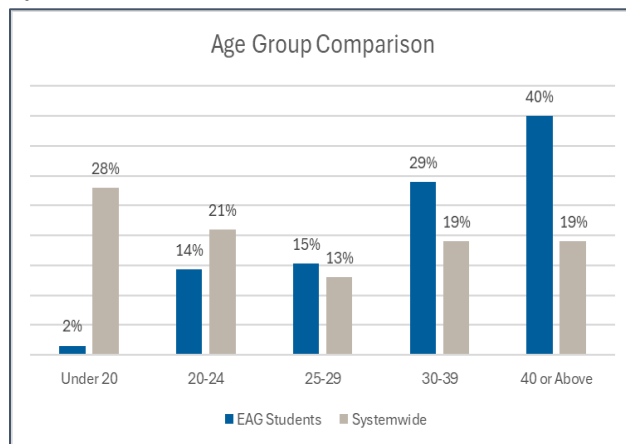
The Early Achievers Grant (EAG) is a student financial aid program designed to help employed childcare providers and early learning educators complete the [required staff qualifications in early childhood education](#). It is offered in partnership with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), which directs funding to SBCTC to administer the program for stackable certificates and associate degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

The program offers scholarships to students to help cover tuition, books, and other emergent costs that may arise during the academic year, which could hinder their progress in completing the required credentials. Colleges that submit successful applications receive \$6,600 per full-time equivalent student (FTES) to cover these expenses. Additionally, they receive \$1,700 per FTES to help meet grant requirements for outreach and recruitment within their communities, verify scholarship eligibility, provide students with relationship-based advising, assist them in navigating campus resources, and, if needed, connect them with external resources that support their educational journeys. In the 2024-25 academic year, college FTES awards ranged from five FTES to 70 FTES, and a total of 767 FTES were awarded systemwide.

In 2024, the Washington State Legislature set aside [\\$801,000 of the Workforce Education Investment Account state appropriation](#) for community college staff to recruit, advise, and support Early Achievers Grant scholars working to complete their education requirements. The proviso included priority for colleges with longer waitlists for Early Achievers scholars.

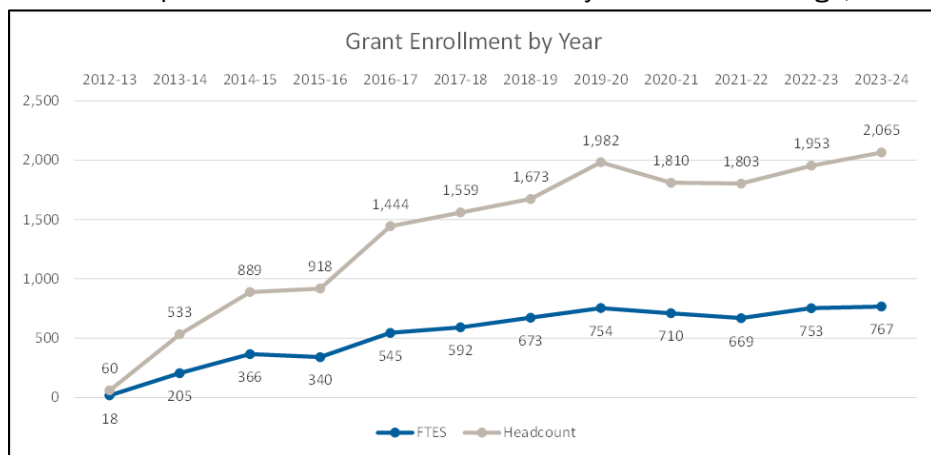
## Early Achievers Grant Student Demographics

Early Achievers students often belong to historically underserved populations in higher education. They tend to be older than their community and technical college peers and are predominantly non-white. For instance, nearly 50% of community and technical college students across Washington state are under 24 years old, while only 16% of EAG students fall within this age group. Furthermore, 61% of EAG students identify as a race or ethnicity other than white, with the percentage of those identifying as Hispanic increasing each year. The childcare and early learning industry is largely female, and EAG student demographics reflect this, with 91% identifying as female. In contrast, only 51% of students across the system identify as female. Early Achievers students are also linguistically diverse, and colleges have begun to develop curricula in students' home languages to help better serve their students. Work is underway to offer the initial certificate in Spanish through the online system shared courses in the 2023-24 academic year.



## Early Achievers Grant Enrollment Trends

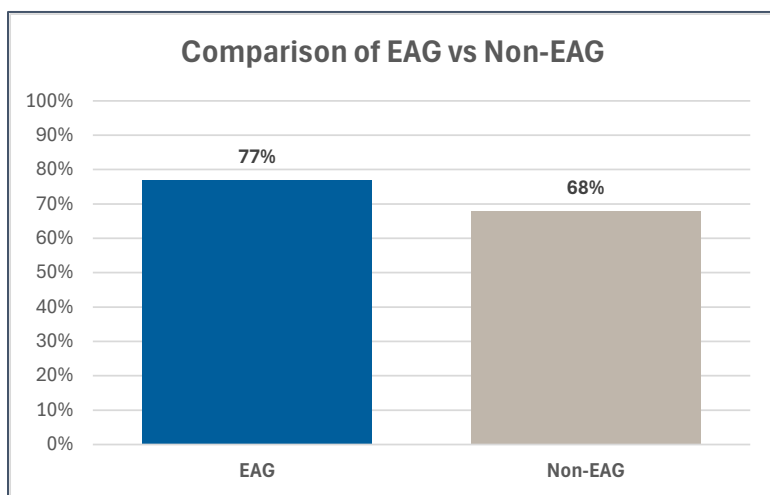
Since its establishment in 2012, the EAG program has seen consistent enrollment growth. Initially, only seven colleges received funding to support between five and 10 FTES each. In the first year, the funding enabled 69 scholars employed at Early Achievers sites to meet their staff qualifications requirements and enhance their professional skills. Over the past 12 years, there has been a significant increase in demand for the Early Achievers Grant program, and 27 colleges across the state now receive funding (see Appendix A for a complete list of participating colleges). As students began to complete their education requirements at their local community or technical college, some started sharing the program's benefits with their colleagues and recommending that they enroll and apply. In their responses to annual surveys, students consistently share that the education they received at the college level gave them the knowledge and skills to manage their



classrooms better and support their students, and the support from college staff helped them navigate their staff qualifications. The graph above shows the consistent increase in students served and credits earned, with only small reductions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023-24, a record 2,065 students received EAG scholarship support, achieving a total of 766.7 FTES, equivalent to 34,501.5 college credits earned.

## Early Achievers Grant Retention and Completion

One of the most significant impacts of the EAG program on student success is the retention rate. Students who receive the scholarship funds and relationship-based advising practices consistently persist and complete their certificate or degree at higher rates than those who do not receive EAG scholarships. In the 2023-24 academic year, 77 percent of EAG students continued or completed their education requirements, while only 68 percent of their non-EAG peers in early learning programs continued or completed. The retention rates for the 2023-24 academic year are consistent with the program's 12-year average, but EAG students' retention rate has been up to 20% higher than non-EAG students as recently as 2021-22.



Completion Type	Count
Initial Certificate	453
Short Certificate - Administration	61
Short Certificate - Family Child Care	30
Short Certificate - General	330
Short Certificate - Infant Toddler Care	103
Short Certificate - School-Age Care	41
State Certificate	70
Associates Degree	131
<b>Total</b>	<b>1219</b>

Additionally, of the 2,065 students supported in 2023-24, over 1,200 credentials were completed, with many students earning more than one credential or degree.

In annual student surveys, EAG students often cite not having to worry about tuition and the support they receive from the EAG staff as decisive factors in their ability to persist and complete their educational requirements. One student noted, “If I need help, my EAG [program contact] is there with all answers, and if they cannot find it, they will look for the answer.”

Another added, “One of the biggest benefits of the Early Achievers Grant Program is the help that is available to the students enrolled in the program.”

## Proviso Implementation

To disburse these newly available funds to the colleges in the most equitable manner while still providing priority to colleges with waitlists, all colleges with a successful fiscal year 2025 Early Achievers Grant application received a standard allocation of \$25,000 at the beginning of July 2024 for a total allocation of \$675,000. Colleges that indicated on their fiscal year 2025 applications that they had students on a funding waitlist received an additional allocation amount for a percentage of the remaining \$126,000 made available by the Legislature. DCYF also increased the overall FTES award amount for fiscal year 2025, providing much-needed funds to help students enroll and complete their education requirements.

## Outcomes

The allocation of the funds at the beginning of the fiscal year allowed colleges to budget their staffing costs for the upcoming fiscal year and, in some cases, increase their staff’s time to support students better. One college was able to shift the EAG program contact position from a part-time faculty position to a full-time classified position, significantly increasing staff access for students in need of support, and two other colleges were able to add additional part-time staff to support EAG scholars. This additional staff support time means more students will have support navigating college applications and platforms, like Canvas, or help filling out FAFSA/WASFA applications so colleges can continue to braid financial aid support for eligible students and continue to exceed their funding award amounts.

An increase in funding for tuition, books, and wraparound support services made available by DCYF for fiscal year 2025 allowed colleges to move students off the waitlist and have the necessary staff available to support EAG scholars. At the end of fiscal year 2024, 600 students were on the waitlist for EAG funding, but after fiscal year 2025 funding became available for summer tuition, only 103 EAG scholars were waiting for EAG funding, an 83% reduction.

## Conclusion

The Early Achievers Grant program has provided critical support to early learning educators since 2012. This support helps meet critical student needs but is also strategic to those services that result in increased enrollments, retention, and advising.

Despite being traditionally underserved by higher education institutions, EAG students successfully meet their education requirements. Notably, persistence and completion rates have been achieved by providing EAG students with scholarship support and relationship-based advising by college staff. As a result, the early learning workforce is better equipped to provide quality care to Washington's youngest learners. However, the demand for EAG funds and staffing support resources continues to grow. While colleges continue to serve more students than they receive funding for by braiding in other forms of financial aid when available, the approaching August 2026 deadline to meet the education requirements will only increase the demand for increased funding for both scholarships and staff time.

The additional funding made available from the Workforce Education Investment Account state appropriation has provided much-needed support for colleges to help EAG students navigate their educational paths, and your continued support of the program is greatly appreciated.

## Appendix A: Colleges Participating in the Early Achievers Grant Program

College	Quarter Started
Bates Technical College	Winter 2013
Bellevue College	Fall 2013
Big Bend Community College	Fall 2016
Centralia College	Fall 2013
Clark College	Winter 2013
Clover Park Technical College	Fall 2017
Columbia Basin College	Fall 2016
Edmonds College	Fall 2013
Everett Community College	Fall 2013
Grays Harbor College	Winter 2016
Green River College	Fall 2013
Highline Community College	Winter 2013
Lake Washington Institute of Technology	Fall 2013
Lower Columbia College	Winter 2013
North Seattle College	Winter 2014
Olympic College	Fall 2012
Peninsula College	Fall 2013
Pierce College	Fall 2012
Renton Technical College	Fall 2014
Skagit Valley College	Fall 2014
South Puget Sound Community College	Fall 2013
Spokane Falls Community College	Winter 2016
Tacoma Community College	Winter 2018
Walla Walla Community College	Fall 2013
Wenatchee Valley College	Fall 2013
Whatcom Community College	Fall 2013
Yakima Valley College	Fall 2013





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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges