

Five Olympic Peninsula school districts receive Gold Star Award

Recognition is given for having high percentage of College Bound Scholarship students

By Zach Jablonski

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Five Olympic Peninsula school districts have been awarded a Gold Star for having a higher percentage of students apply for the College Bound Scholarship than the state average.

The districts that received the Gold Star Award are Port Angeles, Sequim, Port Townsend, Chimacum and Brinnon.

The Gold Star Award is given to schools and school districts whose percent of eligible eighth grade students who have applied for the College Bound Scholarship exceeds the state average, according to the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). The state average for the end of the 2018/2019 school year was 72 percent.

All of the students are part of the class of 2023.

Port Angeles School District had 80 percent (131 students) of its eligible 164 students apply for the scholarship, WSAC said.

“I love that the Olympic Peninsula is encouraging students to apply for [the scholarship],” said Kristen Lunt, Stevens Middle School principal.

“I think that’s going to be [low-income students’] best opportunity that parents don’t often know about and so that’s a great opportunity for them to go to college.

“I owe everything at my school to my counselors. They do it all, we promote it in emails, whenever we do an evening event, we call kids out of class and talk to them about it, we call home; I guess for me I just think about all those kids we’ve opened the doors for and for a lot of those kids, they didn’t know there was a door there to open.”

Sequim School District had 74 percent (72 students) of its eligible 97 students apply for the scholarship, according to WSAC.

“I think [the Gold Star Award] is not only a tribute to our staff at the Sequim Middle School for looking after kids, it’s a tribute to the whole district,” said Sequim Superintendent Rob Clark.

”I’m excited about the opportunities that some of our kids from low socioeconomic backgrounds to have the opportunities to attend higher education.”

Port Townsend School District had 77 percent (55 students) of its eligible 71 students apply for the scholarship, according to WSAC.

“The College Bound Scholarship program is a fantastic opportunity that helps level the playing field for lower income students and families,” said Port Townsend Superintendent John Polm.

“By signing up in middle school, the students are incentivised to keep their focus on their studies throughout their school years.

“We are pleased with the 77 percent sign up rate for the class of 2023. Our staff has worked hard to maximize student sign-ups, however, we would like to see all students take advantage of this opportunity.”

Chimacum School District had 82 percent (23 students) of its eligible 28 students apply for the scholarship, according to WSAC.

“Our District was pleased to receive this news,” said Chimacum Superintendent Rick Thompson.

“We have received the award before and are delighted to share with the community that our dedicated staff continues to help students receive information about scholarships and all sorts of secondary reports.

“As our families become more familiar with aid support, more doors will open. The hard work of our staff made it possible for Chimacum to be a top performing district in the state when it comes to College Bound Scholarships.”

Brinnon School District is listed as having 95 percent on the [WSAC map](#), however Superintendent Trish Beathard received notice that 100 percent of their four eligible students applied for the third year in a row, Beathard said.

“We’re tiny, but we make sure every single one of them does it,” said Beathard. “Heidi Budnek is our middle school teacher and she incorporates this as part of her parent conferences that she has with all the students.

“We want to give our kids every advantage, every opportunity, every possibility and make sure we don’t leave anything on the table. We appreciate the state of Washington making this available to us and we take advantage of it.”

The College Bound Scholarship is for low income and foster care students and pays for the cost of tuition for four years of college at a public university (but students can go to certain approved private colleges, community colleges, and other schooling) after high school.

To be eligible, a student’s family must make less than or equal to a set amount which can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/PDN-CollegeBound>, the family receives SNAP/basic food assistance or the student is in the foster system/a dependent of the state, according to WSAC.

The first class to graduate with the College Bound Scholarship was the Class of 2012. Since then, more than 280,000 students have applied for the scholarship, and 54,255 students have utilized the scholarship so far, said Emily Persky, WSAC policy communications manager.

“One of the most powerful things about the College Bound Scholarship is the early connection with students,” Persky said.

“It promotes a college-going culture by starting the conversation in middle school. As early as seventh grade, the scholarship raises awareness and expands students’ ideas about what’s possible,” Persky continued.

By having the students sign up, officials have seen a higher graduation rate and higher college enrollment for low-income students who have applied for the scholarship, than those who have not, Persky said.

After students sign up for the scholarship in middle school, their next step is to [apply for financial aid](#) during senior year of high school. Students cannot access their College Bound Scholarship if they don’t apply for financial aid.

Students can learn more about planning and applying for college at www.wsac.wa.gov/ActionPlan, Persky said.

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