

# High School Counseling and College Financial Aid

**DATA POINT**  
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This Data Point uses data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09). HSLs:09 is a national study of more than 23,000 students in ninth grade in 2009. Students answered surveys between 2009 and 2016. College transcripts and financial aid records for HSLs:09 students were collected in 2017-18 in the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study and Student Financial Aid Records Collection (PETS-SR).

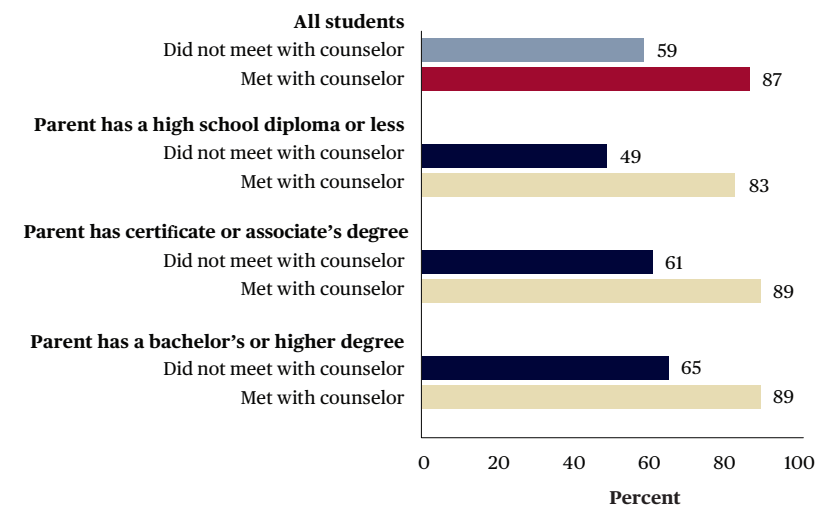
High school counselors can share valuable information about financial aid for college.<sup>1</sup> In addition to helping students learn about college loans, counselors may also help students find sources of financial aid that do not need to be paid back, such as grants or scholarships. This Data Point looks first at whether students who planned to go to college also met with a high school counselor about financial aid. The second question considers a different population of students, addressing whether students who enrolled in college also received aid. This analysis does not indicate a causal relationship between meeting with a counselor and receiving financial aid for college; further research is needed into the underlying mechanisms.<sup>2</sup>

## What percentage of students who met with a high school counselor about financial aid also filled out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)? Did this differ by parental education level?

One of the first steps in receiving financial aid for college is filling out the FAFSA. It is used to decide eligibility for federal financial aid, as well as helping with financial aid from states, colleges, and private funders. Previous research has noted differences in FAFSA completion by family background, including parental education level. Additionally, among HSLs:09 students who did not complete a FAFSA, students whose parents did not earn a college degree or certificate reported they did not have enough information about how to file a FAFSA at higher rates than those whose parents had a bachelor's or higher degree.<sup>3</sup>

Students in HSLs:09 were asked in 2012, which was for most their eleventh-grade year, how far they thought they would get in school. Fifty-four percent who said they planned to go to college met with a counselor about financial aid.<sup>4</sup>

**FIGURE 1. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion and counselor meetings: Among 2009 ninth-graders who planned to go to college, percentage who completed a FAFSA by 2013, by parental education level and whether they met with a high school counselor about financial aid in 2012-13**



NOTE: This figure is limited to students who planned to enroll in any education after high school, even if they did not plan to complete a certificate or degree. The category high school degree or less includes students whose parents have earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential) as their highest level of education and students whose parents have not earned a high school credential.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) First Follow-up, and 2013 Update.

Among students who planned to go to college, 87 percent of those who met with a counselor about

financial aid completed a FAFSA, compared with 59 percent of those who did not meet with a counselor

about financial aid (**FIGURE 1**). This pattern occurred at each level of parental education.

The difference in FAFSA filing between the groups of students who did and did not meet with a counselor was larger for students whose parents had a high school diploma or less than it was for students whose parents earned a bachelor's or higher degree. There was a 35-percentage-point difference among students whose parents had

a high school diploma or less. For students whose parents earned a bachelor's or higher degree, there was a 24-percentage-point difference in FAFSA filing between groups.

## How did meeting with a high school counselor about financial aid relate to receipt of need-based or merit-based grants in their first year of college?

There are many sources of funding available to help students pay for college. Loans are funds that

need to be paid back. Grants and scholarships are funds that do not need to be paid back.<sup>5</sup> Grants can be awarded based on merit (academic or athletic achievement) or need (family ability to pay for college). High school counselors can help students find grant opportunities.

Among students who attended college by 2016–17, a higher percentage of students who had met with a high school counselor about financial aid received need-based college grants than students who had not met with a counselor (**FIGURE 2**). About two-thirds of college students who met with a high school counselor received need-based grants, compared with 45 percent of college students who did not meet with a high school counselor. In contrast, there was no measurable difference in merit-based grant receipt by high school counselor meetings about financial aid.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this Data Point, the term “college” refers to 4-year, 2-year, and less-than-2-year postsecondary institutions.

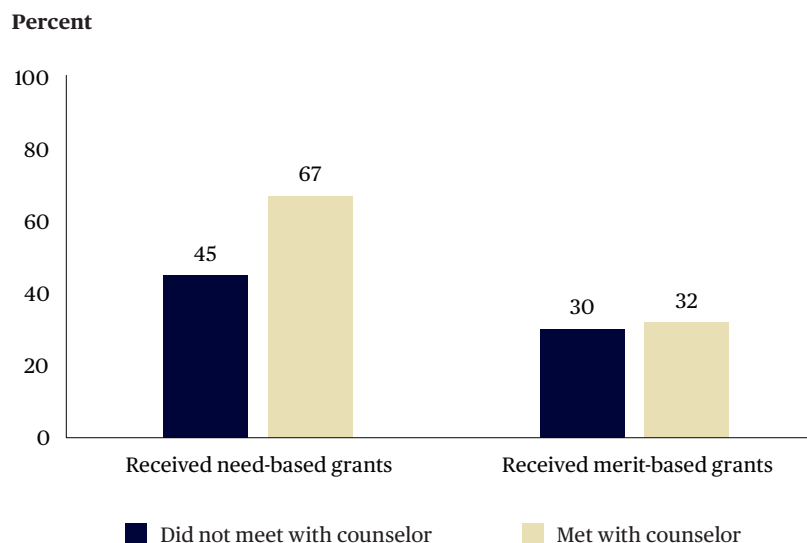
<sup>2</sup> Users are encouraged to access HSLS:09 and conduct their own analyses via the NCES DataLab: <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab>.

<sup>3</sup> Bahr, S., Sparks, D., & Hoyer, K.M. (2018). *Why Didn't Students Complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)? A Detailed Look. Stats in Brief* (NCES 2018-061). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved July 10, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018061.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Not in figures; see Supplemental Table 1 at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2023040>.

<sup>5</sup> In this Data Point, the term “grants” is used to refer to grants, scholarships, or any other funds for college that do not need to be paid back. See the note for Figure 2 for more information on the types of grants included in this analysis.

**FIGURE 2. Grant earning and counselor meetings: Among fall 2009 ninth-graders who enrolled in college by 2016–17, percentage who received need-based and merit-based college grants in their first year, by whether they met with a high school counselor about financial aid in 2012–13**



NOTE: HSLS:09 collected information from the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) and college financial aid records on the amount of need-based grants students received and the amount of merit-based grants students received in their first year of college enrollment after high school at the first college the student attended. Need-based grants include federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) awards, state need-based grants, and institutional need-based grants. Institutional and state grants include grants that were need-based and had a merit consideration. Merit-based grants include state merit-only grants and scholarships and institutional merit-only grants and scholarships, including athletic scholarships. Students can receive both need-based grants and merit-based grants.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) 2013 Update, Postsecondary Education Transcript Study, and Student Financial Aid Records.