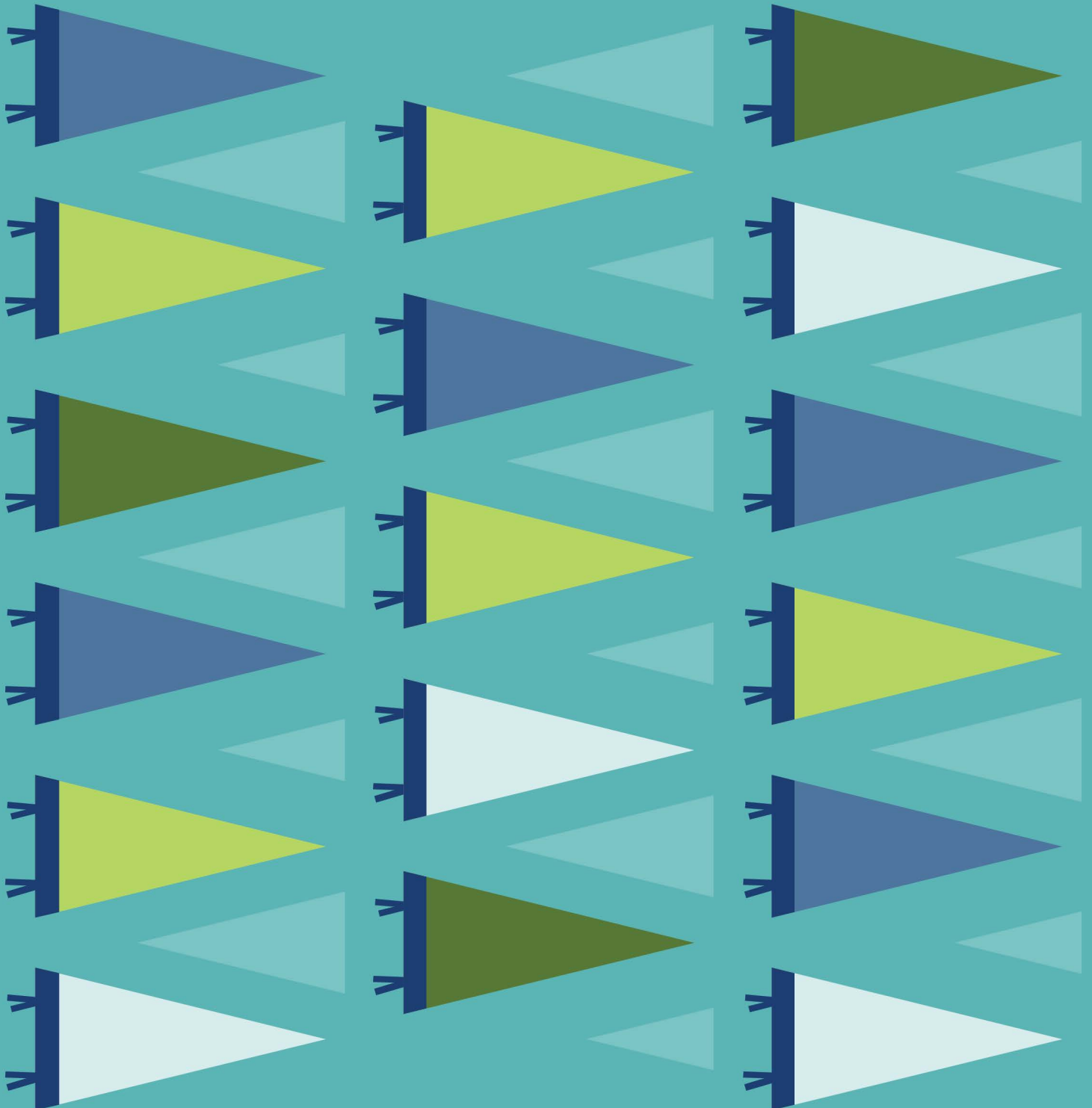


Expanding opportunity through state partnership

A Connecticut story

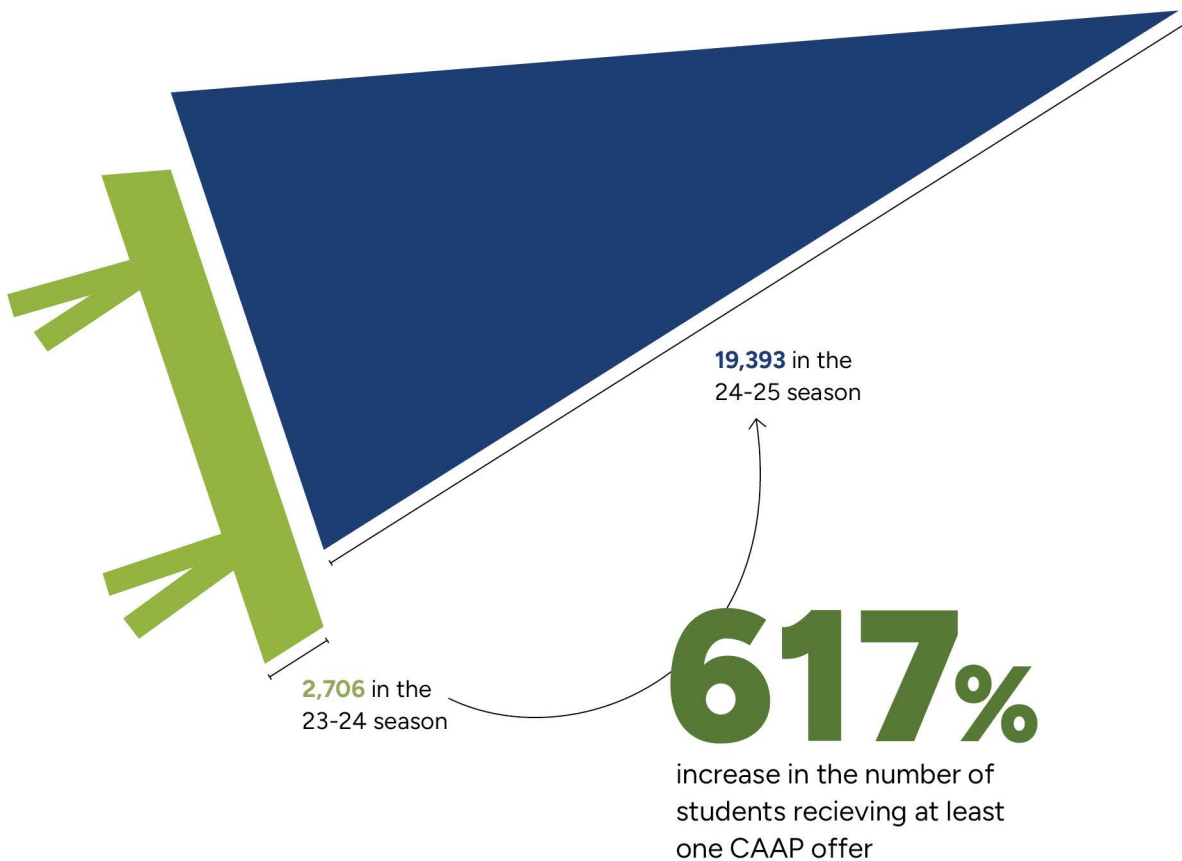


KEY FINDINGS

Expanding opportunity through state partnership

A Connecticut story

Total number of students receiving CAAP offers by season



WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Streamlined communication efforts and a change in eligibility requirements have contributed to **exponential growth** for the CAAP program.

KEYS TO PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS



1. Changing **eligibility requirements** to reduce student/counselor burden



2. Offering **training and support** to high school counselors



3. Providing timely, accessible **information** for qualifying students



4. Consulting **data** regularly to identify areas for improvement

PROXIMITY



Students who lived **within 15 miles** of offering institutions responded to 14% of these offers with an application compared to only 5% among students who lived more than 60 miles away.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

2x

First-generation students and students from low- and middle-income ZIP codes were **twice as likely** to respond to a CAAP offer compared to their peers.

Expanding postsecondary access through statewide direct admissions: Learnings from a multiyear partnership

December 4, 2025

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Introduction

Direct admissions programs, which proactively offer admission to participating colleges to high school seniors who meet specific academic qualifications, have been growing in popularity over the past 5 years. An increasing number of state university systems and boards of higher education now offer direct admissions to public and private campuses, including [Idaho](#), [Illinois](#), and soon [California](#). Fueling the rise of such programs is a growing body of research suggesting that they can improve students' likelihood of applying to and enrolling in college.¹

In keeping with our mission to reduce barriers to postsecondary attainment, Common App began piloting a direct admissions program with a small number of member institutions during the 2021-2022 application season. The program was intended to help Common App accomplish its moonshot goal of closing the gap in postsecondary access for first-generation and low- and middle-income students by streamlining the college admissions process.

¹ See, for example, [Odle & Delaney \(2022\)](#) and [Odle & Delaney \(2023\)](#).

With the success of this pilot, Common App has since greatly expanded its direct admissions program, with more than 200 member institutions partnering with us during the 2025-2026 application season. While most of Common App's direct admissions partnerships to date are with individual member institutions, we also partner with state university systems and higher education agencies to administer statewide direct admissions programs. These state partnerships both expand postsecondary opportunities for students already planning to apply to college and inspire students who may not have otherwise considered college.

Our statewide direct admissions portfolio includes a unique partnership with Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) to deliver the [Connecticut Automatic Admission Program](#) (CAAP). Established by the Connecticut legislature in 2022, CAAP is intended to expand postsecondary access and make it easier for Connecticut seniors to apply to the state's public and private colleges. The initiative offers automatic admission to eligible Connecticut seniors who meet specific academic requirements. The program was first implemented by the state as a small pilot program during the 2022-2023 academic year. During 2023-2024, CSCU partnered with Common App to help deliver and expand the CAAP program to reach more prospective applicants and include more institutions.

Now, two years later, we are pleased to report that the CAAP program has fulfilled its promise to expand educational opportunities for Connecticut seniors and has advanced Common App's mission to close the equity gap in postsecondary access. During the first two years of the partnership between CSCU and Common App, the program's reach has increased ten-fold compared to the pilot year, with more than 22,000 Connecticut students receiving automatic admissions offers to public and private institutions across the state.

This report outlines how CSCU and Common App collaborated to successfully deliver the statewide direct admissions program. We first describe the origins of the CAAP program and how it was implemented during the first two years of the partnership with Common App. We next assess the extent to which CAAP connected Connecticut students with postsecondary opportunities by exploring the number of students who received offers, how likely those students were to respond to those offers, whether the program expanded access for first-generation and low- and middle-income students, and what contextual factors determined how likely a student was to respond to an offer. These findings shed light on the success of the CAAP program and offer important insights and lessons learned for other states and postsecondary institutions considering implementing direct admissions programs.

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Key findings

1. CAAP has seen exponential growth over the course of the partnership with Common App, **largely attributable to streamlined communication efforts and a change in program requirements – basing eligibility on student GPA rather than class ranking.**
 - a. During the first year of the partnerships, students had to rely on high school counselors to calculate their class rank, which proved to be a significant bottleneck for expanding the program.
 - b. Changing this requirement allowed Common App to identify qualified students based on their self-reported GPAs more frequently and efficiently.
 - c. The number of students receiving offers **increased from 2,706 (or 8% of Connecticut seniors on Common App) to 19,393 (53% of Connecticut seniors on Common App)** between the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 application seasons.
2. **Nearly half of those receiving a CAAP offer applied to at least one participating institution.**
 - a. Of the nine institutions that offered students admissions through CAAP, **most students who responded to an offer sent an application to one or two.**
3. First-generation and low- and middle-income students were more likely to respond to CAAP offers than their peers, indicating that **the program may be especially impactful for students facing greater barriers to accessing post-secondary opportunities.**
 - a. First-generation students and students from ZIP codes below the national median income **were twice as likely to respond to a CAAP offer compared to their peers.**
4. **Proximity to the offering institution and the timing of the offer helped predict how likely it was that a student would respond,** suggesting these factors are key considerations that impact students' decisions.
 - a. **Students who lived within 15 miles of offering institutions responded to 14% of these offers with an application** compared to only 5% among students who lived more than 60 miles from the offering institution.
 - b. **Students who created a Common App account and received offers in October responded to 8% of those offers by applying to the offering institution** compared to only 3% among eligible students who did not create an account until May.

Implementation of the CAAP program

Program inception and CAAP pilot (2022-2023)

CAAP was enacted by the Connecticut legislature and signed into [law in 2022](#). The program was intended to promote educational access by making the college application process easier for eligible students. To accomplish this goal, CAAP offered automatic admission to seniors that ranked in the top 30% of their high school class as identified by their high school counselors. CAAP also gave students further incentive to apply to participating institutions by waiving the application fee, personal essay, and letters of recommendation requirements.

Four public regional universities initially signed on to participate in CAAP when it was formally rolled out as a pilot program in 2022-2023, with 1,617 students ultimately receiving direct admissions offers.² During this pilot year, counselors were tasked with identifying eligible students, but individual institutions were ultimately responsible for notifying students of their eligibility and encouraging them to submit their application.

Program implementation during the first year of the Common App partnership (2023-2024)

In the wake of the pilot program, CSCU aimed to expand the reach of CAAP. Recognizing that the institutions participating in CAAP were already Common App members, CSCU partnered with Common App to administer the program and support its growth beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. Common App and CSCU collaborated to operationalize the eligibility requirements, identify eligible students, and send offers on behalf of participating institutions in a manner that minimized the number of new processes for students and counselors to make the transition from the pilot program as smooth as possible. Eight institutions participated in CAAP during the 2023-2024 application season, including the four regional public universities that participated in the pilot and four private institutions who were invited to participate in the program after the pilot year.

Under the partnership, students first had to create a Common App account and provide residence information to help assess their eligibility to receive CAAP direct admissions offers. As during the pilot year of the program, high school counselors were responsible for determining whether a student was in the top 30% of their high

² State of Connecticut (2023). "[Governor Lamont Encourages High School Seniors to Apply for Connecticut's Recently Launched Automatic College Admissions Program](#)."

school class. Counselors communicated class rankings to students, who were then required to enter their percentile rank in their Common App profile.

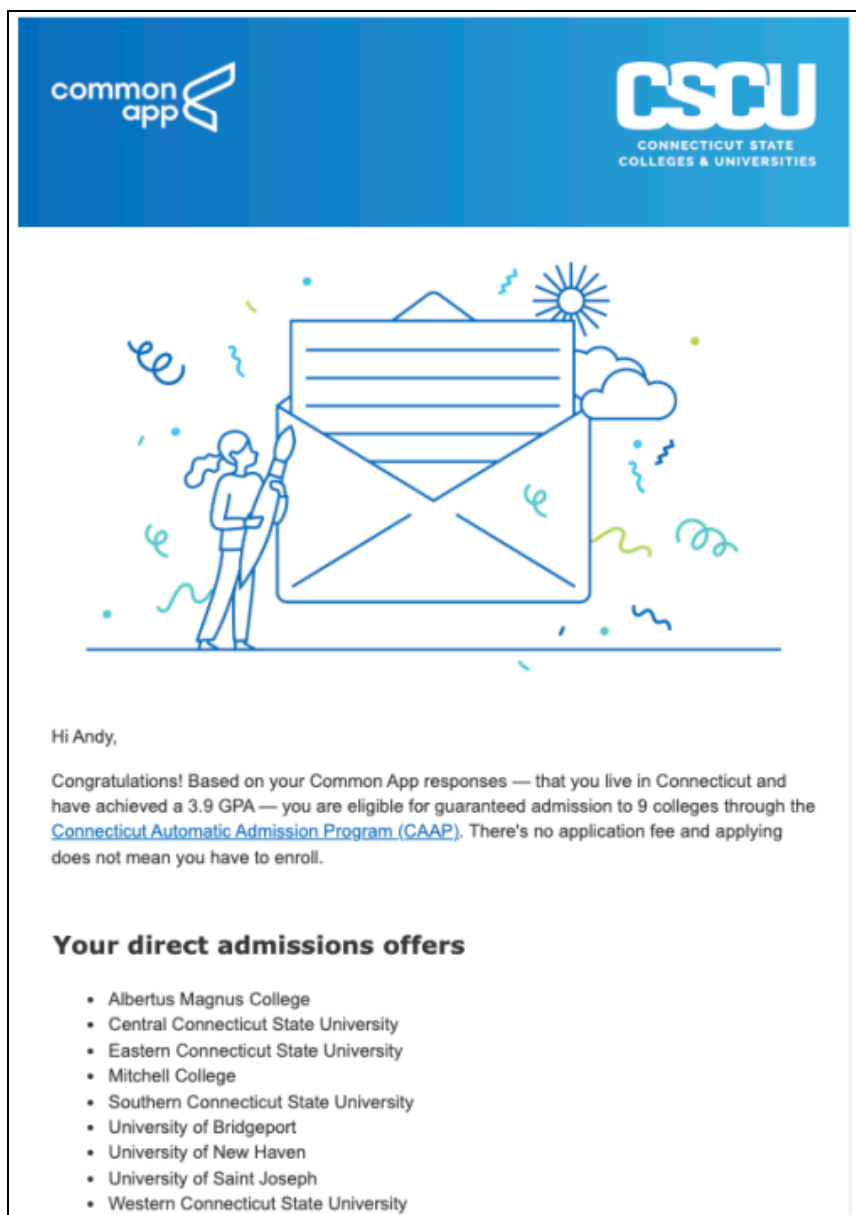
Common App identified eligible students based on the information they submitted on the application platform and notified them of their CAAP offers in two waves during 2023-2024: Once in early November and again in early January. To be eligible to receive an offer, students needed to enter their class ranking in their Common App profile prior to these eligibility calculation dates. This process proved to be an important bottleneck for the program's reach during the first year of the partnership as conducting the calculations to identify eligible students and ensuring students had the correct information in the Common App platform on the correct date presented significant burdens for both school counselors and students.

Once a student was deemed eligible for direct admission to participating CAAP institutions, Common App notified the student and their family of their CAAP offers via email (see Exhibit 1). To accept the direct admission offer, a student needed only to complete and submit their Common App application to the offering institution. Students received direct admission offers from multiple institutions and could apply to as many institutions as they wished.

Recognizing that school counselors play a key role in raising awareness of the CAAP program and helping students apply, Common App and CSCU collaborated to offer a training session to high school counselors in October of 2023, before the first group of eligible students were sent their CAAP offers. The training walked counselors through the details of the CAAP program, with a special focus on eligibility requirements, to ensure that they had the information they needed to explain CAAP to their students and encourage them to consider offers they received through the program.

Common App also provided data reports to CSCU on a monthly basis to empower stakeholders to improve program participation. These reports outlined key indicators of program success, including the number of offers sent, the number of students receiving offers, and the number responding to those offers. To better inform CSCU's and participating institutions' outreach efforts, Common App provided these data at the institution and high school level.

Exhibit 1: CAAP offer email from 2023-2024



What changes were made to the program in the second year (2024-2025)?

The CAAP program underwent several changes during the 2024-2025 application season (Table 1). First, an additional institution joined the CAAP program for the 2024-2025 season, bringing the total number of participating institutions to 9.

Table 1: Key program changes, 2023-2024 to 2024-2025

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Participating institutions	8	9
Eligibility metric	High school class rank	High school GPA
Eligibility criterion	Top 30%	2.75 unweighted or 3.0 weighted GPA (on 4.0 scale)
Earliest offers sent in	November	September
Frequency that offers were sent to newly identified students	Twice during season (November and January)	Weekly from September to May
Mode of offer notification	Email	Email and in-app notification

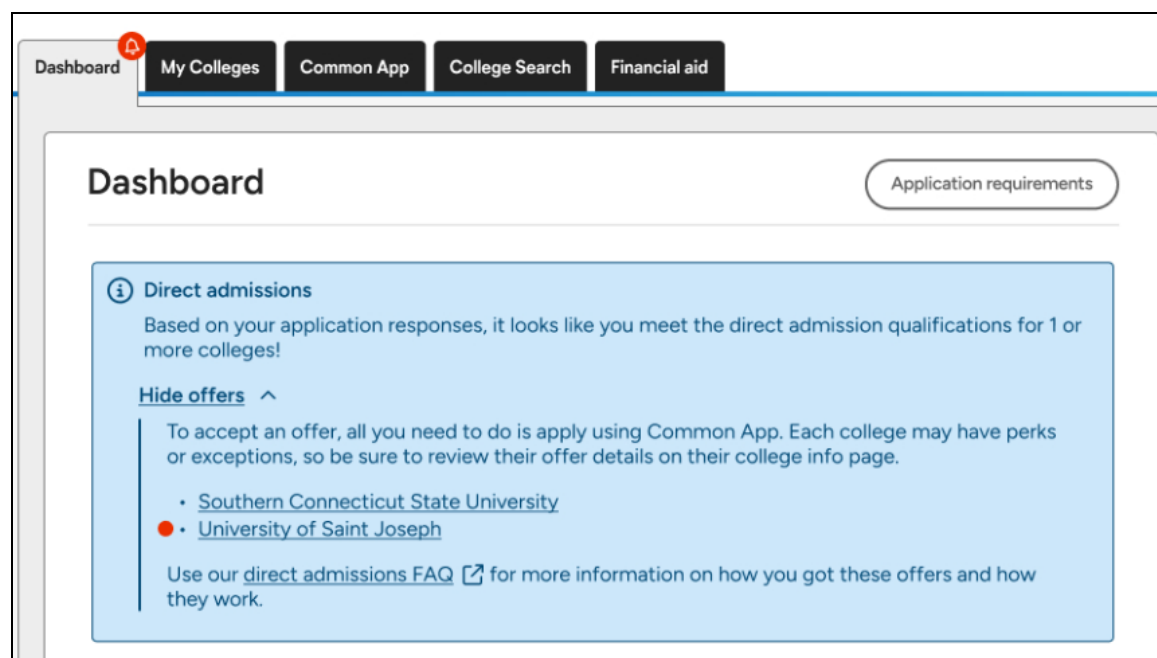
Common App and CSCU also collaborated to address key implementation challenges from the first year of the partnership. In order to expedite the eligibility calculation process and reduce burden on students and counselors, CSCU worked with state legislators to revise the CAAP statute to define eligibility based on students' GPA rather than their relative class ranking. Specifically, students needed to have an unweighted GPA of 2.75 or higher or a weighted GPA of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale in order to be eligible for direct admissions through CAAP.

Basing CAAP eligibility on GPA allowed Common App to determine students' eligibility for a CAAP offer more efficiently than in prior years. Rather than relying on counselors to calculate their class ranking before entering it into the Common App platform, students themselves could directly enter their GPA on the application. Common App could then use students' self-reported GPA and residency information to identify students who were eligible for direct admissions offers through CAAP and send them their offers. This change greatly reduced the burden on high school counselors who had previously been tasked with calculating students' percentile rankings, freeing up their time to ensure that students were aware of the program and encouraging them to participate. Further, because students could self-report their academic information at any point during the application season, Common App was also able to identify eligible students on a weekly basis compared to just twice during the prior year.

Shifting the responsibility for determining academic eligibility from high school counselors to Common App also allowed the partnership to begin notifying students of their direct admissions offer earlier in the application season. While the first round of CAAP offers was sent out in November during the 2023-2024 application season to allow time for counselors to identify qualifying students, in 2024-25 students who had entered the required GPA and residency information in the Common App platform were first notified of their CAAP direct admissions offers beginning in September. In addition to notifying students of their CAAP eligibility via email, Common App also enhanced communication efforts by adding a direct admissions notification to the student's dashboard on the application platform to make it even easier for them to view and act on their CAAP offers (Exhibit 2).

As in the prior year, Common App continued to collaborate with CSCU to provide training webinars for high school counselors and provided monthly data reports reflecting offer and application volume throughout the year.

Exhibit 2: CAAP dashboard notification from 2024-2025 school year



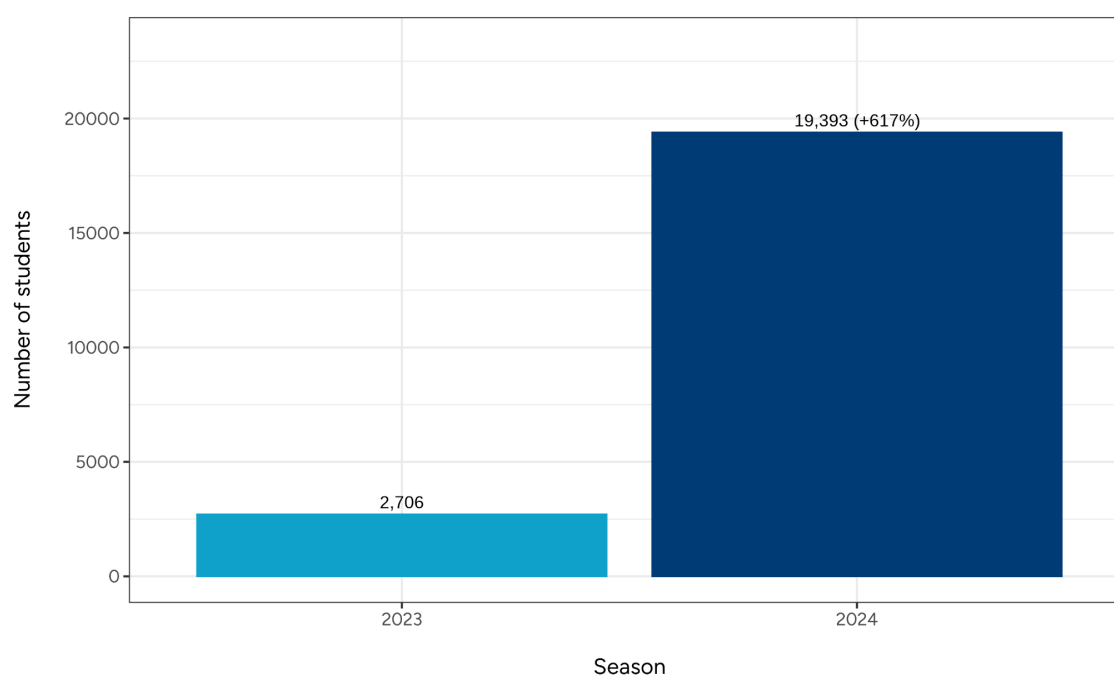
CAAP partnership outcomes

How many students did the CAAP program reach?

Given that the primary goal of the program was to expand access to postsecondary opportunities in Connecticut, we calculated the number of students who received CAAP offers during each year of the partnership between Common App and CSCU. As shown in Figure 1, the number of students who received an offer increased from 2,706 in 2023-2024 to 19,393 in 2024-2025. This reflects a 617% increase in the number of students receiving offers year over year and a more than 1,000% increase compared to the pilot year of the program. The substantial increase in offers over the course of the partnership suggests that the changes in eligibility criteria, offer delivery frequency, and communication with students and counselors combined to greatly expand the reach of the CAAP program in 2024-2025.

Another way to contextualize the reach of the CAAP program is to consider how the number of students receiving CAAP offers compares to the overall number of seniors in Connecticut who created an account on the Common App platform each year. In 2024-2025, 53% of the more than 36,000 Connecticut seniors who created a Common App account during the 2024-2025 application season received a CAAP offer compared to just 8% of seniors in 2023-2024.

Figure 1: Total number of students receiving at least one CAAP offer by season



We next considered the characteristics of students who received CAAP offers and, to provide additional context to these numbers, compare them to the characteristics of Connecticut seniors that created a Common App account but did not receive a CAAP offer. Students receiving CAAP offers differed in a few important ways from other seniors in Connecticut (Table 2). Most notably, students who received CAAP offers were more likely to identify as female and less likely to live in a ZIP code with a median income that was below the national median³ compared to those who did not qualify for CAAP. CAAP recipients were also much more likely to ultimately submit an application through Common App than other seniors who created an account but did not receive a CAAP offer.

Table 2: Characteristics of Connecticut students who did and did not receive CAAP offers (2024-2025)

Characteristic	CAAP students	Non-CAAP Connecticut seniors
Number of students	19,393	17,045
Percent female	55.6	41.8
Percent first generation	32.3	39.6
Percent eligible for fee waiver	29.5	34.2
Percent living in below-median income ZIP	17.8	34.7
Percent URM	28.7	36.6
Percent applied to any school on Common App	93.4	55.8

How likely were students to respond to an offer?

Offers of direct admission can help expand students' postsecondary opportunities, but students must act on these offers and apply to the offering institution if CAAP is to deliver on its ultimate mission to encourage more students to enroll in college.

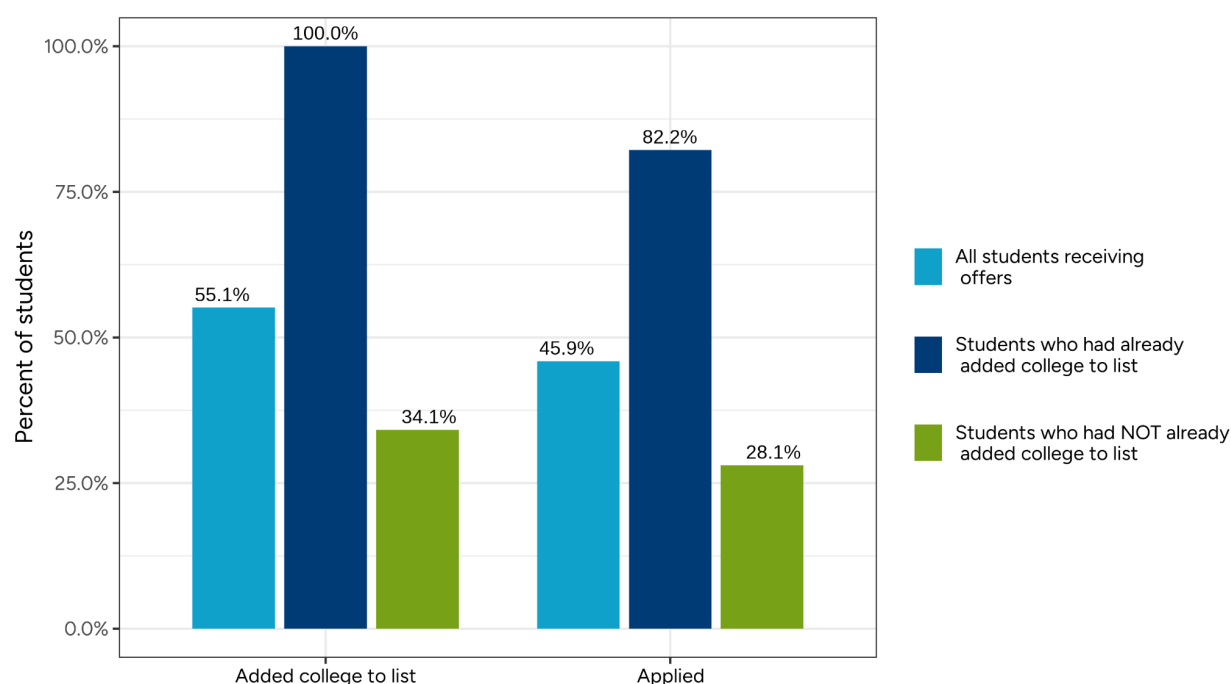
³ In alignment with broader higher education research practices, our past research work, and Common App's [Next Chapter](#), we supplement our understanding of applicants' socio-economic characteristics by examining the number of applicants residing in a ZIP code with a median household income above or below the national median household income based on data from the American Community Survey (\$75,149 for the 2024-2025 application season).

To assess the program's success in encouraging students to apply to college, we also examined the extent to which students responded to CAAP offers by expressing interest in and applying to the offering institution. Among the 19,393 students who received a CAAP offer during the 2024-2025 application season, nearly half (46%) ultimately applied to at least one institution that extended them an offer (Figure 2).

Many students receiving a CAAP offer had already expressed interest in the participating institution by adding it to their college list on the Common App platform before receiving the offer. To better understand how students responded to their CAAP offers, we analyzed responses separately among students who had and had not added the participating institution to their college list prior to offer receipt (Figure 2). Among those who received a CAAP offer from an institution that they had already added to their college list, 82% ended up applying to at least one of the offering institutions. As a point of comparison, among other Connecticut seniors who had added a CAAP institution to their college list, only 66% ultimately applied to the institution.

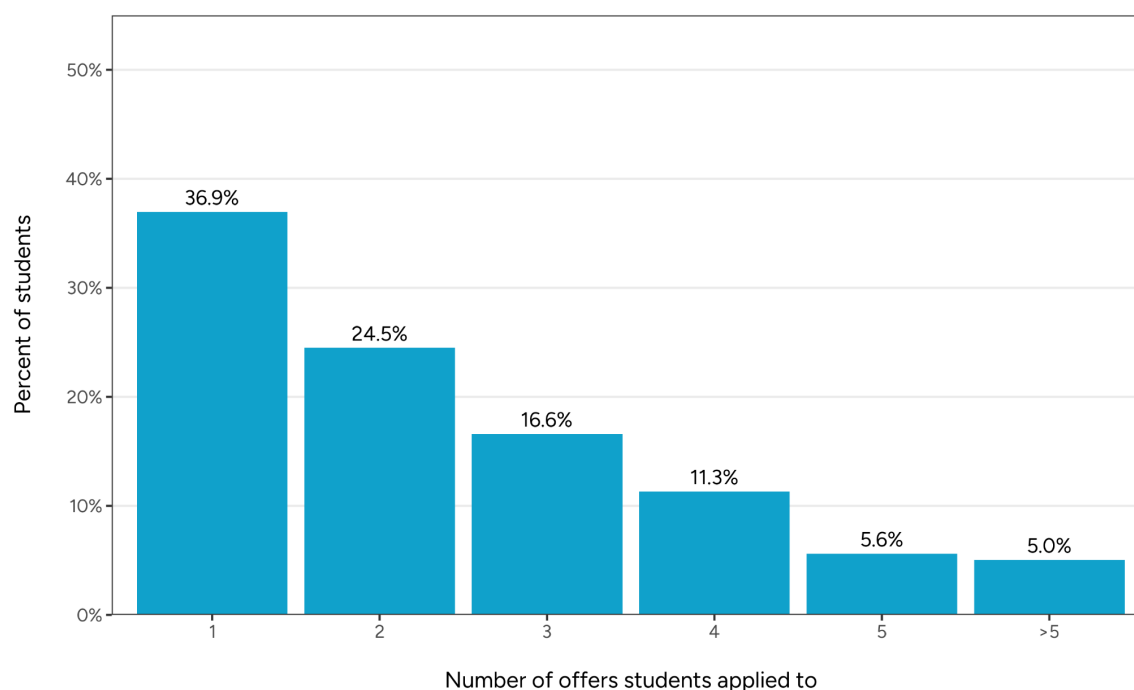
Focusing instead on the group of students who had not yet added the institution to their college list before receiving their CAAP offer, just over one in four responded to at least one offer by applying to the offering institution (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Percentage of students responding to CAAP offers (2024-2025)



While Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who responded to at least one CAAP offer, eligible students in 2024-2025 received offers from 9 participating institutions. As such, it is important to consider how many of these CAAP offers students ultimately chose to act on. Among students who did respond to a CAAP offer by applying to an offering institution, most applied to only one or two institutions (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of offers that students applied to, among students responding to at least one offer (2024-2025)



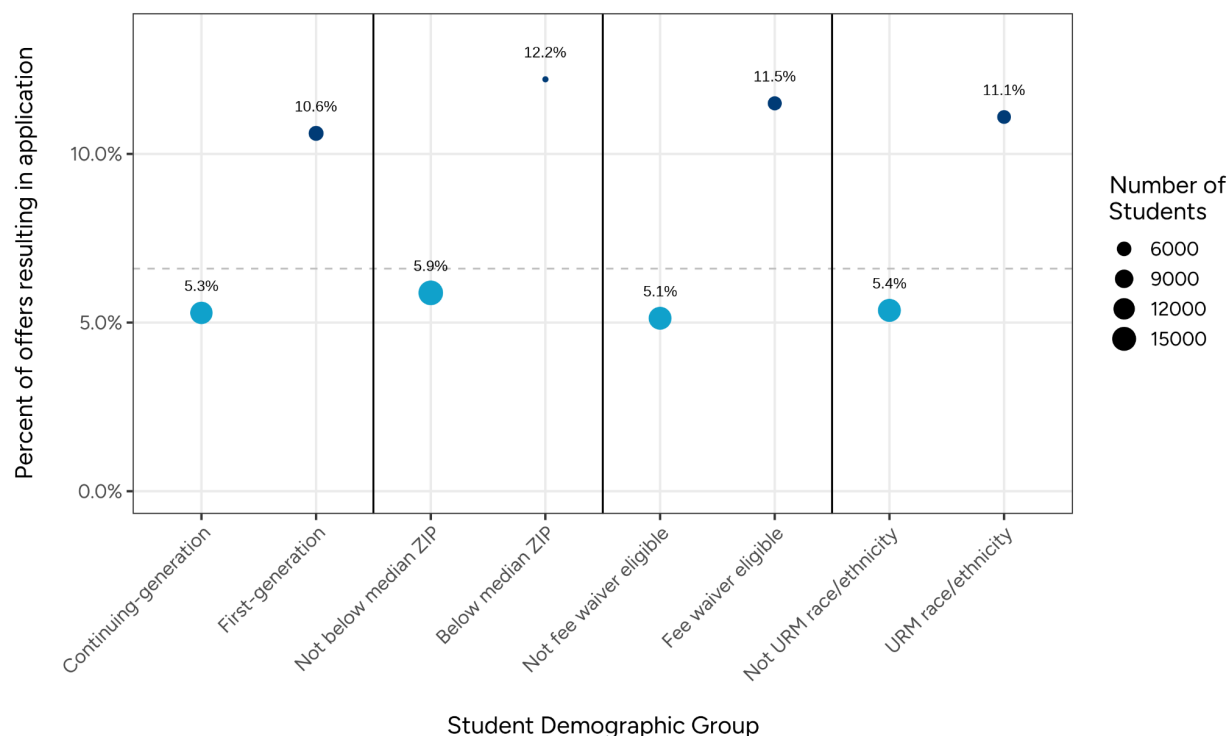
Did CAAP expand postsecondary opportunities for first-generation and low- and middle-income students?

To assess the extent to which the program supported Common App's moonshot goal of closing gaps in postsecondary access, we also analyzed whether certain student characteristics were related to the probability that a student receiving an offer would respond to that offer by applying to the institution.

Student demographics and family background proved to be correlated with the likelihood that a student applied to an offering institution: First-generation students, students from ZIP codes with incomes below the national median, students who were eligible for a fee waiver, and students who identified as an underrepresented

minority race/ethnicity⁴ (URM) were all twice as likely to respond to an offer by applying to an institution compared to their counterparts (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Offer application rates by student demographic characteristics, among students who had not already added the college to their list (2024-2025)



What other factors influenced the likelihood that a student would respond to an offer?

In addition to student demographics, we also explored the extent to which contextual factors such as distance to the offering institution and the timing of the offer influenced the likelihood that a student would respond. These analyses can help illuminate key levers that might help stakeholders improve direct admissions programs in the future.⁵

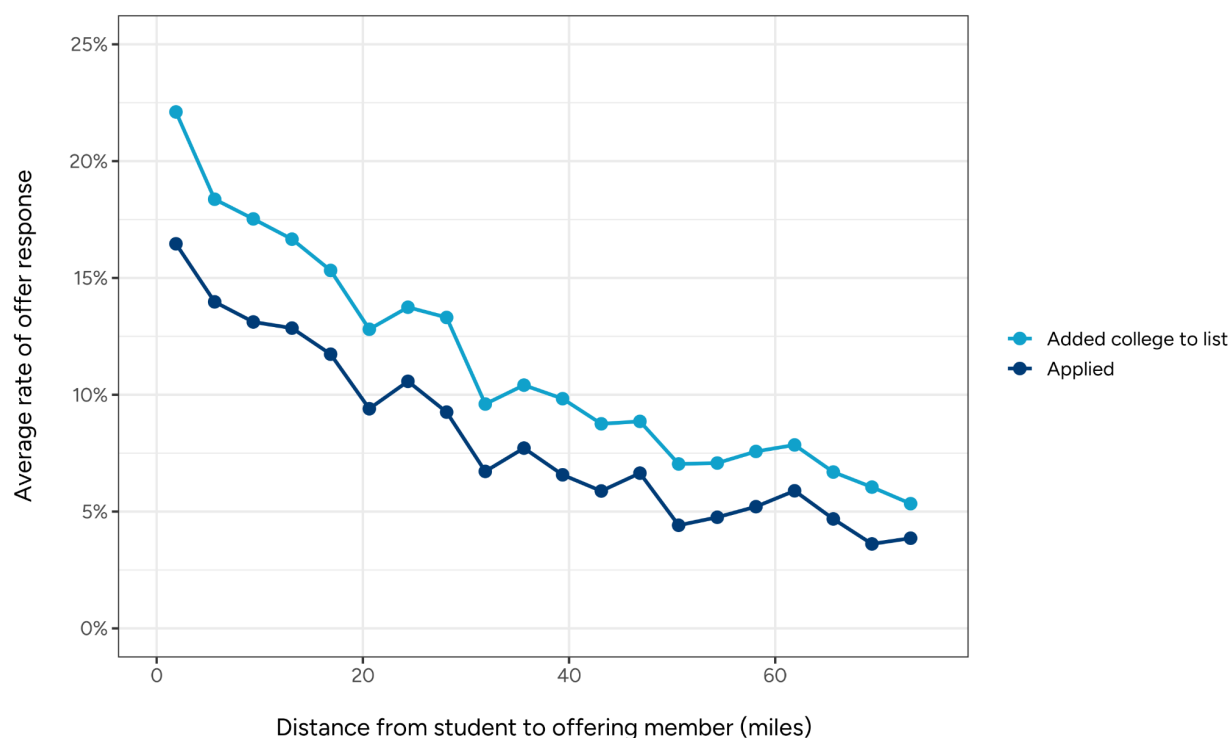
Geography played an important role in determining whether a student responded to an offer. Figure 5 shows that students were several times more likely to respond to

⁴ We use the term underrepresented minority (URM) in alignment with conventions employed by the [National Science Foundation](#). In this report, applicants identifying as Black or African American, Latinx, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander are classified as URM applicants.

⁵ Figures 5 and 6 focus on students who had not already added the college to their college list when they received the direct admission offer, but the trends displayed were similar when all students receiving CAAP offers were included in the analyses.

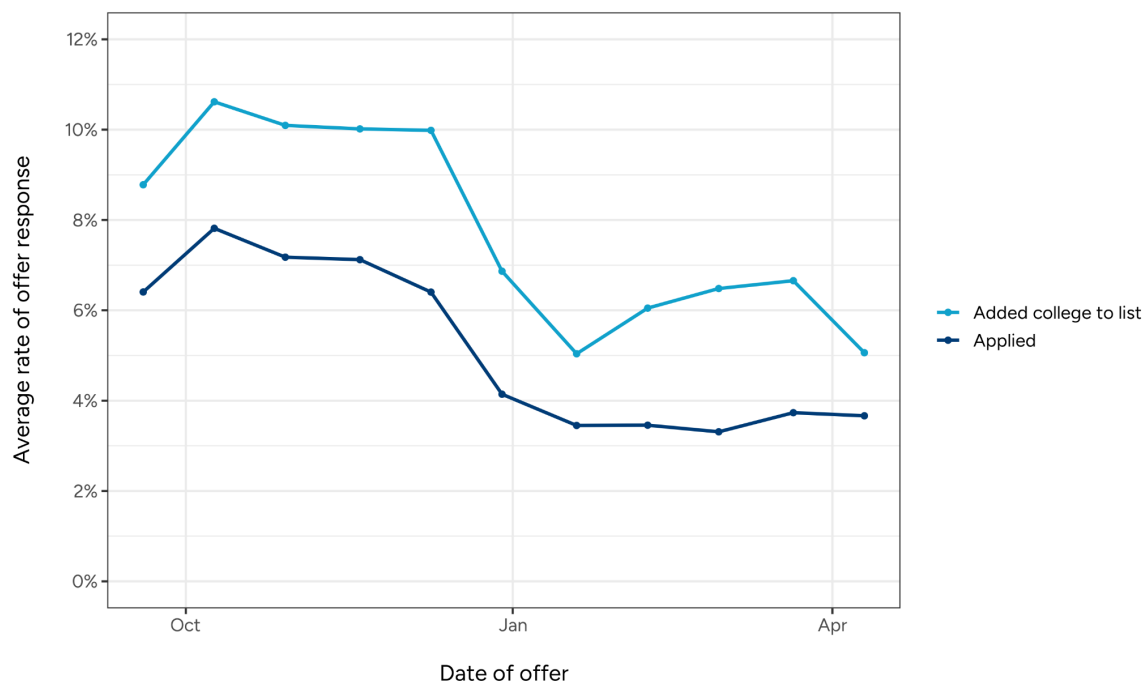
an offer if the offering institution was closer to their residence. This result suggests that proximity to an institution – and perhaps greater familiarity with the institution – is an important driver of whether a student is likely to respond to a CAAP offer.

Figure 5. Average rate of offer response by distance from student to institution, among students who had not already added the college to their list (2024-2025)



The timing of an offer also predicted how likely it was for a student to respond. Eligible students who created a Common App account and entered the requisite eligibility information early in the year were more likely to respond to offers they received than those who entered the information in their Common App account later in the year (Figure 6). For example, eligible students who entered the required information and received offers in October responded to 8% of those offers by applying to the institution compared to only 3% for eligible students who did not enter the information needed to receive offers until May. This finding provides further motivation for the decision to begin sending offers in September rather than November. It may also suggest that making students aware of the program earlier and encouraging them to enter the requisite information into the application platform could further improve offer uptake.

Figure 6. Average rate of offer response by date of offer, among students who had not already added the college to their list (2024-2025)



How can we encourage more students to apply to and enroll in offering institutions?

Anecdotal evidence from Common App members and students who participated in CAAP or Common App's other direct admissions programs offers additional insights into how to increase the number of eligible students who apply to participating institutions. For example, students who received direct admissions offers through one of Common App's direct admissions programs often reported on surveys that they were unfamiliar with direct admissions and confused by the ensuing application and admission process. This suggests that engaging students and their counselors early in the application season to share program details (such as through the counselor webinars that Common App and CSCU organize) could encourage more students to respond to CAAP offers with an application.

Student and member feedback also suggests that providing more information about the offering institution to eligible students through timely, targeted outreach could improve application rates from CAAP offers. Unlike other applicants who elected to apply to participating institutions outside of the direct admissions pathway, CAAP students may not always be familiar with the institutions from which they receive direct admissions offers. Indeed, student survey responses reveal concerns that

some students did not know much about the schools offering them direct admissions and that the prospect of conducting their own research to learn more about the offering institutions was daunting. Member institutions suggest that closing this information gap by providing them with more information about their institution is a key area of focus as they aim to encourage more students receiving direct admissions offers to apply.

Finally, while encouraging students to apply to the offering institution is an important step in the direct admissions process, the program is ultimately intended to support more students to enroll at offering institutions. Although Common App's data provide insights into students' college application behaviors, Common App does not collect systematic information regarding where students ultimately enroll in college. Despite this limitation, information from other sources can help shed light on enrollment rates among students who receive direct admissions offers. CSCU data indicate that, among the four public institutions that participated in CAAP in 2024-2025, 13% of applications from students who received a CAAP offer resulted in the student enrolling the following fall.⁶ Anecdotally, other members that participate in Common App's direct admissions programs (including CAAP) report that enrollment rates for direct admissions applicants tend to be lower on average than enrollment rates among applicants that did not receive direct admissions offers, suggesting that participating institutions might prepare for lower yield rates among direct admissions applicants.

Surveys of students who received offers through Common App's direct admissions programs point to at least one mechanism through which participating institutions might improve enrollment rates among direct admissions applicants. Students expressed concerns that they received little communication from the institution offering them direct admissions after they submitted their application. Based on this feedback, institutions might benefit from creating a tailored communications plan specifically for direct admissions applicants to ensure that they notify students of their acceptance and provide them with additional information shortly after they submit their application.

While these anecdotal member and student perspectives provide examples of possible strategies to improve CAAP processes, future work exploring how best to promote application and enrollment rates among eligible students will be critical to the success of direct admissions programs as a tool for improving postsecondary access.

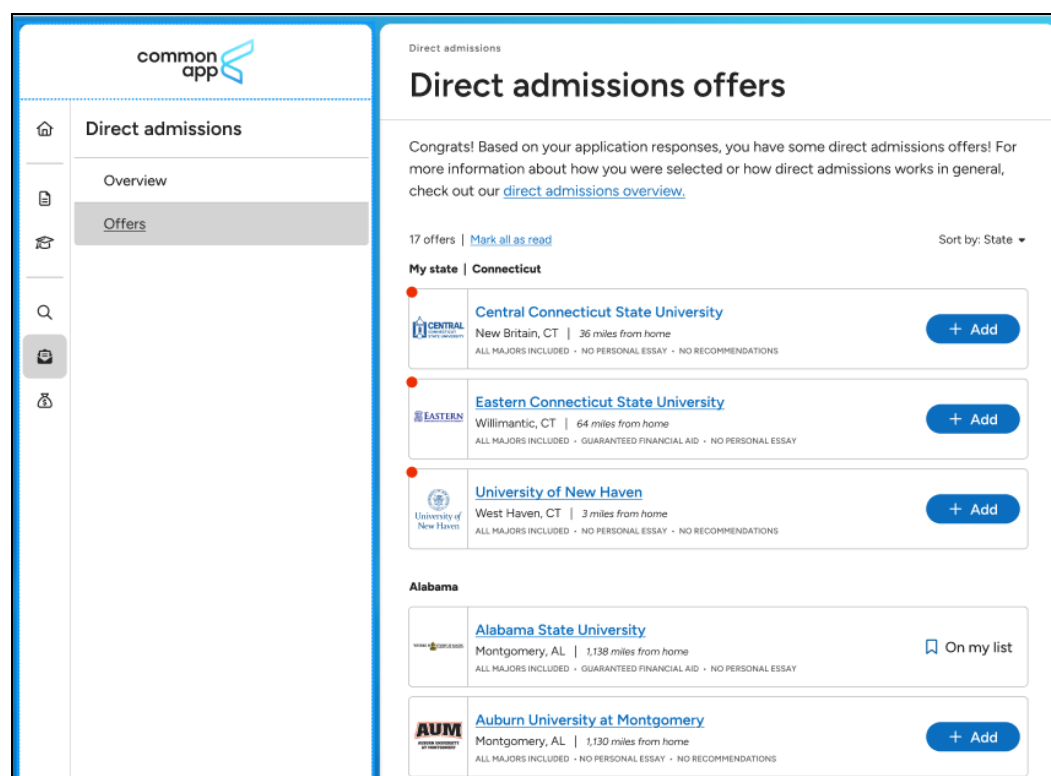
⁶ CSCU does not collect enrollment counts for CAAP applicants to the five private institutions that participated in the program in 2024-2025.

Looking ahead

The CAAP partnership has connected tens of thousands of Connecticut students with postsecondary opportunities since 2022. To build on this success and further improve the process for students and participating institutions, Common App and CSCU have made several important changes to CAAP for the 2025-2026 application season.

First, Common App has improved the student experience within the application platform, including developing a more intuitive interface that allows students to view and act on their CAAP and other direct admissions offers more easily (Exhibit 3). Based on our findings that students are more likely to apply to direct admissions offers from institutions closer to home, we adjusted the application interface to display direct admissions offers from institutions in the student's home state at the top of the direct admissions section.

Exhibit 3: Common App platform direct admissions interface



To better support the ecosystem around each student, Common App also enhanced the direct admissions data dashboards that we share with participating institutions to help them more actively leverage analytic insights. The portal helps institutions

track in real time how students are progressing through the direct admissions pipeline by reporting the number of direct admissions offers they have sent, the number of students who received an offer and who have added the institution to their college list, and the number who have applied to the institution.

Recognizing that statewide collaboration is essential to sustaining progress, Common App and CSCU also hosted their first in-person statewide convening for the CAAP program prior to the 2025-2026 academic year. Representatives from all participating institutions gathered to review data, share best practices, and discuss strategies for strengthening outreach to students, families, and counselors. This event marked an important step toward building a shared learning community committed to improving postsecondary access in Connecticut.

Finally, both CSCU and Common App have continued to invest in counselor engagement to ensure that those on the front lines of advising students understand the CAAP program and can confidently communicate it to students and families. Through new webinars, training sessions, and coordinated outreach with district leaders, counselors are now better equipped to guide students through the process. With no major operational changes to the program in 2025-2026, students, families, and counselors will benefit from a consistent and predictable experience.

Lessons learned

While the findings discussed above generally stem from the unique CAAP partnership between CSCU and Common App, they nonetheless provide important takeaways that we have seen consistently across Common App's direct admissions portfolio:

- **Implementation is critical to success** - Our experience collaborating with CSCU to deliver CAAP vividly demonstrates how removing administrative barriers and leveraging relationships with state partners and member institutions can greatly increase the reach of direct admissions programs.
- **Direct admissions can help encourage first-generation and low- and middle-income students to apply to college** - First-generation students and those from low- and middle-income households were especially likely to respond to direct admission offers.
- **Familiarity and timing seem to be key factors for students** - Students are more likely to respond to direct admissions offers from institutions closer to their home and to those sent earlier in the application season.
- **Counselor communication is essential** - Clear, consistent messaging to counselors helps ensure students and families understand their offers and

next steps. Continued investment in counselor engagement and training can strengthen participation.

- **Student-facing support drives action** - Simplified, timely, and accessible information, delivered early in the season, helps students navigate their offers and increases the likelihood that they act on them.

Common App and CSCU will continue to reflect on these learnings and analyze new data as the CAAP program expands to ensure that we successfully connect more students to postsecondary opportunities. Through these efforts, we hope to advance the direct admissions field by highlighting promising practices that other states and institutions might draw from as they consider implementing similar programs in their own context.