

Leveling the Playing Field: How Wahoo High School Transformed Scholarship Season with AppCentri

With AppCentri, Wahoo High School leveled the scholarship playing field—boosting applications, saving time, and engaging donors—turning scholarship season into a true community success story.

Background

Across the U.S., millions of dollars in scholarships and federal aid go unclaimed each year. In the 2024-25 cycle, 40% of families never used scholarships—and among those, 71% never even applied ([Sallie Mae](#)). Students also left approximately \$4.4 billion in Pell Grants unclaimed due to incomplete FAFSAs ([National College Attainment Network](#)). At the same time, postsecondary costs continue to climb: since 2004, tuition and fees have risen 42% at public four-year colleges, 28% at public two-year institutions, and 25% at private four-year schools ([CollegeBoard](#)).

At Wahoo High School in Nebraska, counselor John Harris saw these numbers reflected in the lives of his students. With about 330 students total and 70-80 seniors each year, Harris was stretched thin meeting the wide-ranging needs of his role: academic guidance, college and career planning, and growing social-emotional needs. The national student-to-counselor ratio is 376:1, well above the recommended 250:1 ([ASCA](#)).



My goal is that every kid has every opportunity that they want in front of them and is prepared to make some choices when they walk away from here as graduates of Wahoo High School.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School

However, every year, scholarship season made that mission harder.

71% of families never apply for scholarships

Demographics:

Wahoo High School Overview

- About **330 students**
- **26%** free and reduced lunch
- **330:1** student-counselor ratio
- **67%** math proficiency, **62%** reading proficiency
- **88%** white, **7%** Hispanic, **2%** multiracial, **1%** Black, **1%** Asian
- **95%** graduation rate



Wahoo High School, located in Wahoo, NE, is home to about 330 students and about 50 staff members.

Challenge

Before AppCentri, scholarships at Wahoo High School were managed through paper applications stored in filing cabinets. Students who had parents familiar with the “scholarship game” arrived with polished resumes, neatly typed essays, and complete applications. Students without that guidance often submitted incomplete applications—sometimes even in pencil.

“The most obvious gap was between the students whose parents knew how to play the game and those who didn’t. Some kids had fancy resumes and perfect applications. Others turned things in incomplete or in pencil. It really was an uneven playing field.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School

In an attempt to bridge this gap, Harris spent countless hours tracking down students and sharing little-known scholarship opportunities to every student. However, as a one-counselor team, this took time away from providing essential mental health and emotional support to Wahoo’s 330 students.

“Finding time to flag down each student, explain available opportunities, and help them complete applications was nearly impossible. It created an uneven playing field before students even began the scholarship process.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School

Managing the scholarship committees added another layer of stress. Paper files had to be carried to meetings or even mailed across state lines. With his counseling duties already overflowing, Harris couldn’t always track down every student or guide them through the process.



Seven seniors earned President's Education Awards Program Academic Excellence pins and certificates in the WHS class of 2025.



Academic Achievement Award Winners in the class of Fourteen 2025 graduates earned Academic Achievement pins and certificates.



Implementation

Frustrated by inefficiency and inequity, Harris was introduced to AppCentri by Wahoo parent and platform founder Michelle Kobza-Sutton.

“I wasn’t shopping for a solution. Honestly, I was just trying to keep up. But when Michelle showed me what AppCentri could do—and how other schools were using it—I realized there was a better way.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School

Although initially hesitant about changing tradition in a small town, Harris moved forward after seeing the benefits. Within the first year, AppCentri transformed the scholarship process:



Centralized scholarship database: Students could see over 50 scholarships tailored to eligibility, award amount, and deadline.



Digital application hub: Resumes, transcripts, and essays uploaded and stored in one place.



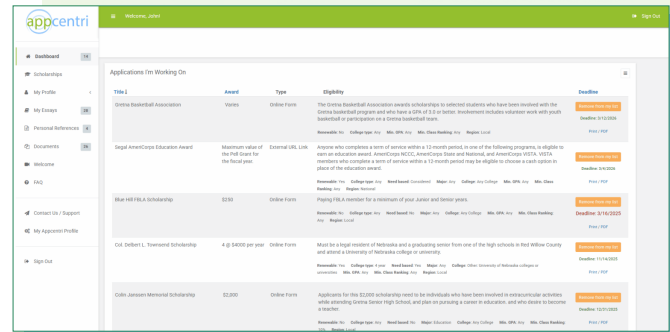
Automated reminders: No more chasing every student—notifications kept them on track.



Resume builder: Even students without formal experience could showcase sports, volunteering, and activities.



Smart organization tools: Students sorted scholarships by due date and award amount, and set calendars for deadlines.



It made my job easier and more effective. I didn’t have to shut down my SEL support during scholarship season. I could support students’ emotional needs while they managed their applications.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School

The Wahoo High School > graduating class of 2025.





Results

The shift was immediate and measurable:

Applications skyrocketed: The average number of applications per student rose from 3 to 8. Top students now submit 20+ applications.

Equity improved: First-generation and less-supported students submitted complete, competitive applications.

Donor engagement grew: Several donors doubled—or even quadrupled—their awards when more students applied.

Committees saved time: With all-digital files, reviews and deliberations were streamlined.

Counselor time reclaimed: Harris no longer had to pause SEL support during scholarship season.

“I’ve had multiple students tell me, “There’s no way I would have applied without AppCentri.” Even \$1,000 makes a huge difference for our kids.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School

In 2025 alone, **80% of Wahoo seniors** applied for local scholarships, and **nearly \$110,000** in local scholarships were awarded.

Moving Forward

Harris encourages other schools to lean into stakeholder engagement and not let tradition hold them back. He shared, “Listen to the people who have used the product. Invest in your stakeholders up front and have the conversation.”

“AppCentri has made my life simpler and allowed me to focus on what matters most—supporting students.

—John Harris

9-12 Counselor, Wahoo High School



^ Alissa Nutzman, treasurer for the Wahoo Public Schools Foundation, presents 2025 WHS graduate Sam Marxsen with a scholarship award certificate. As a senior, Sam applied for nine scholarships through Appcentri.



^ Makenzie Sutton, a 2025 WHS graduate, completed 19 scholarship applications through Appcentri as she prepared to attend the University of Sioux Falls.



About AppCentri

Built by educators, AppCentri streamlines the local scholarship process from start to finish—saving time for counselors, simplifying applications for students, and making it easier than ever for foundations to support college- and career-bound youth. Visit www.appcentri.com to learn more.

See how AppCentri can simplify scholarship management and increase student opportunities at your school.

Request a Demo