

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESSB 6141

C 307 L 20
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Expanding access to higher education.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Randall, Hasegawa, Keiser, Stanford, Frockt, Wilson, C. and Sheldon; by request of Lieutenant Governor).

Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
House Committee on College & Workforce Development

Background: Prior to each year of college, students may apply for financial aid by filling out the federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA). Colleges use the data provided in the financial aid application to determine a student's eligibility for aid. A student's financial need, as determined by the college, is the difference between the amount it will cost the student to go to school—the cost of attendance—and the family's expected family contribution (EFC). The EFC takes into consideration family income, assets, family size, and number of family members in college.

In 2019, the Legislature adopted changes to High School and Beyond Plans (HSBPs) including a requirement that students receive specific information about federal and state financial aid programs providing financial assistance for postsecondary education.

Summary: Financial Aid Calculator. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) must adopt an online calculator for all public four-year higher education institutions in Washington. The tool must:

- provide estimates of federal Pell Grant and Washington College Grant awards based on student and family circumstances;
- be published on a website managed by WSAC; and
- make clear the tool is only an estimate and not a guarantee of state aid.

Financial Aid Award Letters. WSAC, in collaboration the public four-year and two-year higher education institutions, as well as independent colleges in Washington State, must develop clear and consistent definitions for financial aid award letters. By July 1, 2021, all public higher education institutions and all independent colleges in Washington State must adopt a standardized template for financial aid awards.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

School District Requirements for Financial Aid Advising Day. Beginning in the 2020-21 school year, all districts with a high school must provide both a financial aid advising day and notification of financial aid opportunities at the beginning of the school year to parents and guardians of any student entering the twelfth grade. The notification must include:

- eligibility requirements of the Washington College Grant;
- requirements of the financial aid advising day;
- the process for opting out of financial aid advising day; and
- any community-based resources available to assist parents or guardians in completing FAFSA or WASFA.

The Washington State School Director's Association, with assistance from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and WSAC must develop a model policy and procedure for financial aid advising day.

Financial Aid Advising Day. Beginning with the 2020-21 school year and within existing resources, OSPI must coordinate a financial aid advising day or series of days for all districts with a high school. The financial aid advising day may coincide with HSBP information-sharing requirements. Financial aid advising day must take place between September 1st and December 1st of each year and include:

- distribution of information to twelfth grade students about FAFSA, WASFA, and the college board's College Scholarship Service profile;
- assistance in completing an aid application when possible; and
- information about the Washington College Grant and the financial aid calculator.

Students and educational staff may not be assessed on the basis of or penalized for failing to complete a financial aid application.

Includes a federal severability clause, which makes the bill inoperative to the extent that it is found to be in conflict with federal law or regulations.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	47	1	
House	93	3	(House amended)
Senate	48	0	(Senate concurred)

Effective: June 11, 2020