

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6254

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As of January 24, 2024

**Title:** An act relating to student navigational supports to increase postsecondary enrollment.

**Brief Description:** Providing student navigational supports to increase postsecondary enrollment.

**Sponsors:** Senators Nobles, Hansen, Conway, Frame, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Lovick, Saldaña, Valdez and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/24/24.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the financial aid completion program at the community and technical colleges to every educational service district and allows the college board to contract with outside entities including community-based organizations or tribal organizations depending on the needs of the district.
- Modifies the role of the financial aid outreach specialists to include student persistence.
- Creates a new financial aid certification program for secondary school teachers and counselors, higher education staff, and community partners and requires that the certification program be offered at no cost.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and the Professional Educator Standards Board to explore whether completion of a financial aid certification program could be recognized as continuing education credits and what additional incentives should be provided to meet certificated professional goals.

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

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

**Background:** Financial Aid Applications. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the federal form that current and prospective students fill out to determine their eligibility for federal and state financial aid for attending postsecondary education institutions. The FAFSA asks a variety of questions based on federal income tax returns to determine a student's financial need, taking into account the student's dependency status, income, assets, family size, and other factors. Students without legal immigrant status are ineligible for federal financial aid. The Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) is an alternative form for students who cannot file a FAFSA, but may still be eligible for state financial aid. The WASFA is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC).

Free Application for Federal Student Aid and Washington Application For State Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative. In 2022 the Legislature passed 2SHB 1835 which established the FAFSA and WASFA outreach and completion pilot program. Under this program the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) has administered a FAFSA and WASFA outreach and completion initiative pilot program in the two educational service districts with the lowest FAFSA completion rates over the prior three years. The colleges that participate in the pilot employ outreach specialists to work with high schools in the educational service district with the purpose of increasing FAFSA and WASFA filing rates.

**Summary of Bill:** The bill as referred to committee not considered.

**Summary of Bill (Proposed Substitute):** Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative. The FAFSA and WASFA Outreach and Completion Initiative is modified to be the financial aid completion and community and technical college retention pilot program. The program is expanded from serving two educational service districts (ESDs) to serving all ESDs. SBCTC, in consultation with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), shall select community and technical colleges to participate in the program. SBCTC may also consider tribal colleges or community-based organizations to participate in the program.

Outreach and Persistence Specialists. The outreach specialists are renamed outreach and persistence specialists. In addition to any responsibilities related to financial aid application completion, the outreach and persistence specialists are also required to assist students in exploring college services and programs to improve skills and increase academic achievement. The outreach and persistence specialists must focus on students who are eligible for public benefits programs. In collaboration with OSPI the college board must outline the roles and responsibilities of organizations employing outreach and persistence

specialists.

Beginning December 1, 2025, SBCTC must report annually on the financial aid completion and community and technical college retention pilot program. Participating colleges must share student-level data with WSAC. Tribal or community-based organizations that are selected to participate must enter into data sharing agreements with partner colleges. The report must include information about effectiveness in increasing FAFSA and WASFA filing and how the initiatives worked to increase college retention.

Financial Aid Certification Program. WSAC is responsible for administering a financial aid certification program that is available at no cost to secondary school teachers and counselors as well as staff at the institutions of higher education and community partners. Minimum requirements for the financial aid certification program are provided.

By September 1, 2026, OSPI in collaboration with WSAC and the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) must offer continuing education credits to in-service educator on the topic of financial aid. OSPI, WSAC, and PESB must make recommendations to the Legislature regarding additional incentives to encourage participation.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 22, 2024.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony On Proposed Substitute:** PRO: It's important to provide support services that are culturally congruent. This was more than just pulling out a computer or phone. It's also making sure that our students can be successful and persist. By 2030, nearly 70 percent of family wage jobs will require a postsecondary credential. Only half the states seniors enrolled in higher education. Only 53 percent of Americans believe that access to high-quality affordable higher education is actually available. This bill provides navigational supports with the ultimate goal of increasing postsecondary enrollment. This is particularly important in Washington where the state is 47th in the nation for financial aid completion. This bill represents the next crucial step in making sure that higher education is accessible. The process to apply for financial aid can be a hurdle. More support is needed to help young people and their families see it is possible. For many families the process of applying is confusing. This turns into a persistent barrier to applying to college. Students who complete a financial aid application are 84 percent more likely to enroll in higher education. I appreciate the effort in this bill to create a financial aid certification program. The more we can build trusted expertise on financial aid the better prepared we will be to support students. The efforts to make college more affordable are lost if students don't actually file for aid. This legislation supports an on the ground

advocate that will connect students with the most critical resources. A navigator has helped me identify my college goals that I probably wouldn't have been able to do on my own. Applying for financial aid is often the difference between a student going to college or not. I appreciate that this bill invests in peoples skills for navigating the financial aid process. I strongly recommend that you expand this bill to four-year institutions. The ideas in this bill directly serve marginalized students and guarantees that these students navigating the transition from K-12 to college have access to staff who can provide comprehensive support. They will provide culturally competent and relevant information.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Dr. Tafona Ervin, Foundation for Tacoma Students; Dr. Joyce Loveday, Clover Park Technical College; Celva Boon, Clover Park Technical College; Megan Clark, 5923 S I St; Melissa Beard, Council of Presidents; Jamie Traugott, Washington's State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Matt Campbell, Pierce College Fort Steilacoom; Melanie Casciato, Columbia Basin College; Masa Kawamura, South Puget Sound Community College; Chris Gandy, Washington's State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Fahren Johnson, School's Out Washingtono; Tana Peterman, Washington STEM; Paula Sardinas, FMS Global Strategies/Stand for Children WA; Amanda Kost, UW Faculty.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.