
SENATE BILL 6254

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Senators Nobles, Hansen, Conway, Frame, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Lovick, Saldaña, Valdez, and C. Wilson

Read first time 01/17/24. Referred to Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development.

1 AN ACT Relating to student navigational supports to increase
2 postsecondary enrollment; amending RCW 28B.50.940; adding a new
3 section to chapter 28B.77 RCW; creating new sections; and providing
4 an expiration date.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes that Washington
7 stands among the top 10 states for job opportunities requiring
8 education beyond high school, and that large majorities of high
9 school students self-report aspirations to continue their education
10 beyond 12th grade. However, only an estimated 40 percent of
11 Washington's high school class of 2021 is projected to obtain a
12 postsecondary credential. This issue is particularly pressing for
13 students from lower income households. The legislature further
14 recognizes that the real or perceived cost of postsecondary education
15 is a critical systemic barrier that impedes prospective students from
16 applying and enrolling in postsecondary education. This is despite
17 Washington boasting one of the most expansive and equitable set of
18 state-level postsecondary financial aid programs in the country. The
19 legislature further recognizes that counseling, advising, and
20 coaching that help students with the postsecondary financial aid,
21 application, and enrollment processes, and that provide hands-on

1 assistance, are proven approaches to increasing rates of
2 postsecondary enrollment. In order to broaden access to student
3 navigational supports, Washington should invest in student
4 navigational supports and services to advise students to and through
5 postsecondary education and training. Therefore, it is the
6 legislature's intent to establish a financial aid completion and
7 community and technical college retention pilot program.

8 **Sec. 2.** RCW 28B.50.940 and 2022 c 214 s 3 are each amended to
9 read as follows:

10 Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific
11 purpose, the college board shall administer a (~~free application for~~
12 ~~federal student aid and Washington application for state financial~~
13 ~~aid outreach and completion initiative pilot program~~) financial aid
14 completion and community and technical college retention pilot
15 program for every educational service district.

16 (1) The college board shall select community or technical
17 colleges to participate in the pilot program. The (~~colleges selected~~
18 ~~to participate must each be located within educational service~~
19 ~~districts that are in the bottom two for free application for federal~~
20 ~~student aid completion rates when combining their respective school~~
21 ~~districts' free application for federal student aid completion rates~~
22 ~~over the past three completed academic years prior to June 9, 2022~~)
23 college board may also consider tribal organizations or community-
24 based organizations to participate in the pilot program if deemed
25 appropriate for the context of a given educational service district.
26 The colleges or organizations selected to participate must include at
27 least one college or organization from each educational service
28 district. Colleges or organizations selected to participate shall
29 employ outreach and persistence specialists to work directly with the
30 high schools located in the corresponding educational service
31 district. It is the legislature's intent that the outreach and
32 persistence specialists be employed at a ratio of one to 600 high
33 school seniors within the corresponding educational service district.
34 The outreach and persistence specialists shall make significant
35 contact with high school students and their families, with a focus on
36 those households who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch,
37 the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program, medicaid, or
38 other similar public benefit programs, for the purpose of increasing
39 free application for federal student aid and Washington application

1 for state financial aid completion rates. The outreach and
2 persistence specialists shall use the free application for federal
3 student aid and Washington application for state financial aid data
4 maintained by the student achievement council to conduct targeted
5 outreach and free application for federal student aid and Washington
6 application for state financial aid completion assistance to high
7 school seniors. The outreach and persistence specialists shall also
8 provide information on how to access private scholarships. The
9 outreach and persistence specialists shall conduct other outreach as
10 appropriate, including virtual or in-person presentations with
11 students and families, announcements on ~~((school intercoms and))~~
12 social media channels, outreach to recent high school graduates as
13 peer messengers, and events at school college or career fairs.

14 (2) The outreach and persistence specialists shall assist
15 students in exploring college services and programs to improve their
16 skills and increase academic achievement, with a focus on those
17 students who are eligible for public benefit programs, for the
18 purpose of helping community and technical college students reach
19 their education and career goals.

20 (3) The college board shall report annually to the appropriate
21 committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036
22 beginning December 1, ~~((2023, on the free application for federal~~
23 ~~student aid and Washington application for state financial aid~~
24 ~~outreach and completion initiative pilot program))~~ 2025, on the
25 financial aid completion and community and technical college
26 retention pilot program. All colleges or organizations selected to
27 participate in the pilot program and employing outreach and
28 persistence specialists shall share student-level data with the
29 student achievement council. Any tribal organizations or community-
30 based organizations that are selected to participate shall enter into
31 data-sharing agreements with partner colleges. The report must
32 include details on how the colleges selected used the funding
33 ~~((and)),~~ how the initiatives worked to increase free application for
34 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial
35 aid completion rates, and how the initiatives worked to increase
36 college retention. The report must ~~((also))~~ include before and after
37 free application for federal student aid and Washington application
38 for state financial aid completion data and specific details about
39 the number and demographic information of high school students
40 assisted in completing the free application for federal student aid

1 and Washington application for state financial aid. The report must
2 also include details about the rates of college student first-year
3 retention with corresponding demographic information.

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.77
5 RCW to read as follows:

6 (1) The legislature intends to ensure that every school district
7 has access to at least one qualified financial aid professional to
8 provide expert support and ensure accurate and timely administration
9 of financial aid forms. To achieve this, the legislature intends to
10 make available, at no cost to participants, comprehensive financial
11 aid training for teachers, school counselors, postsecondary staff,
12 and community partners.

13 (2) The council shall administer a financial aid certification
14 program that is available to secondary school teachers and
15 counselors, staff at the institutions of higher education, and
16 community partners. The certification program must cover topics
17 including the administration of state and federal financial aid,
18 eligibility criteria, family educational rights and privacy act
19 regulations and standards, consumer information reporting and
20 disclosures, and cost of attendance and need analysis. The council
21 may contract with a third-party entity to provide the certification
22 program. The certification program must be offered at no cost to
23 program participants.

24 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The professional educator standards
25 board, in consultation with the office of the superintendent of
26 public instruction and the Washington student achievement council,
27 shall explore whether completion of a financial aid certification
28 program, as provided for under section 3 of this act or through a
29 third-party entity, can be recognized as continuing education. The
30 professional educator standards board, in consultation with the
31 office of the superintendent of public instruction and the Washington
32 student achievement council, shall make recommendations to the
33 legislature by October 1, 2025, in accordance with RCW 43.01.036
34 about the minimum requirements for a financial aid certification
35 program to be recognized as continuing education and any additional
36 incentives that should be available to encourage participation in the
37 certification program.

1 (2) This section expires November 1, 2025.

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