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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5164**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Nobles, Hansen, Dhingra, Trudeau, Saldaña, Nguyen, Valdez, Liias, Kauffman, Chapman, Bateman, Stanford, C. Wilson, Salomon, Frame, Hasegawa, and Slatter)

AN ACT Relating to student navigational supports to increase postsecondary enrollment; amending RCW 28B.50.940; adding a new section to chapter 28B.77 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.415 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature recognizes that Washington is ranked among the top states for the share of jobs requiring postsecondary education, and that large majorities of high school students self-report aspirations to continue their education beyond 12th grade. However, only an estimated 40 percent of Washington's high school class of 2021 is projected to obtain a postsecondary credential. This issue is particularly pressing for students from lower income households. The legislature further recognizes that the real or perceived cost of postsecondary education is a critical systemic barrier that impedes prospective students from applying for and enrolling in postsecondary education. This is despite Washington boasting one of the most expansive and equitable set of state-level postsecondary financial aid programs in the country.

The legislature finds that counseling, advising, and coaching that help students with the postsecondary financial aid application and enrollment processes, and that provide hands-on assistance, are evidence-based approaches to increasing rates of postsecondary enrollment. The legislature further recognizes that school counselors and other on-site experts deliver comprehensive school counseling programs, which provide support for students and their families in securing postsecondary opportunities. A primary role for school counselors is to assist students in planning for postsecondary options. The addition of enrollment and outreach specialists can provide a valuable resource for comprehensive school counseling programs and broaden access to student navigational supports throughout the state. Therefore, Washington state should invest in student navigational supports and services to advise students to and through postsecondary education and training. It is the legislature's intent to establish a postsecondary outreach and enrollment specialist program for the purposes of helping Washington high school students with postsecondary financial aid and educational opportunities as well as encouraging completion of financial aid and postsecondary enrollment.

Furthermore, the legislature intends to ensure that every school district has access to at least one qualified financial aid professional to provide support and ensure accurate and timely administration of financial aid forms. To achieve this, the legislature intends to make available, at no cost to participants, comprehensive financial aid training for teachers, school counselors, postsecondary staff, and community partners.

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

Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the college board shall administer a ((~~free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid outreach and completion initiative pilot program.~~

~~(1) The college board shall select community or technical colleges to participate in the pilot program. The colleges selected to participate must each be located within educational service districts that are in the bottom two for free application for federal student aid completion rates when combining their respective school districts' free application for federal student aid completion rates over the past three completed academic years prior to June 9, 2022. Colleges selected to participate shall employ outreach specialists to work directly with the high schools located in the corresponding educational service district. It is the legislature's intent that the outreach specialists be employed at a ratio of one to 600 high school seniors within the corresponding educational service district. The outreach specialists shall make significant contact with high school students and their families for the purpose of increasing free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion rates. The outreach specialists shall use the free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid data maintained by the student achievement council to conduct targeted outreach and free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion assistance to high school seniors. The outreach specialists shall also provide information on how to access private scholarships. The outreach specialists shall conduct other outreach as appropriate, including virtual or in-person presentations with students and families, announcements on school intercoms and social media channels, outreach to recent high school graduates as peer messengers, and events at school college or career fairs.~~

~~(2) The college board shall report annually to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036 beginning December 1, 2023, on the free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid outreach and completion initiative pilot program. The report must include details on how the colleges selected used the funding and how the initiatives worked to increase free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion rates. The report must also include before and after free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion data and specific details about the number of high school students assisted in completing the free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid~~)) financial aid completion and postsecondary enrollment program for every educational service district.

(1)(a) Depending on the needs of the educational service district, the college board shall select at least one of the following entities in each educational service district to participate in the program:

(i) Community or technical colleges;

(ii) Public four-year institutions of higher education;

(iii) Tribal organizations; or

(iv) Community-based organizations.

(b) The college board shall establish a selection committee for selecting the entities to participate in the program.

(i) The selection committee must include at least two community or technical college representatives as designated by the college board and at least two public four-year representatives as designated by an organization representing the public four-year institutions of higher education.

(ii) The selection committee may consult with colleges, institutions of higher education, and the student achievement council in developing selection criteria.

(2) Entities selected to participate shall employ outreach and enrollment specialists to work directly with the high schools located in the corresponding educational service district. It is the legislature's intent that the outreach and enrollment specialists be employed at a ratio of one to 600 high school seniors within the corresponding educational service district.

(3) The outreach and enrollment specialists shall coordinate with the secondary school counseling program and any other school district staff as appropriate to make significant contact with high school students and their families, with a focus on secondary schools that have a higher percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch compared to other schools in the same educational service district, for the purpose of increasing free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion rates. The outreach and enrollment specialists must use the free application for federal student aid, Washington application for state financial aid, and college bound scholarship eligibility data maintained by the student achievement council to conduct targeted outreach and free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion assistance to high school seniors. The outreach and enrollment specialists must also provide information on how to access private scholarships. The outreach and enrollment specialists shall conduct other outreach as appropriate, including virtual or in-person presentations with students and families, announcements on school intercoms and social media channels, outreach to recent high school graduates as peer messengers, and events at school college or career fairs.

(4) The outreach and enrollment specialists shall assist:

(a) High school students in navigating the application and enrollment process for institutions of higher education and coordinate with school district staff and other college access partners as appropriate and as needed;

(b) Students in connecting with appropriate staff at institutions of higher education who can help students in exploring campus services and programs to improve their skills, increase academic achievement, and help students reach their education and career goals; and

(c) High school students in connecting with staff or instructors affiliated with state-registered apprenticeship programs who can help students navigate apprenticeship application processes and utilize eligible financial aid.

(5) The tasks performed by outreach and enrollment specialists must complement and support the work of secondary school staff and administration in providing comprehensive postsecondary navigation support.

(6) The college board, in collaboration with the office of the superintendent of public instruction, an organization representing the public four-year institutions of higher education, and college access staff from the student achievement council, shall outline the roles and responsibilities of colleges, institutions of higher education, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations to ensure outreach and enrollment specialists have the necessary resources and support to effectively engage with students to promote financial aid attainment and postsecondary enrollment. Resources and support may include, but are not limited to: Access to buildings, adequate meeting spaces, certain technology, school supplies, and safe and secure access to individual student's high school and beyond plans.

(7) The college board must develop a communication plan for students and families about the presence and role of outreach and enrollment specialists.

(8) The college board, the student achievement council, an organization representing the public four-year institutions of higher education, an organization representing the private four-year institutions of higher education, statewide organizations representing state-registered apprenticeship programs, and those organizations representing teachers, counselors, and principals shall collaborate in preparing a training program for outreach and enrollment specialists.

(9) The college board shall report annually to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036 beginning January 15, 2026, on the outreach and enrollment specialist program. The report must include details on how:

(a) The colleges, institutions of higher education, tribal organizations, or community-based organizations selected used the funding; and

(b) The initiatives worked to increase free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion rates.

(10) The education data center established in RCW 43.41.400, in collaboration with the college board, the public four-year institutions of higher education, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, and the student achievement council shall create a report on the completion rates of the free application for federal student aid and Washington application for state financial aid by Washington high school seniors. The report must include data, disaggregated by demographic data, on: The completion rates prior to implementation of the program created in this section, the postimplementation completion rates, and the rates of first-time postsecondary enrollment of students within one year of high school graduation. The report required by this subsection must be submitted to the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 1, 2027.

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

(1) The council shall administer a financial aid training program that is available to secondary school teachers and counselors, staff at the institutions of higher education, and community partners in order to have at least one qualified financial aid professional at each school to provide support and ensure accurate and timely administration of financial aid forms. The council must coordinate with the office of the superintendent of public instruction to develop the topics that the training program will cover. The council may contract with a third-party entity to provide the training program. The training program must be offered at no cost to program participants.

(2) The council shall provide a report by December 1, 2027, to the governor and the education and higher education committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036. The report must:

(a) Describe the development and content of the training program; and

(b) Report on the number of trainings provided, the number of unique adults who participated in the program, a summary of the geographic location of training program participants, the professional roles of training program participants, and a description of how skills gained through the program have been used by training program participants.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.415 RCW to read as follows:

(1) By September 1, 2027, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, in collaboration with the student achievement council and the Washington professional educator standards board, shall offer continuing education credits to in-service educators on the topic of financial aid, in accordance with section 3 of this act.

(2) By October 1, 2028, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, in collaboration with the student achievement council and the Washington professional educator standards board, shall make recommendations to the legislature regarding additional incentives that should be available to encourage participation in the training program described in section 3 of this act.

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