

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6141

As Passed House - Amended:
March 4, 2020

Title: An act relating to expanding access to higher education.

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).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 2/25/20, 2/26/20 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 3/4/20, 93-3.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House)

- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to develop a centralized online statewide calculator tool to estimate combined financial aid packages.
- Requires the WSAC, in collaboration with the public four-year and two-year institutions of higher education and independent colleges of Washington, to develop clear, consistent definitions for financial aid award packages.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to collaborate with the WSAC to coordinate a financial aid advising day for all school districts with a high school.
- Modifies the High School and Beyond Plan to require additional scholarship information.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Van Werven, Ranking Minority Member;

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.

Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Mead, Paul, Pollet, Ramos, Rude, Sells, Slatter and Young.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Kraft and Sutherland.

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

Background:

Student Aid.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a free application filled out by prospective college or graduate students to determine eligibility for federal government-sponsored aid.

A FAFSA is used to determine if students are eligible for federal financial aid. Aid is dependent on the student's expected family contribution, the cost of attendance at an institution, the student's enrollment status (part-time or full-time), and whether the student attends for a full academic year or less. It is determined on a year-by-year basis.

The Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) is a free application for state financial aid. State financial aid is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), and can include the Washington College Grant (WCG), the College Bound Scholarship, or State Work Study.

The College Board's College Scholarship Service (CSS) profile is an online profile used by students to apply for institutional financial aid.

Net Price Calculator.

The Higher Education Act requires each postsecondary institution participating in federal student aid programs to post a net price calculator on its website. Net price calculators allow prospective students to find an estimate of the cost to attend an institution based on information about the student. Institutions may use the Department of Education's net price calculator template or develop their own customized calculators. The information produced by the calculator must include:

- the estimated:
 - total cost of attendance;
 - tuition and fees;
 - room and board;
 - books and supplies;
 - other expenses;
 - total grant aid;
 - net price;
- the percentage of the cohort that received grant aid; and
- caveats and disclaimers.

Financial Aid Package Award Letters.

Financial aid package award letters are sent by each school to students who have been accepted to an institution and awarded financial aid. The letter provides cost of attendance for one year and how the financial aid package will measure up to that cost. There is no standard format for institutions to follow.

Financial Aid Requirements for High Schools.

To graduate from high school, each student must have a High School and Beyond Plan to guide and inform the student on course taking and assist with college and career planning.

Related to financial aid, the plan must include:

- evidence that the student has received information on federal and state financial aid programs, including information about the necessary documentation for completing applications;
- application timelines and submission deadlines;
- information specific to students who are or have been in foster care, students who are at risk of being homeless, and students whose family members or guardians will be required to provide financial and tax information necessary to complete applications; and
- evidence that the student has received opportunities to participate in sessions that assist students (and their family members or guardians as necessary) in filling out their financial aid applications.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Centralized Calculator Tool.

The WSAC is required to adopt a centralized online statewide calculator tool to estimate combined federal and state financial aid packages for all four-year institutions of higher education. The tool must provide financial aid estimates based on student and family financial circumstances. The calculator must be posted on a website managed by the WSAC. The tool is for estimation purposes only and does not guarantee state aid. Students must be able to use the calculator anonymously, and it must not collect or share any data.

Financial Aid Package Award Letters.

The WSAC is directed to collaborate with financial aid experts from public four-year and two-year institutions of higher education, as well as independent colleges in Washington, to develop clear, consistent definitions regarding financial aid package award letters for institutions of higher education to adopt. By July 1, 2021, all public four-year and two-year institutions of higher education, as well as independent colleges of Washington, must adopt uniform terminology and a standardized template for financial aid package award letters.

Financial Aid Advising Day.

Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, in coordination with the WSAC and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), all school districts with a high school must provide both a financial aid advising day and notification of financial aid opportunities, including community-based resources, to parents and guardians of students entering twelfth grade.

The OSPI, in collaboration with the WSAC and within existing resources, is required to coordinate a financial aid advising day with all school districts with a high school, and the

financial aid advising day may be administered in accordance with information sharing requirements contained in the High School and Beyond Plan. A financial aid advising day is a day or series of days between September 1 and December 1 of each year that must include dedicated time during regular school hours for staff to provide twelfth grade students with information on the FAFSA and the WASFA, and to assist students in completing the applications as appropriate. The OSPI and the WSAC are required to distribute information on the WCG and demonstrate the use of the financial aid calculator tool.

The Washington State School Directors' Association, with assistance from the OSPI and the WSAC, must develop model policies and procedures describing minimum standards for the financial aid advising day that school district board of directors may adopt.

High School and Beyond Plan.

The High School and Beyond Plan must include information on the WCG and local scholarship opportunities.

The OSPI is required to coordinate with the WSAC whenever possible to assist school districts in providing opportunities outside of regular school hours for parents to participate in seminars on financial aid applications, and whenever possible, provide interpreter services.

Students may choose to opt out of these activities with written consent of the parent if under the age of 18, and without consent if over the age of 18. Neither students nor staff may be punished for a student's failure to complete financial aid applications or a student's choice to opt out of activities.

Electronic platforms for the High School and Beyond Plan must include a sample financial aid award letter and a link to the financial aid calculator at such a time as those materials are finalized.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Many institutions already have a FAFSA night, and institutions are already required to have a net price calculator. The bill is centralizing systems to make the process easier to navigate. There is much work to be done moving forward to bring Washington's FAFSA and WASFA completion rate up, and the calculator tool will help students know that aid is available. Standardized financial aid award letters will make financial aid award packages easier for students to understand. The financial aid advising day is great for reaching high school students, but there is also a need to reach adults to let them know financial aid is available to them as well.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Randall, prime sponsor; Paul Francis, Council of Presidents; and Arlen Harris, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.