
SENATE BILL 5566

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By Senators Shewmake, Randall, Wellman, Saldaña, Lias, Hasegawa, Hunt, Nguyen, Nobles, Trudeau, Valdez, and C. Wilson

Read first time 01/25/23. Referred to Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development.

1 AN ACT Relating to the student basic needs at public
2 postsecondary institutions act; adding a new section to chapter
3 28B.10 RCW; adding new sections to chapter 28B.50 RCW; creating new
4 sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.10
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1) By the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year, institutions
9 of higher education shall each establish a student basic needs task
10 force comprised of staff and faculty, student representatives, and
11 community organizations with expertise in accessing basic needs. Each
12 task force shall develop a hunger-free campus strategic plan for its
13 campus beginning no later than April 1, 2024. Each strategic plan
14 must:

15 (a) By the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year and every year
16 thereafter, collect and disseminate results of a student survey
17 developed by the state board for community and technical colleges and
18 the student achievement council to assess food security, housing
19 security, and access to basic economic supports;

20 (b) Analyze gaps in student basic needs in the student body and
21 institution;

1 (c) If none exists, design a benefits resource hub to assist
2 students with accessing public benefits, emergency financial
3 assistance such as those created under RCW 28B.50.295, and other
4 community resources using a minimum of one full-time navigator;

5 (d) Hire full-time benefits navigators to assist students in
6 accessing public benefits and existing emergency assistance programs
7 such as those funded by RCW 28B.50.295;

8 (e) Ensure access to a campus food pantry for students;

9 (f) Establish and update methods to identify likely low-income
10 and food-insecure students and conduct communications and outreach
11 methods by the institution to promote opportunities for benefits
12 assistance (such as basic food enrollment, working connections child
13 care enrollment, referrals to the special supplemental nutrition
14 program for women, infants, and children, affordable housing
15 assistance) and emergency financial resources;

16 (g) Assess the needs and advantages of their benefits navigator
17 model; and

18 (h) Identify opportunities for the institution and partnerships
19 with community-based organizations to holistically support students'
20 basic needs, access to benefits and community resources.

21 (2) Each annual plan must include at least two activities to
22 implement into the strategic plan.

23 (3) Institutions of higher education shall each provide a brief
24 written report from their respective student basic needs task forces
25 to the student achievement council and the state board for community
26 and technical colleges by the end of the 2023-24 academic year and
27 every subsequent year. Each report must include findings and
28 activities from the strategic plan and be published online in an
29 easily accessible location.

30 (4) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this
31 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

32 (a) "Benefits navigator" means an individual who is employed by
33 an institution of higher education for the purpose of helping
34 students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits
35 programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

36 (b) "Benefits resource hub" means a single location on campus
37 where students are directed to get assistance from a benefits
38 navigator to understand what basic needs benefits they may be
39 eligible for and receive assistance in applications, enrollment, and
40 removing barriers to receive support services.

1 (c) "Institutions of higher education" means institutions as
2 defined in RCW 28B.10.016, university campuses created under chapter
3 28B.45 RCW, and tribal institutions of higher education operated by
4 an Indian tribe as defined in RCW 43.376.010.

5 (d) "Student basic needs" means food, water, nutrition, shelter,
6 clothing, physical health, mental health, child care, or similar
7 needs that students enrolled at an institution of higher education
8 may face difficulty with and that hinders their ability to begin or
9 continue their enrollment.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.50
11 RCW to read as follows:

12 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
13 specific purpose, the state board for community and technical
14 colleges and the student achievement council shall convene a
15 postsecondary basic needs work group. The purpose of the work group
16 is to learn from the experiences of students and local institutions
17 of higher education. The work group shall:

18 (a) Develop budgetary and administrative policy in the
19 administration of the work group;

20 (b) Coordinate with and provide technical assistance to student
21 basic needs task forces at institutions of higher education;

22 (c) By the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year and every year
23 thereafter, coordinate the collection of a student survey data that
24 measures the basic needs of students and disseminate survey results;

25 (d) Identify how many full-time benefits navigators are necessary
26 to adequately assist an institution's student population;

27 (e) Facilitate discussions and generate recommendations amongst
28 relevant stakeholders on the basic needs of Washington's higher
29 education student population;

30 (f) Assess the distribution of state funds for basic needs
31 support provided to institutions of higher education and university
32 campuses;

33 (g) Assess how effectively funds of institutions of higher
34 education are meeting students' basic needs;

35 (h) Issue biennial recommendations, beginning January 1, 2025,
36 regarding strategies to address students' basic needs to the
37 appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW
38 43.01.036; and

1 (i) Support a collaborative partnership with not-for-profit
2 organization(s) with expertise in student basic needs programs, or
3 benefits navigation to provide ongoing technical assistance and
4 training.

5 (2) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this
6 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

7 (a) "Benefits navigator" means an individual who is employed by
8 an institution of higher education for the purpose of helping
9 students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits
10 programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

11 (b) "Institutions of higher education" means institutions as
12 defined in RCW 28B.10.016, university campuses created under chapter
13 28B.45 RCW, and tribal institutions of higher education operated by
14 an Indian tribe as defined in RCW 43.376.010.

15 (c) "Student basic needs" means food, water, nutrition, shelter,
16 clothing, physical health, mental health, child care, or similar
17 needs that students enrolled at an institution of higher education
18 may face difficulty with and that hinders their ability to begin or
19 continue their enrollment.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.50
21 RCW to read as follows:

22 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
23 specific purpose, the state board for community and technical
24 colleges and the student achievement council shall:

25 (a) Design and implement a benefits navigator grant program to
26 provide funding to institutions of higher education to be used in the
27 implementation of duties established under section 1 of this act;

28 (b) Where applicable, maximize use of the basic food education
29 and training program to fund navigators and maximize federal funds to
30 help low-income students meet their basic needs; and

31 (c) Review applications for the benefits navigator grant program
32 and select institutions of higher education to receive the grant
33 using objective criteria included within the application and online
34 in an easily accessible location.

35 (2) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this
36 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

37 (a) "Benefits navigator" means an individual who is employed by
38 an institution of higher education for the purpose of helping

1 students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits
2 programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

3 (b) "Institutions of higher education" means institutions as
4 defined in RCW 28B.10.016, university campuses created under chapter
5 28B.45 RCW, and tribal institutions of higher education operated by
6 an Indian tribe as defined in RCW 43.376.010.

7 (c) "Student basic needs" means food, water, nutrition, shelter,
8 clothing, physical health, mental health, child care, or similar
9 needs that students enrolled at an institution of higher education
10 may face difficulty with and that hinders their ability to begin or
11 continue their enrollment.

12 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) Subject to the availability of amounts
13 appropriated for this specific purpose, the college board shall
14 select four college districts, two on each side of the crest of the
15 Cascade mountains, to participate in a pilot program to provide free
16 and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible low-income
17 students.

18 (2) The pilot program expires July 1, 2025.

19 (3) This section expires January 1, 2026.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) Subject to the availability of amounts
21 appropriated for this specific purpose, the council shall select two
22 public four-year institutions of higher education, one on each side
23 of the crest of the Cascade mountains, to participate in a pilot
24 program to provide free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to
25 eligible low-income students.

26 (2) The pilot program expires July 1, 2025.

27 (3) This section expires January 1, 2026.

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