
Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

HB 1136

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

Sponsors: Representatives Leavitt, Shavers, Callan, Bronoske, Simmons, Pollet, Nance and Bernbaum.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Repeals the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program and establishes the Financial Aid Completion and Postsecondary Enrollment Program (Program).
- Requires the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to report annually to the Legislature on the Program.
- Requires the Education Data Center, in collaboration with other entities, to create a report on the completion rates of the FAFSA and WASFA by Washington high school seniors.
- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council to administer a financial aid training program for secondary school teachers and counselors, staff at the institutions of higher education, and community partners.
- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in collaboration with other entities, to offer continuing education credits to in-service educators on the topic of financial aid and to make recommendations to the Legislature regarding additional incentives to encourage participation in the training program.

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.

Hearing Date: 1/17/25

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

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 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).

Educational Service Districts.

Educational Service Districts (ESDs) were established at the state level in 1969 with the purpose of serving as a vehicle to link local public and private schools with state and national educational resources. There are nine ESDs in Washington.

College Bound Scholarship.

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program provides guaranteed four-year tuition to students from low-income families. Eligible students for the CBS include those who, among other requirements:

- qualify for free or reduced-price lunches in the seventh grade, eighth grade, or in certain circumstances, ninth grade; or
- are independent from parents or guardians, or are receiving extended foster care services, and meet other specified requirements.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid and Washington Application for State Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) is required to administer a FAFSA and WASFA Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program. The SBCTC must select community or technical colleges to participate in the pilot program. The colleges selected must each be located within educational service districts that are in the bottom two for FAFSA completion rates when combining their respective school districts' FAFSA completion rates over the past three academic years prior to June 9, 2022. The colleges selected to participate must employ outreach specialists to work directly with high school students and their families for the purpose of increasing FAFSA and WASFA completion rates.

The state intent of the Legislature is that the outreach specialists be employed at a ratio of one outreach specialist to 600 high school seniors within the corresponding educational service district. The outreach specialists must use FAFSA and WASFA data maintained by the WSAC to conduct targeted outreach and completion assistance. The outreach specialists must also provide information on how to access private scholarships. The outreach specialists must

conduct 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.

The SBCTC must report annually to the Legislature beginning December 1, 2023, on the FAFSA and WASFA Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program. The report must include details on how the colleges used the funding and how the initiatives worked to increase FAFSA and WASFA completion rates, including FAFSA and WASFA completion data and specific details about the number of students assisted.

Summary of Bill:

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program is repealed and a new program is established. Subject to appropriation, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) must administer a Financial Aid Completion and Postsecondary Enrollment Program (Program) for every Educational Service District (ESD).

Depending on the needs of the ESD, the SBCTC must select at least one of the following entities in each ESD to participate in the program: community and technical colleges (CTC); public four-year institutions of higher education; tribal organizations; or community-based organizations. The SBCTC must establish a selection committee for selecting the entities to participate in the Program. The selection committee must include at least two CTC representatives and two public four-year representatives and may consult with CTCs, institutions of higher education, and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC).

Selected entities must employ outreach and enrollment specialists (Specialists) to work directly with the high schools in the corresponding ESD. The Specialists must coordinate with the secondary school counseling program and other school district staff as appropriate to make significant contact with high school students and their families. The outreach must have a focus on secondary schools with a higher percentage of students who are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch compared to other schools in the same ESD with the purpose of increasing FAFSA and WASFA completion rates. The Specialists must use FAFSA, WASFA, and College Bound Scholarship eligibility data maintained by the WSAC to conduct targeted outreach and financial aid application assistance to high school seniors, and must provide information on how to access private scholarships. Specialists must also 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.

Beginning January 15, 2026, the SBCTC must report annually to the Legislature on the Program. The report must include details on how the CTCs, institutions of higher education, tribal organizations, or community-based organizations selected to use the funding and the initiatives worked to increase FAFSA and WASFA completion rates.

The Education Data Center, in collaboration with the SBCTC, the public four-year institutions of higher education, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the WSAC, must create a report on the completion rates of the FAFSA and WASFA by Washington high school seniors. The report must also include other specified disaggregated data.

The WSAC must 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 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 WSAC must coordinate with the OSPI to develop the training. The WSAC may contract with a third-party entity to provide the training, and the training must be offered at no cost to program participants. The WSAC must provide a report to the governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2027. The report must include the development and content of the program, the number of trainings provided and the number of participants, a summary of the geographic location of the training program participants, and other specified data.

By September 1, 2027, the OSPI, in collaboration with the WSAC and the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, must offer continuing education credits to in-service educators on the topic of financial aid. By October 1, 2028, the OSPI and its collaborating entities must make recommendations to the Legislature regarding additional incentives to encourage participation in the training program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 13, 2025.

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