

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1557

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Postsecondary Education & Workforce

**Title:** An act relating to making higher education more accessible by establishing the Washington guaranteed admissions program and requiring student notifications.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the Washington guaranteed admissions program and requiring student notifications.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Reed, Salahuddin, Scott, Morgan, Street, Ramel, Walen, Macri, Berry, Obras, Bernbaum, Fosse, Mena, Bergquist, Ortiz-Self, Lekanoff, Duerr, Ryu, Leavitt, Gregerson, Parshley, Kloba, Goodman, Peterson, Zahn, Pollet and Doglio.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Postsecondary Education & Workforce: 2/5/25, 2/18/25 [DPS].

<p><b>Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishes the Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program.</li></ul>
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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Paul, Chair; Nance, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Entenman, Keaton, Leavitt, Pollet, Reed, Salahuddin, Thomas and Timmons.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Rude.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives McEntire, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Ley, Mendoza and Schmidt.

**Staff:** Saranda Ross (786-7068).

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*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.*

**Background:**

Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program.

The Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program (WAGAP) supports guaranteed admissions efforts at the following participating institutions of higher education: Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, The Evergreen State College, University of Washington Tacoma, Washington State University, and Western Washington University. There are over 131 combined public school districts and school partners participating in the WAGAP.

Guaranteed admissions offers admission to a student and then requires the student to apply to the institution, as opposed to general admissions which requires a student to first apply to the institution and then potentially be offered admission. Guaranteed admissions do not guarantee enrollment in a specific degree program.

To be eligible for the WAGAP, students must:

- earn a 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA); and
- complete all of Washington's College Academic Distribution Requirements.

Washington's College Academic Distribution Requirements are the minimum number of high school course credits required in six subject areas to meet state minimum admission standards at Washington public four-year institutions. Washington's College Academic Distribution Requirements include:

English	Four credits
Math	Three credits
Science	Three credits
Social Sciences	Three credits
World Language	Two credits
Art	One credit
Senior Year Math-based Quantitative Course	One credit

The Council of Presidents.

The Council of Presidents (COP) is a voluntary association of Washington's six public four-year institutions of higher education. The COP works to advance collaboration, cooperation, and efficiency across public four-year institutions.

Washington Student Achievement Council.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) is a state agency consisting of nine

voting members. The WSAC provides strategic planning, oversight, advocacy, and program administration to support increased student success and higher levels of educational attainment. The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) operates within the WSAC. The Office administers state and federal financial aid and other education service programs

#### The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matters pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) have numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute, including:

- making rules and regulations necessary for the administration of public education requirements;
- preparing courses of study and other materials and books for the discharge of education duties;
- fulfilling financial responsibilities, including distributing legislatively allocated funds to districts for the operation of the public school system, and awarding numerous state and federally funded grants; and
- satisfying numerous reporting and other duties assigned by the Legislature.

#### Washington School Information Processing Cooperative.

The nine educational service districts govern and jointly operate the Washington School Information Processing Cooperative (WSIPC) through an interlocal agreement. The WSIPC provides technology services, such as data management and compliance reporting, to school districts and educational service districts who are members of the cooperative.

#### Washington School Counselor Association.

The Washington School Counselor Association (Association) is a professional organization that represents over 1,000 school counselors, school counselor educators, and graduate students in Washington. The Association works to further develop Professional School Counselors' expertise.

#### Charter Schools.

Charter schools are privately run public schools that operate according to the terms of renewable five-year charter contracts that establish the roles, powers, responsibilities, and performance expectations of the parties to the contracts. Charter schools are alternatives to traditional public schools and are operated and funded separately from the traditional public school system. Charter schools are required by law to be tuition-free and open to all children and may offer any program or course of study that any other public school may offer.

#### Institutional Education Provider.

An institutional education provider is a school district or other entity providing education services to youth in an institutional education facility, for example, a county juvenile

detention center or a state long-term juvenile institution.

#### State-Tribal Education Compact Schools.

State-tribal education compact schools are public schools that are governed and operated according to the terms and conditions of a compact. The compacts, which must meet requirements established in statute and through administrative rules established by the SPI, are negotiated between the SPI and the governing body of a tribe in Washington or the governing body of a school in the state that is funded by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, a tribe, or a tribal consortium.

#### High School and Beyond Plan.

Each high school student must complete a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The purpose of the HSBP is to guide the student's high school experience and inform course-taking that is aligned with the student's goals for education or training and career after high school. School districts are encouraged to involve parents and guardians in the process of developing and updating the HSBP, and the HSBP must be provided to the students' parents or guardians in their native language if that language is one of the two most frequently spoken non-English languages of students in the district.

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The WAGAP is established in collaboration with the state's public four-year institutions of higher education. In consultation with the WSAC and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the COP must determine and annually review eligibility criteria. The COP may collaborate with philanthropic organizations to secure funding for a range of strategic initiatives essential to the successful promotion and implementation of the program, including marketing campaigns, research and analysis, and the engagement of specialized professional services to enhance program visibility, outreach, and operational effectiveness.

Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, the following institutions of higher education must continue or begin participating in the WAGAP:

- at least one University of Washington campus;
- at least one Washington State University campus;
- Western Washington University at Bellingham;
- Central Washington University at Ellensburg;
- Eastern Washington University at Cheney;
- The Evergreen State College; and
- Northwest Indian College.

These institutions may opt out of the WAGAP by reporting to the Legislature the reason for opting out and a detailed overview of other initiatives for improving admissions and expanding access to the institution for resident students.

By January 1, 2026, school districts, charter schools, state-tribal education compact schools, and institutional education providers with students in grades 11 or 12 must enter into data sharing agreements with each participating institution or the Washington School Information Processing Cooperative (WSIPC) to facilitate the transfer of qualified student data. Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, school districts, charter schools, state-tribal education compact schools, and institutional education providers must work with the WSIPC and the COP to facilitate the transfer of this student data.

Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, the WSIPC must collect data of eleventh and twelfth grade students who meet the WAGAP eligibility criteria. The WSIPC must transmit this data to the COP to make available to participating institutions for the purpose of guaranteeing admission to qualified applicants under the WAGAP.

Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, participating institutions must simplify and streamline the general admissions application form, requiring only necessary information for students.

The OSPI must collaborate with the WSAC, the COP, the SBCTC, education service districts, the WSIPC, and the Association to create a notice providing information about the following programs:

- the WAGAP;
- the Washington College Grant;
- dual credit programs;
- career and technical education programs;
- associate degrees and certificates;
- the Free Application for Federal Student Aid; and
- the Washington Application for State Financial Aid.

The OSPI must work with the WSAC to disseminate the notice to school districts, charter schools, state-tribal education compact schools, and institutional education providers with students in grades 9 through 12. Beginning in the 2025-26 academic year, these entities must:

- disseminate the notice to students in grades 9 through 12 and their parents or guardians at the beginning of each school year; and
- designate a staff member or create a virtual resource for students to learn more about the information contained in the notice.

Alternatively, the information in the notice may be incorporated into HSBPs.

Beginning with the 2026-27 school year, each school district, charter school, state-tribal education compact school, and institutional education provider with students in grades 11 or 12 must collaborate with the WSIPC and the COP to create a notice about the WAGAP and general admissions for dissemination to students in grades 11 and 12 and their parents and guardians. The notice must provide a parent or guardian with an opportunity to opt their

student out of the WAGAP.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill clarifies that the WAGAP is established in collaboration with the state's public four-year institutions of higher education and eliminates the annual report to the Legislature. The COP is permitted to collaborate with philanthropic organizations to secure funding for a range of strategic initiatives essential to the successful promotion and implementation of the WAGAP, including comprehensive marketing campaigns, in-depth research and analysis, and the engagement of specialized professional services to enhance program visibility, outreach, and operational effectiveness.

The substitute bill requires the OSPI to collaborate with the WSAC and other organizations, rather than the WSAC leading the collaboration, to create the notice to students about various educational programs and financial aid opportunities. Further, the information in that notice may be disseminated, as an alternative option, in HSBPs.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available. New fiscal note requested on February 18, 2025.

**Effective Date of Substitute 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) The WAGAP is about investing in students who are trying to invest in themselves and expanding friction-free pathways to higher education in publicly funded institutions. Under this bill, students who meet certain eligibility criteria are guaranteed a pathway to higher education at the state's public institutions. It is necessary for the state to make higher education as accessible as possible, particularly given the state is facing a shortfall of highly trained workers to meet the needs of Washington's economy and future. At least one third of all states have some type of direct admissions program like the one created in this bill. This policy was first pioneered in the state of Idaho, where direct admissions caused a four to eight percent increase in full-time undergraduate enrollment per campus. This was not just an increase in applications, but in enrollment. Due to Georgia's direct admissions program, there was a six percent increase in enrollment. Direct admissions is especially impactful for students who have been told or believe that they are not college material, or do not believe they will be accepted. These are disproportionately students of color, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and students from rural areas.

This is an evidence-based strategy to removing barriers that keep students out of higher education by helping them realize their potential. This policy does not cost much—it is

mostly a matter of managing data sharing. The advantage of codifying this program is to make this guarantee a true one. That is, voluntary partnerships between school districts and institutions might not last, but giving students this certainty will encourage them to attain the GPA requirement and graduate. Washington has a goal of 70 percent of high school graduates earning some form of a postsecondary credential by 2030. This bill will help Washington reach that goal. Institutions of higher education tend to act as gatekeepers rather than being welcoming to students trying to get into higher education. This bill changes that culture and mindset.

The college application process is convoluted and complicated. Parents and high school seniors face intense anxiety over the application process, even with the help of a college counselor. Any policy that simplifies the college application process is a win, particularly for mental health and leveling the playing field by removing financial barriers. All students regardless of their background should know that there is a college seat for them if they study and show an aptitude and appetite for knowledge during high school.

Eighty percent of high school students aspire to pursue a college education but only 53 percent enroll in postsecondary education directly from high school. This bill enables the state to tell students not only that their tuition and fees are covered via the Washington College Grant but that they are also guaranteed admission to the state's public four-year institutions.

(Opposed) A certain GPA should not be a requirement to be guaranteed admissions. The Legislature continues to impose unfounded requirements on high school counselors.

(Other) While guaranteed admissions is helpful, there are outstanding questions about the implementation and logistics of this program. The Washington Round Table found that of the 1.5 million jobs that will be created in the next 10 years, 75 percent will require a credential and 45 percent will require bachelor's degree. There is a large gap between the number of bachelor degrees being produced and the number actually needed. Many high school students, despite having a good GPA, do not believe college is for them. Notifications for guaranteed admissions should be matched with financial aid notifications to ensure students understand their options. Community and technical colleges offer open enrollment, so they do not have the same level of barriers as four-year institutions.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Julia Reed, prime sponsor; Ruben Flores, Council Of Presidents; Jacob Vigdor, University of Washington Faculty/COF; Bill Lyne, United Faculty of Washington State; Patricia Loera, Office of Governor Bob Ferguson/Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education & Workforce Development; Neil Strege, Washington Roundtable; Dan Glowitz; Dr. Peter Finch, Superintendent, West Valley School District #208; and Maya Amos, Student, West Valley High School.

(Opposed) John Axtell.

(Other) Misha Cherniske, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI); and Troy

Nichols, Washington School Information Processing Cooperative (WSIPC).

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.