
Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

HB 2070

Brief Description: Providing state funding parity for Western Washington University.

Sponsors: Representatives Timmons, Lekanoff, Ramel, Rule, Parshley, Scott and Pollet.

<p>Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating state funding parity for Western Washington University.
--

Hearing Date: 2/25/26

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068).

Background:

Operating Budget. The Washington State Constitution requires that the state's operating budget balance over a four year period, with certain exceptions. While the operating budget bill itself covers only one biennium, at the beginning of each biennium, technical adjustments must be made to the budget to reflect items adopted in the prior biennium to carry costs over both years of the new biennium or remove one-time costs. This creates the carryforward level for the new biennium; the expense of carrying forward the previous budget before any additional appropriations or reductions are made.

Decisions to appropriate funds in an omnibus operating budget are often categorized as being at either maintenance level or policy level. Maintenance level decisions are the estimated appropriations necessary to maintain the continuing costs of program and service levels either funded in the prior biennium or otherwise mandated by other state or federal law. Maintenance level items typically include adjustments for the forecasted changes in entitlement caseloads or enrollments and other mandatory expenses.

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.

All other budget decisions are typically categorized as policy items. Examples include creating a new program, eliminating a current program, increasing or decreasing vendor or employee payment rates, expanding or contracting program eligibility, and expanding or contracting the value of services provided by a program.

State Accounts. Near General Fund-Outlook (NGF-O) accounts are General Fund-State, the Education Legacy Trust Account, the Opportunity Pathways Account, and the Workforce Education Investment Account.

In addition to the General Fund-State, which may be expended for any lawful purpose, the state maintains several hundred accounts that are dedicated to particular statutory purposes. These accounts generally fall into one of three categories: (1) accounts located in the State Treasury, which always require appropriation by the Legislature; (2) accounts held in the custody of the State Treasurer, which may or may not require legislative appropriation; and (3) accounts located in state agencies and institutions of higher education, known as local accounts, which may require approval by the Office of Financial Management.

Accounts are generally created in policy bills for dedicating moneys in the account for the policy purposes of the bill. Accounts are also created in omnibus appropriation bills—budget bills—to dedicate funding for specific purposes and appropriations. Expenditures from dedicated accounts are limited to the purposes defined in law, and therefore, legislative action is required to temporarily or permanently expand or further restrict the purposes of a dedicated account. Expenditures from accounts that do not require legislative appropriation must be authorized by an official designated in the statute creating the account.

Regional Universities. The regional universities are Western Washington University in Bellingham, Eastern Washington University in Cheney, and Central Washington University in Ellensburg. The state college is Evergreen State College.

State-funded enrollments. The following table reflects the annualized average state-funded full-time-equivalent (FTE) student enrollments for the 2022-23 through 2024-25 academic years (AYs) based on tenth day enrollment reporting for the regional universities and the state college. FTE is calculated assuming 15 credits for one FTE for undergraduates and 10 credits for graduate students. Annualized average includes fall, winter, and spring terms, but not summer.

	2022-23 AY	2023-24 AY	2024-25 AY
Western Washington University	11,944	12,093	12,115
Eastern Washington University	6,661	6,351	6,226
Central Washington University	7,993	7,732	7,281

Evergreen State College	1,785	2,194	2,326
-------------------------	-------	-------	-------

Summary of Bill:

Beginning with the 2029-2031 biennium Omnibus Appropriations Act, the Legislature must appropriate to Western Washington University (WWU) an amount for state funding parity. To calculate that amount, the carryforward level funding average from Near General Fund-Outlook accounts must be divided by the number of full-time equivalent students from state-funded academic programs for the prior fiscal year for each regional university and the state college. The Legislature must calculate this ratio at the beginning of every odd-numbered year. If WWU has the lowest ratio, an appropriation in the Omnibus Appropriations Act must be made that is at least equal to the difference from WWU's ratio and the next lowest regional university or the state college. If the WWU ratio is not the lowest of the regional universities and the state college, no appropriation may be made in accordance with this calculation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 18, 2026.

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