

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5164

As of January 16, 2025

Title: An act relating to student navigational supports to increase postsecondary enrollment.

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

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Hansen, Dhingra, Trudeau, Saldaña, Nguyen, Valdez, Lias, Kauffman, Chapman, Bateman, Stanford, Wilson, C., Salomon, Frame, Hasegawa and Slatter.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/16/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a navigational support program with outreach and enrollment specialists for high school seniors at every educational service district.
- Establishes a financial aid training program for high school teachers, and others, to be trained on how to support students in filling out financial aid forms.
- Requires the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board to offer continuing education credits to in-service educators on the topic of financial aid.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

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

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their eligibility for federal and state financial aid to attend postsecondary education institutions. The FAFSA uses information based on federal income tax returns to determine a student's financial need, and considers the student's dependency status, income, assets, family size, and other factors. Students without legal immigrant status are ineligible for federal financial aid. 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).

The Financial Aid Outreach Program. In 2022, the Legislature passed 2SHB 1835 which established the Financial Aid Outreach Pilot Program (Pilot Program). Under this program, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) determined the two educational service districts with the lowest FAFSA completion rates over the prior three years, Educational Service District (ESD) 114—north Olympic Peninsula and Kitsap peninsula, and ESD 123—southeast Washington, to participate in the Pilot Program. By approval of the Legislature, in 2024, the Pilot Program was expanded to ESD 113—capital region. The colleges that participate in the Pilot Program employ outreach specialists to work with high schools in the ESD with the purpose of increasing FAFSA and WASFA filing rates, at a staffing ratio of one outreach member to 600 high school seniors.

Summary of Bill: Financial Aid Completion and Postsecondary Enrollment Program.

Subject to appropriation, the SBCTC shall administer a financial aid completion and postsecondary enrollment program (Program) for every ESD.

The SBCTC shall employ outreach specialists, selected by a selection committee, and select at least one of the following in each ESD to participate in the Program:

- community or technical colleges;
- public four-year institutions of higher education;
- tribal organizations; or
- community-based organizations.

The selection committee must include at least two SBCTC representatives and at least two public four-year representatives as designated Council of Presidents.

Outreach and Enrollment Specialists. Outreach and enrollment specialists shall work directly with the high schools located in the corresponding ESD, employed at a ratio of one specialist to 600 high school seniors.

Specifically, the specialists shall:

- coordinate with high school counseling programs and other staff as appropriate, with a focus on schools with a higher percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch;
- use the FAFSA, WASFA, and college bound scholarship eligibility data to conduct targeted outreach and completion assistance to high school seniors;

- provide information to students on how to access private scholarships;
- conduct outreach as appropriate;
- assist students in navigating the application and enrollment process for postsecondary education and coordinate with certain partners as appropriate and needed; and
- connect students with appropriate staff at institutions of higher education.

The SBCTC shall outline the roles and responsibilities of the entities chosen to participate in the Program, to ensure they have the support and resources needed, and develop a communication plan for students and families about the specialists.

A report is due on the Program annually beginning January 15, 2026. The report must include details on how the entities employed outreach specialists, used the funding, and how the use of the outreach specialists affected FAFSA and WASFA completion.

By December 1, 2027, the education research and data center (ERDC) must report on the FAFSA and WASFA completion rates. Specifically, the ERDC must include disaggregated data on:

- completion rates prior to implementation of the Program;
- postimplementation completion rates; and
- rates of first-time postsecondary enrollment of students within one year of high school graduation.

Financial Aid Training Program. A financial aid training program (training program) for high school teachers and counselors, staff at the institutions of higher education, and community partners is created, under the administration of the WSAC and in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The training program must provide support and ensure accurate and timely administration of the financial aid form and be offered at no cost. WSAC may contract with a third party to deliver the training program. A report on the training program is due to the Legislature by December 1, 2027, on the number of trainings provided, the development and content of the training program, and other related information.

Continuing Education Requirements. By September 1, 2027, OSPI, in collaboration with the WSAC and the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, shall offer continuing education credits to in-service educators on the topic of financial aid.

By October 1, 2028, OSPI, WSAC, and the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board shall make recommendations to the Legislature regarding additional incentives that should be available to encourage participation in the Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 12, 2025.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill provides students with the tools and guidance needed to overcome the barriers to higher education. This expands the current program to every ESD, and brings in stakeholders like the public four-year institutions. This will support students at every level, and bridge the gap between aspiration and achievement.

This bill compliments previous legislation by providing the needed outreach. This expands upon a pilot program that has shown success. The community college system's top goal is a sustainable budget. If you come from a low-income family, filing financial aid forms is an impossible process.

Through the pilot program, Olympic College provides imbedded high-touch support for high school students in FAFSA completion. Through this program we have built strong relationships among the other professionals that are there to assist students. In a high-touch way, using a multitier framework, this approach works—especially with mixed status families and McKinney-Vento families. This bill will help the state reach it's 70 percent degree attainment goal.

OTHER: Outreach Specialists could potentially assist school counselors in providing support for students through the college application and financial aid completion process. The staffing ratio of counselors is still low. The student to school counselor ratio in 2023 was on average 373 to 1, which exceeds the recommended ratio. The bill should be revised to ensure that apprenticeship is recognized as postsecondary education. This type of program is being piloted for the building trades apprenticeship pathways, which includes navigators and a website, so it can be used across the state and provide details on all apprenticeship programs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Ben Mitchell, Foundation for Tacoma Students; Alyson Ritter, Olympic College; Melissa Beard, Council of Presidents; Isabella Flores, WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Bill Lyne, UFWS/WEA; Sam Herriot, WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Jayme Shoun, Washington STEM; Myle Tang, Stand for Children Washington ; monica yu, Bellevue College.

OTHER: Erin Frasier, Washington State Building & Construction Trades Council; Catherine Holm, Washington School Counselor Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.