

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5978

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, January 29, 2026

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: Senators Hansen, Hasegawa, Liias, Nobles, Shewmake and Slatter.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/19/26, 1/29/26 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program.
- Requires the Washington School Information Processing Cooperative (WSIPC) members to transfer transcript data for students in grade 11 and 12.
- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to work with WSIPC to develop a process to facilitate data transfer from school districts that are not members of WSIPC.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5978 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Slatter.

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.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Warnick, Ranking Member; Boehnke.

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

Background: Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program. The Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program (WAGAP), established and administered by the Washington State Council of Presidents (COP), provides notice to students of admission to certain public universities before applying. Those six institutions include Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, The Evergreen State College, University of Washington Tacoma, Washington State University, and Western Washington University.

To have guaranteed admission, a student must have a minimum of a 3.0 GPA, be on track to meet all the minimum core academic course requirements a student must have completed for college admission—College Academic Distribution Requirements—and be from a school in a school district that is participating in WAGAP.

Council of Presidents. COP is an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education in Washington State.

Washington School Information Processing Cooperative. The Washington School Information Processing Cooperative (WSIPC) is a public, nonprofit cooperative that provides K-12 public and private schools with certain services including data reporting, technology services, building partnerships between agencies, a purchasing program, and software support.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): The Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program is Established. Beginning with the 2027-28 academic year, regional universities, The Evergreen State College, at least one campus of each state university, and tribal institutions of higher education, must participate in WAGAP. Participating institutions must simplify and streamline the general admissions application form. An institution may opt out if they provide:

- the reason for opting out by reporting in writing to the Legislature; and
- a detailed overview of other initiatives the institution has for improving admissions and expanding access to the institution for resident students.

Beginning with the 2027-28 academic year, participating institutions shall determine and review eligibility criteria for WAGAP annually, and notify the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Data Sharing. Beginning with the 2027-28 school year, each school district, charter school, state-tribal education compact school, and institutional education provider with students in grade 11 or 12 who are members of WSIPC shall use their statewide digital transcript data-

sharing environment to facilitate the secure, standards-compliant transfer of transcript data for students in grades 11 and 12 who meet the criteria for WAGAP. WSIPC shall consider this a core function of membership and not charge additional fees for this use of the data-sharing environment or for the transfer of data.

By July 1, 2027, OSPI shall work with WSIPC to develop a process to facilitate the transfer of transcript data for school districts, charter schools state-tribal education compact schools or institutional education providers that are not a member of the cooperative without an additional cost and without requiring WSIPC membership.

Beginning with the 2028-29 school year, WSIPC shall work with participating institutions through the COP to facilitate the transfer of data.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Beginning with the 2027-28 academic year, participating institutions shall determine eligibility criteria annually and notify OSPI of the criteria to enable clear data sharing protocols.
- Beginning with the 2027-28 academic year, each school district or other institutional education provider, who is a member of WSIPC, shall use the statewide digital transcript data-sharing environment developed and maintained by WSIPC to facilitate secure transfer of transcript data.
- By July 1, 2027, OSPI shall work with WSIPC to develop a process for non-WSIPC members to transfer transcript data without cost and without becoming a member of WSIPC.
- Beginning with the 2028-29 school year, WSIPC must work with participating institutions to facilitate data transfer.
- Requires school districts, and others, to allow a student or family to opt out of data-sharing for WAGAP.
- Removes certain requirements on agency collaboration.
- Removes certain notice requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 9, 2026.

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 on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This codifies and speeds up a

program that is already in existence. All institutions currently participate in this except for UW Seattle. This is something the Governor is also interested in. This program was created, developed, and led by the public four-year institutions. What a nice message to get when you are about to graduate from high school, to know you have been accepted to an institution. There is a specific time to fill out the FAFSA. We are working closely with WSAC to make sure that those things are aligned - FAFSA and WAGAP. This first step is helping students figure out where they want to go. WAGAP helps build this relationship.

Half the high school students in the state of Washington right now who graduate do not go to any postsecondary education. This bill will have schools become recruiters, rather than gate keepers. This bill also has us work on a new streamlined application and admissions process. If we are really going to do this and succeed, we should not cut higher education anymore. We must ensure any individual who meets the criteria, knows that postsecondary education is available to them. High schools are supposed to prepare students for the future. The notification is the most important component of this bill. When I was in high school, this notification did not exist and I didn't know about my options. This creates a safety net which ensures qualified residents that have a spot know they have a spot.

My parents are not from this country, and they did not go to college here. As an only child, I am navigating this by myself. There are so many students at each school, overly reliant on a few counselors to tell them about their opportunities. Creating this safety net, about providing this necessary information to students, will allow students the opportunity to chase their dreams and shape their future.

I was an overachiever and stretched myself thin during high school. Even with my good grades and my participation in extracurricular activities, I was so busy my senior year that I missed my deadlines to apply to college. If this program had been up and running, this would not have occurred. The application and admissions process is not transparent and is confusing for students. This bill makes it clear to students and gives students peace of mind. Today, a four-year degree is increasingly important for economic stability. Other states, such as Texas, have enacted similar programs to great success. As a first-generation student, I know how easy it is to miss these deadlines. Guaranteed admission ensures equal access. We have a college-going culture problem in this state. We are near the bottom of the list. Enrollment is what we should focus on. WAGAP was started by institutions. If you tie this to financial aid, this would be a powerful enrollment tool.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Drew Hansen, Prime Sponsor; Melissa Beard, Council of Presidents; Bill Lyne, United Faculty of Washington State; Omkar Page; Christopher Rosenquist, Associated Students of Western Washington University; Heba Qatrani, Associated Students of University of Washington Tacoma; Jonathan Lin; Kaushal Rao; Hugo Huang; Ishan Sharma; Jayden Hong; Sienna Jarrard, Washington Student Association; Natalya Yudkovsky, Washington State PTA; Neil Strege, Washington Roundtable.

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