
HOUSE BILL 2438

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2026 Regular Session

By Representatives Bergquist, Ybarra, Scott, Pollet, Reed, and Nance

Read first time 01/13/26. Referred to Committee on Postsecondary Education & Workforce.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the supporting our early
2 education degree seekers scholarship; adding a new chapter to Title
3 28B RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that:

6 (1) The share of families reporting difficulty securing a spot in
7 licensed child care jumped from 22 percent in December 2021 to 58
8 percent in January 2022. The second most cited reason for staffing
9 vacancies in licensed family homes is staffing issues and lack of
10 staff capacity, and nearly 50 percent of child care centers report
11 vacancies because of staffing issues. Licensed child care providers
12 continue to struggle with recruiting and retaining staff in a tight
13 labor market, especially as retail, hospitality, and service
14 industries offer more competitive wages and benefits. Without
15 targeted action, these access gaps in high quality care and their
16 unequal impacts on women are likely to widen;

17 (2) The 2020 child care policy recommendations by the child care
18 collaborative task force recommended full funding for professional
19 development, relationship-based professional development, and
20 financial incentives to support providers in meeting staff
21 qualifications, ongoing continuous quality improvement, and achieving

1 high quality levels in early achievers and school-age quality
2 standards;

3 (3) When the Washington advanced college tuition payment program
4 was enacted, the legislature envisioned that establishing a
5 scholarship for those in financial need would be a permissible use of
6 the moneys from the payment program account;

7 (4) The Washington advanced college tuition payment program
8 account in chapter 28B.95 RCW has a surplus of funding and is funded
9 at a level of approximately 178 percent;

10 (5) In June 2025, the internal revenue service issued an
11 informational letter stating that section 529 of the internal revenue
12 code does not explicitly restrict a state from transferring credit or
13 certificate purchases in a qualified tuition program; and

14 (6) It is an appropriate use of a portion of the surplus from the
15 Washington advanced college tuition payment program account to
16 provide financial aid to students enrolled in eligible early
17 childhood education programs.

18 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
19 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
20 otherwise.

21 (1) "Board" means the state board for community and technical
22 colleges.

23 (2) "Community college" has the same meaning as in RCW
24 28B.50.030.

25 (3) "Eligible degree or certificate program" means:

26 (a) An early childhood stackable certificate; or

27 (b) An early childhood associate degree.

28 (4) "Gift aid" means financial aid received from the federal Pell
29 grant, the state need grant program under chapter 28B.92 RCW, the
30 college bound scholarship program under chapter 28B.118 RCW, the
31 opportunity grant program under chapter 28B.50 RCW, the opportunity
32 scholarship program under chapter 28B.145 RCW, or any other state
33 grant or scholarship program that provides funds for educational
34 purposes with no obligation of repayment. "Gift aid" does not include
35 student loans or work-study programs.

36 (5) "Office" means the office of student financial assistance.

37 (6) "Recipient" means an eligible student who has been awarded
38 the scholarship.

1 (7) "Resident student" has the same meaning as defined in RCW
2 28B.15.012.

3 (8) "Scholarship" means the supporting our early education degree
4 seekers scholarship.

5 (9) "Technical college" has the same meaning as defined in RCW
6 28B.50.030.

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) The supporting our early education
8 degree seekers scholarship is established to provide up to 90 credits
9 of tuition-free community or technical college for students enrolled
10 in eligible early childhood education and assistance degrees or
11 programs beginning in the 2027-28 academic year. The office shall
12 implement and administer the scholarship.

13 (2) To be eligible for the scholarship, a resident student must:

14 (a) Have a family income at or between 65 to 150 percent of the
15 state median family income, adjusted for family size as established
16 and updated annually by the student achievement council;

17 (b) Not have previously earned an associate's degree;

18 (c) Be enrolled at least part time in a community or technical
19 college in an eligible degree or certificate program;

20 (d) Complete the free application for federal student aid or the
21 Washington application for state financial aid for the academic year
22 in which the student seeks eligibility for the scholarship; and

23 (e) Sign an attestation to work in an early learning center for
24 at least two years upon completion of an eligible degree or
25 certificate program.

26 (3) Qualifications for receipt and renewal of the scholarship
27 include maintaining satisfactory academic progress toward completion
28 of an eligible degree or certificate program as determined by the
29 office and established in rule.

30 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The amount of \$10,000,000 from the
31 Washington advanced college tuition payment program account created
32 in RCW 28B.95.060 must be used for recipient grant awards under the
33 scholarship as outlined in this section. Funding may only be
34 allocated if the actuarial funded status remains at or above 120
35 percent.

36 (2) The value of a grant award is:

37 (a) The difference between the recipient's tuition fees as
38 defined in RCW 28B.15.020 and services and activities fees as defined

1 in RCW 28B.15.041, less the value of any state-funded grant including
2 the college bound scholarship program established in chapter 28B.118
3 RCW and the Washington college grant program created in RCW
4 28B.92.200, scholarship, gift aid, or waiver assistance the recipient
5 receives, for up to 90 credits to be earned within three academic
6 years; and

7 (b) Student support and wraparound services, provided by each
8 community or technical college, to reduce or help to reduce barriers
9 that threaten completion of eligible degree or certificate programs.
10 Support and wraparound services under this section may be provided no
11 longer than the recipient receives benefits under the scholarship.

12 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** The caseload forecast council shall
13 estimate the anticipated caseload of the scholarship and submit this
14 forecast as required in RCW 43.88C.020.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** The office and the board may adopt, and
16 revise as necessary, rules to implement this chapter.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** Sections 1 through 6 of this act
18 constitute a new chapter in Title 28B RCW.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** (1) The student achievement council, in
20 collaboration with the state board for community and technical
21 colleges, shall conduct a study on the sustainability of the
22 scholarship to include at a minimum the following information: Any
23 increase in enrollments at community or technical colleges; any
24 decreases in enrollments elsewhere at institutions of higher
25 education; and changes in recipient persistence, completion, and
26 time-to-degree rates in eligible degree or certificate programs.

27 (2) The study must include an analysis on the demand for student
28 services, such as advising and student success courses,
29 recommendations to improve student services and outcomes, and the
30 financial impact of the scholarship on recipients.

31 (3) The student achievement council shall report its findings to
32 the relevant committees of the legislature, in accordance with RCW
33 43.01.036, by October 1, 2027.

34 (4) This section expires July 1, 2028.

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