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HOUSE BILL 2538

State of Washington 69th Legislature 2026 Regular Session

By Representatives Pollet, Entenman, Taylor, Parshley, Goodman, Macri, Gregerson, Simmons, Santos, Nance, Fosse, Scott, Zahn, Obras, and Callan

Read first time 01/16/26. Referred to Committee on Postsecondary Education & Workforce.

AN ACT Relating to pay equity for part-time faculty; adding a new section to chapter 28B.50 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that Washington's community and technical colleges continue to rely heavily on part-time faculty who are paid significantly less than their full-time counterparts for teaching the same classroom hours. Despite possessing the same qualifications and delivering the same instruction, part-time faculty at some institutions earn as little as 52 percent of what full-time faculty receive for identical classroom teaching hours. This persistent inequity undermines students, faculty, and the long-term stability of our higher education system.

Recognizing this issue, the legislature first took action in 1996 by requiring an audit of part-time faculty compensation and establishing best practices for employment. From 1997 to 2007, funds were allocated to address pay disparities. However, specific funding to close the part-time faculty pay gap has not been provided since fiscal year 2009. While some colleges have made modest progress through collective bargaining, significant wage gaps remain, and systemic progress has been slow.

This wage gap forces many part-time faculty members to juggle multiple jobs, teach an excessive number of courses, or leave the profession entirely, creating instability for both faculty and students. When instructors must piece together incomes from multiple institutions or nonteaching jobs, they are less available for office hours, academic mentorship, and long-term student guidance. This has a direct negative impact on student success, especially for first-generation college students and those who rely on faculty for critical academic and career support.

Additionally, chronic underpayment of part-time faculty makes it difficult to recruit and retain a stable workforce. Many qualified educators are unable to remain in the profession due to inadequate pay and job insecurity. This financial barrier disproportionately excludes candidates from historically marginalized communities, resulting in a faculty pool that does not reflect the diversity of the student population. Pay equity will make teaching at the community and technical colleges a more viable career path for candidates who cannot afford to teach part time, very often including candidates from historically marginalized communities. Greater diversity among part-time faculty will lead to greater diversity of candidates for full-time positions.

When part-time faculty lack institutional stability, they are also less able to participate in curriculum development, governance, and other critical "life of the college" activities. This weakens academic programs and limits opportunities for faculty collaboration. Colleges, in turn, face higher turnover, increased recruitment costs, and lost institutional knowledge, all of which weaken the long-term quality and sustainability of the community college system. Colleges are harmed when they spend time rehiring faculty quarter to quarter, year after year due to high turnover rates.

The reliance on underpaid, contingent faculty undermines the long-term strength of Washington's public higher education system. Without competitive pay and job stability, the state risks losing talented instructors to better-paying sectors, weakening the pipeline of experienced educators. Faculty working conditions are student learning conditions, when instructors must reapply for their positions every term, lack access to professional development, or are excluded from departmental decision making, it lowers the overall quality of education and diminishes student outcomes. A well-supported faculty workforce is essential for maintaining high

academic standards, robust student support, and Washington's commitment to accessible, high-quality education.

At the broader economic level, the underpayment of part-time faculty means that many must rely on public benefits or struggle to afford basic necessities, limiting their ability to contribute fully to their communities and the state's economy. Communities are harmed when workers do not earn enough to participate in the economy fully and when they must rely on the safety net for adequate food, rent, health care, and more.

Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to achieve pay equity for part-time and adjunct faculty, setting a salary minimum of 85 percent of full-time, comparably qualified faculty for the same classroom teaching hours. This reflects the fact that approximately 85 percent of a full-time faculty member's workload is dedicated to instruction and direct student engagement. State funding for this adjustment will allow part-time faculty to be more available to students, strengthen their connection to their institutions, and ensure that teaching at Washington's community and technical colleges is a viable career path, not just for those with financial privilege, but for all qualified educators.

By increasing pay equity, Washington will support a more stable, diverse, and engaged faculty workforce, which in turn will improve student outcomes, strengthen academic programs, and ensure that community and technical colleges continue to serve as pathways to economic mobility for all Washingtonians.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.50 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to amounts appropriated specifically for this purpose, community and technical colleges shall develop and implement plans to provide compensation to part-time and adjunct faculty as follows:

(a) Beginning in the 2028-29 academic year, compensation must equal or exceed 75 percent of the compensation provided to comparably qualified full-time and tenured faculty;

(b) Beginning in the 2029-30 academic year, compensation must equal or exceed 80 percent of the compensation provided to comparably qualified full-time and tenured faculty; and

(c) Beginning in the 2030-31 academic year, compensation must equal or exceed 85 percent of the compensation provided to comparably qualified full-time and tenured faculty.

(2) The college board shall transmit a report with an update on progress both at the system and individual college level toward meeting the 85 percent pay equity goal to the governor and the higher education committees of the legislature by January 1, 2030, in accordance with RCW 43.01.036. By December 1, 2031, the college board shall report to the governor and the higher education committees of the legislature the implementation status of pay equity plans required by this section. At a minimum, the report must include:

(a) The percentage of full-time pay attained by part-time and adjunct faculty;

(b) Data that includes the race, ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics of faculty contracts not meeting pay equity plans;

(c) Data that includes the academic department of faculty contracts not meeting pay equity plans; and

(d) Progress at the college level toward meeting pay equity plans set forth in this section.

(3) The standards used in this section to determine pay equity must be based on the instructional work of the faculty, including direct student support, time in class, preparation for class, grading and assessment, and office hours equivalent to those required for full-time tenure-track faculty under the relevant collective bargaining agreement.

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