
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5164

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Nobles, Hansen, Dhingra, Trudeau, Saldaña, Nguyen, Valdez, Lias, Kauffman, Chapman, Bateman, Stanford, C. Wilson, Salomon, Frame, Hasegawa, and Slatter)

READ FIRST TIME 01/31/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to student navigational supports to increase
2 postsecondary enrollment; amending RCW 28B.50.940; adding a new
3 section to chapter 28B.77 RCW; adding a new section to chapter
4 28A.415 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes that Washington
7 is ranked among the top states for the share of jobs requiring
8 postsecondary education, and that large majorities of high school
9 students self-report aspirations to continue their education beyond
10 12th grade. However, only an estimated 40 percent of Washington's
11 high school class of 2021 is projected to obtain a postsecondary
12 credential. This issue is particularly pressing for students from
13 lower income households. The legislature further recognizes that the
14 real or perceived cost of postsecondary education is a critical
15 systemic barrier that impedes prospective students from applying for
16 and enrolling in postsecondary education. This is despite Washington
17 boasting one of the most expansive and equitable set of state-level
18 postsecondary financial aid programs in the country.

19 The legislature finds that counseling, advising, and coaching
20 that help students with the postsecondary financial aid application
21 and enrollment processes, and that provide hands-on assistance, are

1 evidence-based approaches to increasing rates of postsecondary
2 enrollment. The legislature further recognizes that school counselors
3 and other on-site experts deliver comprehensive school counseling
4 programs, which provide support for students and their families in
5 securing postsecondary opportunities. A primary role for school
6 counselors is to assist students in planning for postsecondary
7 options. The addition of enrollment and outreach specialists can
8 provide a valuable resource for comprehensive school counseling
9 programs and broaden access to student navigational supports
10 throughout the state. Therefore, Washington state should invest in
11 student navigational supports and services to advise students to and
12 through postsecondary education and training. It is the legislature's
13 intent to establish a postsecondary outreach and enrollment
14 specialist program for the purposes of helping Washington high school
15 students with postsecondary financial aid and educational
16 opportunities as well as encouraging completion of financial aid and
17 postsecondary enrollment.

18 Furthermore, the legislature intends to ensure that every school
19 district has access to at least one qualified financial aid
20 professional to provide support and ensure accurate and timely
21 administration of financial aid forms. To achieve this, the
22 legislature intends to make available, at no cost to participants,
23 comprehensive financial aid training for teachers, school counselors,
24 postsecondary staff, and community partners.

25 **Sec. 2.** RCW 28B.50.940 and 2022 c 214 s 3 are each amended to
26 read as follows:

27 Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific
28 purpose, the college board shall administer a ~~((free application for
29 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial
30 aid outreach and completion initiative pilot program.~~

31 ~~(1) The college board shall select community or technical
32 colleges to participate in the pilot program. The colleges selected
33 to participate must each be located within educational service
34 districts that are in the bottom two for free application for federal
35 student aid completion rates when combining their respective school
36 districts' free application for federal student aid completion rates
37 over the past three completed academic years prior to June 9, 2022.
38 Colleges selected to participate shall employ outreach specialists to
39 work directly with the high schools located in the corresponding~~

1 educational service district. It is the legislature's intent that the
2 outreach specialists be employed at a ratio of one to 600 high school
3 seniors within the corresponding educational service district. The
4 outreach specialists shall make significant contact with high school
5 students and their families for the purpose of increasing free
6 application for federal student aid and Washington application for
7 state financial aid completion rates. The outreach specialists shall
8 use the free application for federal student aid and Washington
9 application for state financial aid data maintained by the student
10 achievement council to conduct targeted outreach and free application
11 for federal student aid and Washington application for state
12 financial aid completion assistance to high school seniors. The
13 outreach specialists shall also provide information on how to access
14 private scholarships. The outreach specialists shall conduct other
15 outreach as appropriate, including virtual or in-person presentations
16 with students and families, announcements on school intercoms and
17 social media channels, outreach to recent high school graduates as
18 peer messengers, and events at school college or career fairs.

19 (2) The college board shall report annually to the appropriate
20 committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036
21 beginning December 1, 2023, on the free application for federal
22 student aid and Washington application for state financial aid
23 outreach and completion initiative pilot program. The report must
24 include details on how the colleges selected used the funding and how
25 the initiatives worked to increase free application for federal
26 student aid and Washington application for state financial aid
27 completion rates. The report must also include before and after free
28 application for federal student aid and Washington application for
29 state financial aid completion data and specific details about the
30 number of high school students assisted in completing the free
31 application for federal student aid and Washington application for
32 state financial aid) financial aid completion and postsecondary
33 enrollment program for every educational service district.

34 (1) (a) Depending on the needs of the educational service
35 district, the college board shall select at least one of the
36 following entities in each educational service district to
37 participate in the program:

38 (i) Community or technical colleges;

39 (ii) Public four-year institutions of higher education;

40 (iii) Tribal organizations; or

1 (iv) Community-based organizations.

2 (b) The college board shall establish a selection committee for
3 selecting the entities to participate in the program.

4 (i) The selection committee must include at least two community
5 or technical college representatives as designated by the college
6 board and at least two public four-year representatives as designated
7 by an organization representing the public four-year institutions of
8 higher education.

9 (ii) The selection committee may consult with colleges,
10 institutions of higher education, and the student achievement council
11 in developing selection criteria.

12 (2) Entities selected to participate shall employ outreach and
13 enrollment specialists to work directly with the high schools located
14 in the corresponding educational service district. It is the
15 legislature's intent that the outreach and enrollment specialists be
16 employed at a ratio of one to 600 high school seniors within the
17 corresponding educational service district.

18 (3) The outreach and enrollment specialists shall coordinate with
19 the secondary school counseling program and any other school district
20 staff as appropriate to make significant contact with high school
21 students and their families, with a focus on secondary schools that
22 have a higher percentage of students who are eligible for free or
23 reduced-price lunch compared to other schools in the same educational
24 service district, for the purpose of increasing free application for
25 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial
26 aid completion rates. The outreach and enrollment specialists must
27 use the free application for federal student aid, Washington
28 application for state financial aid, and college bound scholarship
29 eligibility data maintained by the student achievement council to
30 conduct targeted outreach and free application for federal student
31 aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion
32 assistance to high school seniors. The outreach and enrollment
33 specialists must also provide information on how to access private
34 scholarships. The outreach and enrollment specialists shall conduct
35 other outreach as appropriate, including virtual or in-person
36 presentations with students and families, announcements on school
37 intercoms and social media channels, outreach to recent high school
38 graduates as peer messengers, and events at school college or career
39 fairs.

40 (4) The outreach and enrollment specialists shall assist:

1 (a) High school students in navigating the application and
2 enrollment process for institutions of higher education and
3 coordinate with school district staff and other college access
4 partners as appropriate and as needed;

5 (b) Students in connecting with appropriate staff at institutions
6 of higher education who can help students in exploring campus
7 services and programs to improve their skills, increase academic
8 achievement, and help students reach their education and career
9 goals; and

10 (c) High school students in connecting with staff or instructors
11 affiliated with state-registered apprenticeship programs who can help
12 students navigate apprenticeship application processes and utilize
13 eligible financial aid.

14 (5) The tasks performed by outreach and enrollment specialists
15 must complement and support the work of secondary school staff and
16 administration in providing comprehensive postsecondary navigation
17 support.

18 (6) The college board, in collaboration with the office of the
19 superintendent of public instruction, an organization representing
20 the public four-year institutions of higher education, and college
21 access staff from the student achievement council, shall outline the
22 roles and responsibilities of colleges, institutions of higher
23 education, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations to
24 ensure outreach and enrollment specialists have the necessary
25 resources and support to effectively engage with students to promote
26 financial aid attainment and postsecondary enrollment. Resources and
27 support may include, but are not limited to: Access to buildings,
28 adequate meeting spaces, certain technology, school supplies, and
29 safe and secure access to individual student's high school and beyond
30 plans.

31 (7) The college board must develop a communication plan for
32 students and families about the presence and role of outreach and
33 enrollment specialists.

34 (8) The college board, the student achievement council, an
35 organization representing the public four-year institutions of higher
36 education, an organization representing the private four-year
37 institutions of higher education, statewide organizations
38 representing state-registered apprenticeship programs, and those
39 organizations representing teachers, counselors, and principals shall

1 collaborate in preparing a training program for outreach and
2 enrollment specialists.

3 (9) The college board shall report annually to the appropriate
4 committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036
5 beginning January 15, 2026, on the outreach and enrollment specialist
6 program. The report must include details on how:

7 (a) The colleges, institutions of higher education, tribal
8 organizations, or community-based organizations selected used the
9 funding; and

10 (b) The initiatives worked to increase free application for
11 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial
12 aid completion rates.

13 (10) The education data center established in RCW 43.41.400, in
14 collaboration with the college board, the public four-year
15 institutions of higher education, the office of the superintendent of
16 public instruction, and the student achievement council shall create
17 a report on the completion rates of the free application for federal
18 student aid and Washington application for state financial aid by
19 Washington high school seniors. The report must include data,
20 disaggregated by demographic data, on: The completion rates prior to
21 implementation of the program created in this section, the
22 postimplementation completion rates, and the rates of first-time
23 postsecondary enrollment of students within one year of high school
24 graduation. The report required by this subsection must be submitted
25 to the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 1, 2027.

26 NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 28B.77
27 RCW to read as follows:

28 (1) The council shall administer a financial aid training program
29 that is available to secondary school teachers and counselors, staff
30 at the institutions of higher education, and community partners in
31 order to have at least one qualified financial aid professional at
32 each school to provide support and ensure accurate and timely
33 administration of financial aid forms. The council must coordinate
34 with the office of the superintendent of public instruction to
35 develop the topics that the training program will cover. The council
36 may contract with a third-party entity to provide the training
37 program. The training program must be offered at no cost to program
38 participants.

1 (2) The council shall provide a report by December 1, 2027, to
2 the governor and the education and higher education committees of the
3 legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036. The report must:

4 (a) Describe the development and content of the training program;
5 and

6 (b) Report on the number of trainings provided, the number of
7 unique adults who participated in the program, a summary of the
8 geographic location of training program participants, the
9 professional roles of training program participants, and a
10 description of how skills gained through the program have been used
11 by training program participants.

12 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.415
13 RCW to read as follows:

14 (1) By September 1, 2027, the office of the superintendent of
15 public instruction, in collaboration with the student achievement
16 council and the Washington professional educator standards board,
17 shall offer continuing education credits to in-service educators on
18 the topic of financial aid, in accordance with section 3 of this act.

19 (2) By October 1, 2028, the office of the superintendent of
20 public instruction, in collaboration with the student achievement
21 council and the Washington professional educator standards board,
22 shall make recommendations to the legislature regarding additional
23 incentives that should be available to encourage participation in the
24 training program described in section 3 of this act.

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