
Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

HB 2374

Brief Description: Establishing the Washington promise program.

Sponsors: Representatives Pollet, Reed, Bergquist, Callan, Farivar, Ryu, Berry, Nance, Tharinger, Doglio, Slatter, Simmons, Paul, Street, Goodman and Macri.

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates the Washington Promise Program to provide up to 90 credits of tuition-free community or technical college to eligible students.

Hearing Date: 1/23/24

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068).

Background:

State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (College Board) is led by a nine-member Governor-appointed board. The College Board directs Washington's system of 34 public community and technical colleges.

Washington Student Achievement Council.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) is a state agency consisting of nine voting members. The WSAC provides strategic planning, oversight, advocacy, and program administration to support increased student success and higher levels of educational attainment. The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) operates within the WSAC. The Office administers state and federal financial aid and other education service programs.

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.

Financial Aid Applications.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a federal financial aid application used to determine a student's eligibility for federal financial aid. The Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) is used by students who do not fill out a FAFSA, which includes undocumented students or those who do not qualify due to immigration status. The WASFA is used to qualify such students for state financial aid.

Washington College Grant.

The Washington College Grant (WCG) is the state's largest financial aid program and provides grants to students who demonstrate financial need to pursue postsecondary education. The WCG is an entitlement program administered by the WSAC with guaranteed grants for students who qualify.

High School and Beyond Plan.

Each high school student must complete a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The purpose of the HSBP is to guide the student's high school experience and inform course taking that is aligned with the student's goals for education or training and career after high school. School districts are encouraged to involve parents and guardians in the process of developing and updating the HSBP, and the HSBP must be provided to the students' parents or guardians in their native language if that language is one of the two most frequently spoken non-English languages of students in the district.

Caseload Forecast Council.

The Caseload Forecast Council (Council) is charged with forecasting the entitlement caseloads, and other caseloads, for the State of Washington. The Council meets several times a year to adopt official forecasts that are the basis of the Governor's proposed budget and used by the Legislature in the development of the Omnibus Biennial Appropriations Act.

Summary of Bill:

Washington Promise Program.

The Washington Promise Program (Promise) is created to provide up to 90 credits of tuition-free community or technical college to eligible students beginning with the 2026-27 academic year. Credits must be earned within six years from the date of enrollment or the equivalent of two years of full-time enrollment, whichever comes first. The Office administers the Promise.

To be eligible for the Promise, a student must:

1. have graduated from a public high school or earned a high school equivalency certificate in the state within 15 calendar months prior to enrolling in a community or technical college;
2. have a family income that does not exceed 200 percent of the state median family income (MFI), adjusted for family size as established and updated annually by the WSAC;
3. not have previously earned an associate degree;
4. be enrolled at least part time in an eligible degree or certificate program at a community or

- technical college;
5. complete the FAFSA or the WASFA for the academic year in which they seek eligibility for the program; and
 6. be a resident student.

Beginning in the 2028-29 academic year, eligibility requirements 1 and 2 are expanded to include students who graduated high school or earned a high school equivalency certificate in the state at any time prior to enrolling in a community or technical college and who have a family income at or below 150 percent of the state MFI.

Eligible certificate or degree programs include: an associate degree program, academic programs with credits that can fully transfer via an articulation agreement toward a baccalaureate degree or postbaccalaureate degree at an institution of higher education, professional and technical programs that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential, or apprenticeship programs established by law and conducted in association with any community or technical college.

Student Success and Advising.

The College Board must develop a plan to provide recipients with a family income at or below 100 percent of the state MFI or who are eligible for the WCG with a free preenrollment orientation program or a quarter- or semester- to year-long student success course that provides advising and peer support, and teaches essential skills for college success. Essential skills may include study habits and time management, financial aid information and resources, connecting students with advisors, encouraging student mentoring, helping establish student cohorts, and providing information about services available on campus. The College Board must provide the plan to the Legislature by December 1, 2024, and begin implementation in the 2025-26 academic year.

Recipients must receive intensive advising, defined by the College Board in consultation with the WSAC, for student success from the community or technical college in which they are enrolled. The state universities, regional universities, and the Evergreen State College must offer students who transferred from a community or technical college at which they received wraparound services under the Promise a quarter- or semester-long student success course, intensive advising, or a peer advising or mentoring program.

College Basic Attendance Grant.

A \$500 College Basic Attendance Grant (Attendance Grant) is provided to recipients with family incomes at or below 150 percent of the state MFI. The grant is meant for books and other related higher education expenses and includes a transit pass for public transit serving the community or technical college at which the recipient is enrolled. The Attendance Grant is distributed evenly over three quarters or two semesters of attendance per academic year. Recipients enrolled less than full time receive a prorated portion of the Attendance Grant based on the number of credits enrolled.

Beginning December 31, 2026, and every two years thereafter, the WSAC must adopt an inflation increase for the Attendance Grant based on the cost of attendance, including required textbooks and other costs for attendance. By January 31, 2027, and every two years thereafter, the WSAC must report the inflation adjustment for the following biennium to the Governor, the Council, and the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature.

Wraparound Services.

The WSAC and the College Board must adopt a menu of evidence-based wraparound services that increases student retention and degree or certificate completion rates. The menu of wraparound services must be updated every five years. Community or technical college districts must devise a plan for providing wraparound services based on the needs of the population the district serves and including evidence-based wraparound services identified in the menu created by the WSAC and the College Board. Wraparound services may include collaborations with not-for-profit and community-based organizations using evidence-based mentoring and advising. Each community or technical college district must submit its plan to the College Board for approval by December 1, 2025, and every five years thereafter.

Wraparound services must be provided to all recipients from the community or technical college in which they are enrolled for the purpose of reducing, or helping to reduce, barriers that threaten completion of their degree or certificate program. Wraparound services may include navigation support for public benefits, financial coaching, and access to food, housing, and childcare resources and referrals. Recipients with eligible dependent children are eligible for subsidized childcare and early learning programs accredited through Head Start, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, or a public school system at the community or technical college, or in the community.

Recipients who are first generation or members of other groups whose retention and completion rates are lower than target rates set by the College Board must be offered additional evidence-based wraparound services including mentoring and peer support programs. The College Board is encouraged to utilize community-based nonprofit partners who may begin mentoring and supporting students in developing postsecondary success skills while in high school and continuing through the first two quarters of enrollment at a community or technical college.

Notifications.

The State Board of Education and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must adopt learning requirements and a curriculum for every high school junior and senior to learn about the Promise, the WCG, and the benefits and opportunities of postsecondary education. The College Board and the OSPI must create a notice about the Promise, the WCG, and the benefits and opportunities of postsecondary education to be provided to individuals upon registration for the test to earn a high school equivalency certificate and upon issuance of a high school equivalency certificate.

Beginning with the 2025-26 academic year, high school graduation requirements must include participation in a program in junior or senior year assisting students and parents or legal

guardians in completing the FAFSA and WASFA.

The notification of financial aid opportunities provided at the beginning of each school year to parents and guardians of students entering the twelfth grade must include eligibility requirements for the Promise. Notices to students required under the HSBPs must include information on the Promise. The statewide marketing campaign conducted by the WSAC to increase awareness of the WCG must also include marketing for the Promise.

Reports to the Legislature.

The WSAC, in collaboration with the College Board, must conduct a study on the effectiveness of the Promise and report its findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2028. The study must include:

- increases in enrollment at community or technical colleges;
- changes in enrollment elsewhere at institutions of higher education;
- changes in high school graduation or equivalency program completion rates;
- changes in student persistence, completion, and time to degree rates in eligible degree or certificate programs; and
- an analysis on the demand for student services, such as advising and student success courses, recommendations to improve student services and outcomes, and the Promise on recipients.

Beginning December 1, 2026, the College Board must submit an annual report to the Legislature on the following impacts of the Promise:

- recipient enrollment in eligible degree or certificate programs;
- recipient completion rates of credits, certificates, and degrees;
- the cost of implementation, including the cost per recipient;
- additional resources used to meet recipient needs, such as counseling, precollege courses, childcare, or transportation;
- the number of recipients receiving wraparound services, the number of schools providing wraparound services, and the resources needed to provide wraparound services; and
- evidence relating to changes in student retention and degree or certificate completion rates for different student populations divided, to the extent possible, by type of wraparound services students received.

Miscellaneous.

If sufficient funding is not appropriated for statewide implementation of the Promise, the College Board must provide matching grants to community or technical college districts based on the appropriation received to implement a program offering tuition-free community or technical college for recent graduates of high schools within the region served by the college or college district. The community or technical college districts must partner with local governments and private entities to secure match funding. Programs may include a free "13th year," under which up to 45 credits may be obtained tuition-free in the 15 months following graduation from a public high school or the obtaining of a high school equivalency certificate. Criteria for grants is prioritized for at-risk students and programs with funding partners.

The Council must forecast the number of students who are eligible for the Promise and are expected to attend a community or technical college in the state.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2024.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.