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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 6254**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Nobles, Hansen, Conway, Frame, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Lovick, Saldaña, Valdez, and C. Wilson)

READ FIRST TIME 01/31/24.

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; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

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

1 assistance, are proven approaches to increasing rates of  
2 postsecondary enrollment. In order to broaden access to student  
3 navigational supports, Washington should invest in student  
4 navigational supports and services to advise students to and through  
5 postsecondary education and training. Therefore, it is the  
6 legislature's intent to establish a financial aid completion and  
7 postsecondary enrollment pilot program for the purposes of informing  
8 Washington high school students of postsecondary financial aid and  
9 educational opportunities as well as encouraging completion of  
10 financial aid and postsecondary enrollment.

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

13 Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific  
14 purpose, the college board shall administer a ~~((free application for  
15 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial  
16 aid outreach and completion initiative pilot program))~~ financial aid  
17 completion and postsecondary enrollment pilot program for every  
18 educational service district.

19 (1) The college board shall, in consultation with the office of  
20 the superintendent of public instruction, select community or  
21 technical colleges to participate in the pilot program. The  
22 ~~((colleges selected to participate must each be located within  
23 educational service districts that are in the bottom two for free  
24 application for federal student aid completion rates when combining  
25 their respective school districts' free application for federal  
26 student aid completion rates over the past three completed academic  
27 years prior to June 9, 2022))~~ college board may also consider tribal  
28 organizations or community-based organizations to participate in the  
29 pilot program if deemed appropriate for the context of a given  
30 educational service district. The colleges or organizations selected  
31 to participate must include at least one college or organization from  
32 each educational service district. Colleges or organizations selected  
33 to participate shall employ outreach and enrollment specialists to  
34 work directly with the high schools located in the corresponding  
35 educational service district. It is the legislature's intent that the  
36 outreach and enrollment specialists be employed at a ratio of one to  
37 600 high school seniors within the corresponding educational service  
38 district. The outreach and enrollment specialists shall make  
39 significant contact with high school students and their families,

1 with a focus on those households who are eligible for free or  
2 reduced-price lunch, the federal supplemental nutrition assistance  
3 program, medicaid, or other similar public benefit programs, for the  
4 purpose of increasing free application for federal student aid and  
5 Washington application for state financial aid completion rates. The  
6 outreach and enrollment specialists shall use the free application  
7 for federal student aid and Washington application for state  
8 financial aid data maintained by the student achievement council to  
9 conduct targeted outreach and free application for federal student  
10 aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion  
11 assistance to high school seniors. The outreach and enrollment  
12 specialists shall also provide information on how to access private  
13 scholarships. The outreach and enrollment specialists shall conduct  
14 other outreach as appropriate, including virtual or in-person  
15 presentations with students and families, announcements on (~~school~~  
16 ~~intercoms and~~) social media channels, outreach to recent high school  
17 graduates as peer messengers, and events at school college or career  
18 fairs.

19 (2) The outreach and enrollment specialists shall assist students  
20 in exploring college services and programs to improve their skills  
21 and increase academic achievement, with a focus on those students who  
22 are eligible for public benefit programs, for the purpose of helping  
23 students reach their education and career goals. The student  
24 achievement council, the college board, an organization representing  
25 the public four-year institutions of higher education, and an  
26 organization representing the private four-year institutions of  
27 higher education shall collaborate in preparing a training program  
28 for outreach and enrollment specialists.

29 (3) In collaboration with the office of the superintendent of  
30 public instruction, the college board shall outline the roles and  
31 responsibilities of colleges, tribal organizations, community-based  
32 organizations, and educational service districts to ensure outreach  
33 and enrollment specialists have the necessary resources and support  
34 to effectively engage with students to promote postsecondary  
35 enrollment and financial aid completion. Resources and support may  
36 include, but are not limited to, providing: Access to buildings,  
37 adequate meeting spaces, certain technology, and school supplies. The  
38 college board should also include a communication plan to students  
39 and families about the presence and role of outreach and enrollment  
40 specialists.

1        (4) The college board shall report annually to the appropriate  
2 committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036  
3 beginning December 1, (~~(2023, on the free application for federal~~  
4 ~~student aid and Washington application for state financial aid~~  
5 ~~outreach and completion initiative pilot program)~~ 2025, on the  
6 financial aid completion and postsecondary enrollment pilot program.  
7 The report must include details on (~~how the~~):

8        (a) How the colleges selected used the funding (~~and how the~~);

9        (b) How the initiatives worked to increase free application for  
10 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial  
11 aid completion rates(~~(. The report must also include before and after~~  
12 ~~free application for federal student aid and Washington application~~  
13 ~~for state financial aid completion data and specific details about~~  
14 ~~the number of high school students assisted in completing the free~~  
15 ~~application for federal student aid and Washington application for~~  
16 ~~state financial aid)~~);

17        (c) How the initiatives worked to increase first-time enrollment  
18 into college;

19        (d) The data including completion rates for free application for  
20 federal student aid and Washington application for state financial  
21 aid prior to implementation of the pilot program and  
22 postimplementation, disaggregated by demographic characteristics; and

23        (e) The rates of first-time college enrollment of students within  
24 one year of high school graduation, disaggregated by demographic  
25 characteristics.

26        (5) For the purposes of the reporting requirements provided under  
27 subsection (4) of this section, the college board must enter into  
28 data-sharing agreements with the student achievement council and any  
29 colleges or organizations that are selected to participate in the  
30 pilot program.

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

33        (1) The legislature intends to ensure that every school district  
34 has access to at least one qualified financial aid professional to  
35 provide expert support and ensure accurate and timely administration  
36 of financial aid forms. To achieve this, the legislature intends to  
37 make available, at no cost to participants, comprehensive financial  
38 aid training for teachers, school counselors, postsecondary staff,  
39 and community partners.

1 (2) The council shall administer a financial aid certification  
2 program that is available to secondary school teachers and  
3 counselors, staff at the institutions of higher education, and  
4 community partners. The council shall coordinate with the office of  
5 the superintendent of public instruction to develop the topics that  
6 the certification program will cover. The council must consider  
7 contracting with a third-party entity to provide the certification  
8 program. The certification program must be offered at no cost to  
9 program participants.

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

12 (1) By September 1, 2026, the office of the superintendent of  
13 public instruction in collaboration with the Washington student  
14 achievement council and the Washington professional educator  
15 standards board shall offer continuing education credits to in-  
16 service educators on the topic of financial aid, as described in  
17 section 3 of this act.

18 (2) By October 1, 2025, the office of the superintendent of  
19 public instruction in collaboration with the Washington student  
20 achievement council and the Washington professional educator  
21 standards board shall make recommendations to the legislature  
22 regarding additional incentives that should be available to encourage  
23 participation in the certification program described in section 3 of  
24 this act.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) December 1, 2027, the joint  
26 legislative audit and review committee shall conduct a performance  
27 review of the financial aid completion and postsecondary enrollment  
28 pilot program. The performance review must evaluate, at a minimum:

29 (a) The program's impact on free application for federal student  
30 aid and Washington application for state financial aid completion;

31 (b) The program's impact on college enrollment within 12 months  
32 of high school graduation;

33 (c) A description of activities each pilot site has engaged in  
34 related to increasing financial aid filing; and

35 (d) A description of other factors that may be impacting  
36 financial aid filing and college enrollment rates.

1 (2) This section expires July 1, 2028.

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