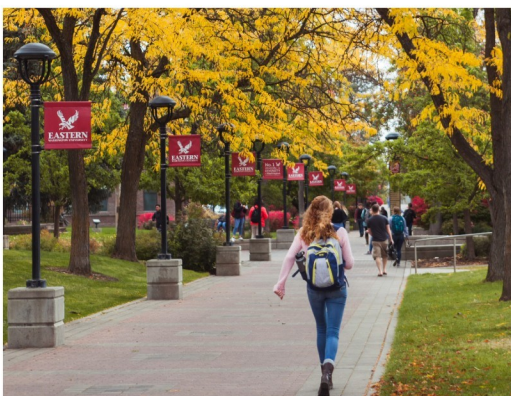


WASHINGTON STATE
Council of
Presidents
REPRESENTING WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS

2026 Legislative Report



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The Council of Presidents (COP) is the association of Washington's six public baccalaureate degree-granting college and universities. Located in Olympia, Washington, COP strives to be a common voice for the public baccalaureate sector and the most respected and trusted resource for decision-makers on issues affecting public higher education. COP serves a coordinating role for a number of initiatives and activities common to the public baccalaureate institutions, fostering coordination and collaboration among the public baccalaureates as well as with other educational partners, both in Washington and nationally.

This report is available on COP's website: councilofpresidents.org/legislative-engagement

Introduction

The 2026 session was a 60-day sprint greatly influenced by a projected budget shortfall. Bills with fiscal impact were scrutinized during hearings, if heard at all. Within this budget context, bills were heard on protecting the privacy of Washingtonians, housing, election integrity and state sovereignty, and revenue.

Many stakeholders worked with legislators to protect privacy through [ESSB 6002](#), which created guidelines for the use of automated license plate readers. These guidelines prohibited sharing this data and required its deletion. Our campuses use this technology to enforce parking, so we worked with the sponsors to ensure privacy and continued use. [HB 2266](#) removed barriers to building permanent supportive housing, emergency shelters, and transitional housing by allowing housing in the urban growth area where residential housing and hotels are allowed.

Under the topics of election integrity and state sovereignty, while double voting within Washington is already prohibited, the Legislature passed [SB 6084](#), which further clarifies that a person is guilty of a class C felony if they vote or attempt to vote in two different states. [ESHB 1916](#) protects voter registration rights and increases penalties for false challenges. In addition, a voter's registration may only be challenged by an individual who is registered to vote in the same county. Peace officers and federal law enforcement officers are prohibited from wearing facial coverings while interacting with the public in performance of their duties through [SB 5855](#). The state vaccine recommendations now come from the Washington State Department of Health instead of federal agencies or committees ([HB 2242](#)).

The Legislature also passed a cleanup bill to last year's revenue bill [ESSB 5814](#). After the 2025 session, the Department of Revenue (DOR) held many meetings to clarify how to implement the bill. Our institutions and Council of Presidents met twice with DOR on this topic. This session's bill, [ESSB 6113](#), codified the changes needed.

Likely the best-known bill for this session is [SB 6346](#), known as the Millionaires' Tax bill. The bill levies a 9.9% tax on earnings over \$1 million. The bill requires 5% of the revenues collected to be deposited in the Fair Start for Kids Account with the remainder deposited into the state general fund. The Fair Start for Kids Account makes childcare and early learning more accessible, affordable, and sustainable. While this bill passed the Legislature, court challenges are expected because it exceeds the 1% state constitutional limit on property taxes.

Council of Presidents' efforts in the 2026 legislative session

During each legislative session, Council of Presidents works in tandem with public baccalaureate leaders, policymakers, legislative staff, state agencies, higher education partners, education partners, and many other stakeholders.

Bill development. COP staff contributed to and amended sector-supported legislation while engaging with stakeholders and partners to advance policy through the legislative process.

Bill testimony and legislative requests. COP staff testified and coordinated sector-wide responses to legislative inquiries on a range of issues. This included providing amendatory language to legislative committees, meeting with policymakers and their staff, and outlining our sector's position. COP responded on behalf of the sector to inquiries about higher education fiscal and personnel data, student enrollments, the use of automated license plate readers, student basic need services, the Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program (WAGAP), and dual credit. This role is critical in providing a unified sector position, supporting policy-driven legislation, and minimizing bills that may have negative or unintended impacts on our operations or students.

Legislative presentations. On January 26, COP jointly [presented](#) with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges about dual credit during a [work session](#) to the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee. On February 2, COP [presented](#) about student supports during a work session to the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee. COP staff responded to follow-up questions from members and staff stemming from both presentations.

Interinstitutional Committee of Legislative Officers (ICLO). COP staff coordinated twice-weekly meetings of our legislative officers during session. These meetings allowed for a better understanding and discussion of campus perspectives on policy and budget proposals and helped determine COP's response.

Legislative updates and collaboration with campuses. During the legislative session, COP disseminated legislative updates to campuses through our [interinstitutional committees](#). COP regularly acts as a conduit for information between policymakers and our campuses, helping to succinctly communicate how fiscal and policy proposals will impact on-the-ground operations and the students we serve. This year, COP staff held weekly and biweekly calls with COP committees, provided legislative updates during regular meetings of interinstitutional committees, held joint budget meetings, and sent email updates to academic groups on emerging academic-related policies. Our presidents also regularly met and received updates. Institutional administrators, faculty, and staff played a key role in providing timely feedback to policymakers and their staff regarding the impacts of proposed legislation.

Working with higher education partners. COP continues to be committed to strong working relationships with educational and community partners across the state. This includes but is not limited to the [Governor's Office](#), [Office of Financial Management](#), [State Board for Community and Technical Colleges](#) (SBCTC), [Independent Colleges of Washington](#), [College Success Foundation](#), [College Promise Coalition](#), Washington Student Association, Council of Faculty, [Washington Roundtable](#), [Washington STEM](#), [Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board](#), [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\)](#), [Association of Washington School Principals](#), and the [Washington Student Achievement Council](#) (WSAC). This is also the second year of participating in the Higher Education Coalition, which includes WSAC, SBCTC, [Communities for Our Colleges](#), along with labor unions that represent higher education staff and faculty: [Washington Education Association](#), [Public School Employees](#), [Washington Federation of State Employees](#), [United Auto Workers](#), [American Federation of Teachers Washington](#), and [Washington Public Employees Association](#).

2026 Higher education legislative policy proposals

The legislative higher education and education committees were engaged in hearing policy proposals across various subject areas, including student financial aid, transition to college, enrollment, advanced degree offerings, data sharing, higher education funding, and governance. COP closely tracked over 230 bills impacting higher education across the various legislative committees, with most bills assigned to the House and Senate higher education committees. COP also tracked legislation in other legislative committees that impacted higher education operations, including establishing a statewide digital transcript data-sharing environment, automated license plate readers, predesign threshold amounts, and increasing small works roster contract limits.

This session, legislators interested in higher education met on Fridays to discuss policies and budget proposals and informally called themselves the Higher Education Caucus. Members attending were not limited to those on the higher education committees in the House and Senate. Members of the Higher Education Coalition met with this group twice during session and the Friday College Promise Coalition calls have included members sharing discussion topics.

Throughout the legislative session, COP provided expertise and perspective on multiple bills impacting colleges and universities. While many notable policies passed, many others did not. Below is a list of notable policy proposals.

For a full list of bills where COP acted, see [Appendix A](#).

Highlights of bills that passed the Legislature

HB 2353: Concerning predesign thresholds (Sponsored by Representative Michael Keaton) – Increases the statutory threshold for capital construction projects from \$10 million to \$15 million and requires OFM to adjust this threshold annually for inflation.

HB 2420: Increasing small works roster contract limits (Sponsored by Representative Janice Zahn) – Raises the small works roster threshold from \$350,000 to \$530,000 on January 1, 2027, then in \$30,000 annual steps to \$650,000 beginning July 1, 2030.

SB 5841: Concerning the completion of postsecondary financial aid applications (Sponsored by Senator Matt Boehnke) – Requires the high school and beyond plan platform to import financial aid application data so high schools can view the student's progress on financial aid applications and provide electronic notifications about eligibility and program requirements to students enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship Program.

SB 5963: Modifying funding for the passport to careers program and eligibility for the Washington college grant (Sponsored by Senator T'wina Nobles) – Defines that an individual eligible for the Passport to Careers Program qualifies as income-eligible under the Washington College Grant (WCG).

SB 6002: Concerning driver privacy protections (Sponsored by Senator Yasmin Trudeau) – Regulates the use of automated license plate readers.

SB 6278: Concerning the ongoing review of approved teacher and principal preparation programs (Sponsored by Senator Lisa Wellman) – Identifies components that must be included in reviews of teacher and principal preparation programs and requires the Professional Educators Standards Board to update the components to reflect the changing needs of the modern classroom. Also changes the timing of when plans and updates must be submitted.

Highlights of bills that did not pass the Legislature

HB 2098: Adjusting higher education funding (Sponsored by Representative Julia Reed) – Would have eliminated the Workforce Education Investment surcharge cap, expanded income eligibility ranges for WCG award amounts, and reduced resident undergraduate tuition operating fees at public institutions of higher education over three academic years.

HB 2132: Concerning application for state financial aid (Sponsored by Representative Mari Leavitt) – Would have limited disclosure and retention of personally identifying information related to the Washington Application for State Financial Aid.

HB 2311/SB 5931: Concerning workforce education investment accountability and oversight board administrative changes (Sponsored by Representative Alex Ybarra and Senator Judy Warnick) – Would have made administrative changes to the Workforce Education Investment Accountability and Oversight Board.

HB 2324: Concerning tuition waivers for children of eligible veterans (Sponsored by Representative Dave Paul) – Would have provided children of certain veterans eight years from the date of the veteran's disability determination to use the tuition waiver for veterans and National Guard members, if the determination of disability occurred after the child turned 18 years old.

HB 2535/SB 5826: Concerning access at public postsecondary educational institutions to medication abortion (Sponsored by Representative Kristine Reeves and Senator T'wina Nobles) - Would have required public institutions of higher education to offer access to medication abortion through certain available methods with the student health center and to maintain a webpage on reproductive health within an existing website.

HB 2567/SB 5828: Concerning the Washington College Grant and College Bound Scholarship Program for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions of higher education in Washington (Sponsored by Representative Chipalo Street and Senator T'wina Nobles) -Would have modified the maximum Washington College Grant and College Bound Scholarship award amounts for students attending four-year not-for-profit institutions.

HB 2589: Addressing encampments at institutions of higher education (Sponsored by Representative Mari Leavitt) – Would have prohibited any person or individual from establishing an encampment at an institution of higher education without authorization.

HB 2570/SB 6052: Establishing a statewide digital transcript data-sharing environment (Sponsored by Representative Alex Ybarra and Senator Matt Boehnke) – Would have authorized the Washington School Information Processing Cooperative to develop, maintain, and govern a statewide digital transcript file, required school districts and public institutions of higher education to participate, and allowed private four-year not-for-profit institutions of higher education in Washington to participate.

HB 2617/SB 6325: Enhancing higher education procedures (Sponsored by Representative Gerry Pollet and Senator T'wina Nobles) – Would have required the Legislature to fully fund the compensation, benefits and central services costs instead of only funding a portion of it and required Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct a study on essential student services at public institutions of higher education.

HB 2671: Concerning state financial aid (Sponsored by Representative Joe Timmons) – Would have expanded institutional eligibility for participation in state financial aid programs.

SB 5909: Reviewing and discontinuing low-enrollment undergraduate programs at public baccalaureate institutions (Sponsored by Senator Matt Boehnke) – Would have required higher education

institutions to compile an annual list of undergraduate degree programs producing a five-year average of fewer than 10 graduates and recommendations for program discontinuation.

SB 5954: Concerning veteran survivor tuition waiver eligibility (Sponsored by Senator Keith Wagoner) – Would have amended the eligibility requirements for a mandatory waiver of state tuition and fees for certain veteran dependents and survivors.

SB 5978: Establishing the Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program and requiring student notifications (Sponsored by Senator Drew Hansen) – Would have established WAGAP in statute.

SB 6082: Safeguarding student financial aid from fraud (Sponsored by Senator Matt Boehnke) – Would have required the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to conduct a performance audit and report regarding fraud in Washington's financial aid programs.

SB 6089: Increasing coordination and alignment throughout the P20W system (Sponsored by Senator Vandana Slatter) – Would have directed OFM to contract with a nonprofit organization to facilitate increased P20W system coordination and create a public-facing P20W data dashboard.

SB 6209: Concerning financial aid awards for students attending private four-year and two-year institutions of higher education (Sponsored by Senator Lisa Wellman) – Would have required WSAC to develop a gainful employment standard for private, for-profit, institutions to participate in state financial aid programs and allowed these institutions to participate in the WCG and College Bound Scholarship if the gainful employment standard was met.

SB 6227: Formalizing data collection protocols to support parenting students (Sponsored by Senator Claire Wilson) – Would have required WSAC to collaborate with higher education institutions to develop data collection protocols identifying students who are parents and convene a work group to provide recommendations for identifying students' parenting status.

SB 6259: Establishing that students are no longer eligible for and must repay state aid immediately upon determination of significant monetary damage to a public institution of higher education (Sponsored by Senator Matt Boehnke) – Would have established that a student found by a court to have caused damage to a higher education institution is not eligible for state financial aid and must repay any financial aid received.

2026 Supplemental operating and capital budgets

The February 2026 revenue forecast projected a modest revenue increase through 2029, providing the Legislature with an additional \$438 million for the 2026 session. When compared to the November 2025 forecast, expected revenue increased \$1.3 billion over the four-year forecast, including \$421 million more in the Workforce Education Investment Account (WEIA). However, cuts were still necessary due to the \$1.6 billion budget shortfall.

The Legislature passed a \$79.4 billion supplemental operating budget, which added \$1.2 billion to the 2025-27 biennial budget passed last year. This increase was mostly due to inflation and caseload growth, not expansion of state services.

For higher education, all institutions received an administrative reduction. In addition, a budget mechanism involved a \$45 million reduction to university operating budgets that was immediately backfilled with cash from prior-year capital project funds. The state then utilized unused bond capacity to restore the capital budget, effectively shifting the funding source from cash to debt financing while maintaining both operational stability

and planned construction projects. This approach allowed the Legislature to avoid deeper structural cuts to higher education, while acknowledging the sector's ongoing financial challenges. Meanwhile, state agencies, including WSAC and WTB, received across-the-board cuts of 5%. Finally, Running Start funding was cut by limiting high school students' full-time equivalent (FTE) from 1.4 to 1.3.

More details can be found at fiscal.wa.gov.

For a summary of the state operating budget, see [Appendix C](#).

For a summary of the state capital budget, see [Appendix D](#).

Council of Presidents' interim efforts in 2026

We are proud of the collaborative and meaningful work done thus far, both with our member campuses as well as with state agencies and other higher education partners. This interim, COP staff will be working closely with the presidents to discuss our legislative strategy for 2027, academic preparation, higher education governance, and staffing changes over time.

As of this date, multiple legislators have announced they will not be running again or are running for a different office. Because of this, the 2027 Legislature will look quite different, leading to changes to higher education, fiscal, and K-12 committees, as well as leadership. COP staff will keep track of these changes.

COP will also provide verbal and written updates to policymakers and legislative staff, as well as represent our sector in myriad areas, including state-level workforce-related initiatives, task forces, work groups, and other cross-sector opportunities for engagement.

Appendix A: 2026 Legislative testimony by COP staff

Bill	Original Sponsor	Date	Committee	Bill Summary/Workshop	COP Action
HB 2332	Salahuddin	Jan 20	Civil Rights & Judiciary	Driver privacy protections and automated license plate reader systems	COP testified OTHER
HB 2353	Keaton	Jan 29 Feb 24	Capital Budget Ways & Means	Predesign thresholds	COP testified PRO
HB 2420	Zahn	Jan 29 Feb 20	Capital Budget State Gov, Tribal Affairs & Elections	Increasing small works roster contract limits	COP testified PRO
HB 2567	Street	Feb 4	Postsecondary Education & Workforce	Washington College Grant & College Bound Scholarship program for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions of higher education in Washington	COP provided written testimony OTHER
HB 2617	Pollet	Feb 25	Postsecondary Education & Workforce	Enhancing higher education procedures by modifying higher education funding for increases in compensation and central services and identifying essential student services	COP testified PRO
HB 2671	Timmons	Feb 28	Postsecondary Education & Workforce	State financial aid, adding out-of-state institutions	COP provided written testimony OTHER
SB 5828	Nobles	Jan 15	Higher Education & Workforce Development	Washington College Grant & College Bound Scholarship program for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions of higher education in Washington	COP provided written testimony OTHER
SB 5978	Hansen	Jan 19	Higher Education & Workforce Development	Establishing the Washington guaranteed admissions program and requiring student notifications	COP testified PRO
SB 6002	Trudeau	Jan 16 Feb 18	Law & Justice Civil Rights & Judiciary	Driver privacy protections and automated license plate reader systems	COP testified OTHER COP provided written testimony OTHER

Bill	Original Sponsor	Date	Committee	Bill Summary/Workshop	COP Action
SB 6052	Boehnke	Jan 20	Early Learning & K-12	Establishing a statewide digital transcript data-sharing environment	COP testified PRO
SB 6325	Nobles	Jan 29	Higher Education & Workforce Development	Enhancing higher education procedures by modifying higher education funding for increases in compensation and central services and identifying essential student services	COP testified PRO
Work Session		Jan 26	Higher Education & Workforce Development	Dual Credit	COP presented
Work Session		Feb 2	Higher Education & Workforce Development	Student Supports	COP presented

Appendix B: Higher education bills that passed the 2026 Legislature

Bill Number	Sponsor	Bill Summary	Votes (Yea, Nay, Absent, Excused)	Companion Bill
HB 1069	Fosse	Allowing collective bargaining over contributions for certain supplemental retirement benefits	House: 72-19-0-7 Senate: 31-18-0-0	SB 5044
E2SHB 1170	Shavers	Informing users when content is developed or modified by artificial intelligence	House: 56-37-0-5 Senate: 46-3-0-0	
SHB 1570	Timmons	Collective bargaining for certain employees who are enrolled in academic programs at public institutions of higher education	House: 58-35-0-5 Senate: 29-19-0-1	SB 5119
SHB 2088	Leavitt	Dietitian licensure compact	House: 93-1-0-4 Senate: 48-0-0-1	
HB 2091	Reed	Requiring public employers under chapter 41.80 RCW to provide employee information to exclusive bargaining representatives	House: 93-1-0-4 Senate: 44-4-0-1	
2SHB 2105	Ortiz-Self	Protecting immigrant workers	House: 56-38-0-4 Senate: 27-21-0-1	SB 5852
ESHB 2225	Callan	Regulation of artificial intelligence companion chatbots	House: 69-28-0-1 Senate: 43-5-0-1	SB 5984
HB 2309	Leavitt	Reducing barriers to state employment by eliminating postgraduate degree requirements that are unnecessary	House: 97-0-0-1 Senate: 48-0-0-1	SB 6038
HB 2353	Keaton	Capital predesign thresholds	House: 94-0-0-4 Senate: 38-10-0-1	
SHB 2363	Reed	Temporary exemptions from licensure for certain applicants for a license to practice music therapy	House: 94-0-0-4 Senate: 48-0-0-1	
SHB 2420	Zahn	Increasing small works roster contract limits	House: 94-0-0-4 Senate: 48-0-0-1	
ESHB 2471	Scott	Collective bargaining for employees not covered by the national labor relations act	House: 58-35-0-5 Senate: 31-18-0-0	SB 6117
SSB 5841	Boehnke	Completion of postsecondary financial aid applications	Senate: 49-0-0-0 House: 92-4-0-2	
SSB 5862	Dozier	Providing a cost-of-living adjustment for Plan 1 retirees of the teachers' retirement system and public employees' retirement system	Senate: 48-0-0-1 House: 96-0-0-2	

Bill Number	Sponsor	Bill Summary	Votes (Yea, Nay, Absent, Excused)	Companion Bill
SSB 5886	Boehnke	Personality rights	Senate: 47-0-0-2 House: 85-9-0-4	
SB 5963	Nobles	Modifying funding for the passport to careers program, and permitting students eligible for the passport to careers program to automatically qualify as income-eligible for the purpose of receiving the Washington College Grant	Senate: 48-0-0-1 House: 92-1-0-5	HB 2586
ESSB 6002	Trudeau	Driver privacy protections and automated license plate reader systems	Senate: 40-9-0-0 House: 84-10-0-4	HB 2332
ESSB 6113	Frame	Improving the tax law administered by the Department of Revenue by making technical corrections, clarifying ambiguities, and providing administrative efficiencies in a manner that is not estimated to affect state or local tax	Senate: 45-3-1-0 House: 92-4-0-2	HB 2257
SB 6134	King	Notice to striking workers applying for unemployment insurance benefits of potential overpayment assessment upon receipt of retroactive wages	Senate: 48-0-0-1 House: 94-0-0-4	
SB 6278	Wellman	Ongoing review of approved teacher and principal preparation programs	Senate: 46-3-0-0 House: 86-7-0-5	

Appendix C: 2025-27 Omnibus operating budget | 2026 Supplemental

As passed by the Legislature March 12, 2026
Dollars in thousands

	2025-2027 Budget	2026 Supplemental	2025-2027 Revised Budget
Legislative	326,315	3,412	329,737
Judicial	751,659	17,278	768,783
Governmental Operations	8,611,337	1,481,094	10,082,990
Other Human Services	51,749,908	3,767,163	55,510,567
DSHS	25,021,899	719,476	25,740,975
Natural Resources	3,762,731	227,833	3,984,530
Transportation	334,019	20,648	354,237
Public Schools	36,406,761	207,648	36,614,409
Higher Education	18,923,742	175,420	19,098,490
University of Washington	9,493,297	15,593	9,508,827
Washington State University	2,168,287	-1,179	2,167,108
Eastern Washington University	415,129	3,583	418,712
Central Washington University	490,284	3,497	493,781
The Evergreen State College	155,571	3,570	158,940
Western Washington University	537,991	1,243	539,234
Community/Technical College System	4,326,977	1,574	4,328,143
Student Achievement Council	1,336,206	147,539	1,483,745
Other Education	182,085	1,846	183,931
Special Appropriations	4,364,275	256,841	4,621,116
Statewide Total	150,434,731	6,878,659	157,289,755

Appendix D: 2025-27 Biennial capital budget | 2026 Supplemental new appropriations

As passed by the Legislature March 12, 2026
Dollars in thousands

	Debt Limit Bonds*	Toxics	Total Appropriations
Governmental Operations	542,335	4,000	509,979
Human Services	32,467	0	67,654
Natural Resources	-470,564	1,930	73,500
Higher Education	267,462	0	128,575
University of Washington	85,575	0	47,500
Washington State University	59,500	0	16,400
Eastern Washington University	13,800	0	11,134
Central Washington University	11,191	0	2,891
The Evergreen State College	9,144	0	0
Western Washington University	12,084	0	2,650
Community/Technical College System	76,168	0	48,000
Other Education	63,374	0	110,002
Statewide Total	435,074	5,930	889,710

*Includes alternative finance projects

Appendix E: Legislative directors and staff

Central Washington University

Steve DuPont, Director of Government Relations

Eastern Washington University

David Buri, Director of Government Relations

The Evergreen State College

Sandy Kaiser, Director of Government Relations

University of Washington

Morgan Hickel, Director of State Relations

Kevin Chang, Associate Director of State Relations

Jordan Caron, Associate, State Relations

Washington State University

Chris Mulick, Senior Director of State Relations

Connor Haggerty, Assistant Director of State Relations

Cat Amortegui, Policy and Affairs Coordinator

Western Washington University

Nora Selander, Director of Government Relations

Elissa Hicks, Government Relations Policy and Affairs Coordinator

Council of Presidents

Melissa Beard, Director of Legislative Affairs