

Washington College Grant – Proposal to Restore Equity for Washington Residents Attending Not-For-Profit, Private Universities

Issue: As adopted, the Workforce Education Investment Act (Chapter 406, 2019 Laws) sets up an equity divide for those Washington residents who are eligible for the Washington College Grant but who do not participate in the College Bound program and wish to enroll at an independent, not-for-profit, private college or university in the state.

Departing from established state higher education public policy, Sec. 21 (5) sets the maximum Washington college grant as: “For students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions of higher education in Washington, in the 2019-20 academic year, is nine thousand seven hundred thirty-nine dollars and may [emphasis added] increase each year afterwards by no more than the tuition growth factor.” At the same time, for the 2019-20 academic year, qualified Washington residents enrolled at the University of Washington will receive \$10,768, to fully cover tuition and fees. Similarly, that same student would receive \$10,479 to attend Washington State University. In the years ahead

As an issue of equity, state residents who may not wish to leave their home communities—whether Lacey, Yakima, Walla Walla or Spokane—should have access to the same level of funding to enroll at a nearby nonprofit college or university. Students choose to enroll at specific campuses for a variety of reasons, including academic program offerings, size, proximity to home, and sense of community. A differential in state assistance should not be a reason.

Recommendation: The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) could (1) advance agency request legislation for a statutory change to restore equity such that the maximum grant for students enrolled at private four-year not-for-profit institutions is again tied to grant award levels for public research universities; and (2) further request that Governor Inslee advance a budget with sufficient funds for the change.

Equity would result from a change in the maximum Washington College Grant for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions to the lesser of either the grant for a student attending a four-year public research institution or the private institution's tuition for 15 quarter credits or the equivalent rather than \$9,739 for the 2019-20 academic year with an annual increase no more than the tuition growth factor.

Proposed language: In Sec. 21 (5)(b), Chapter 406, 2019 Laws, after “Washington,” strike all material through “factor” and insert “is the lesser of the maximum college grant under (a) of this subsection, or the individual institution's tuition for fifteen quarter credit hours or the equivalent.”

The required increase in appropriations to the Washington Student Achievement Council to account for the change in grant amounts for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions is estimated at \$3.731 million, approximately one percent of total funding for the Washington College Grant in 2018-19.

Timing: It is important that this revision be made in the 2020 Legislative Session, before the Washington College Grant moves to a fully funded, caseload-driven program in the 2020-21 academic year.