

Chapter 28B.145 RCW
OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP ACT

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RCW 28B.145.005 Finding—Intent. The legislature finds that, despite increases in degree production, there remain acute shortages in high employer demand programs of study, particularly in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health care fields of study. According to the workforce training and education coordinating board, seventeen percent of Washington businesses had difficulty finding job applicants in 2010. Eleven thousand employers did not fill a vacancy because they lacked qualified job applicants. Fifty-nine percent of projected job openings in Washington state from now until 2017 will require some form of postsecondary education and training.

It is the intent of the legislature to provide jobs and opportunity by making Washington the place where the world's most productive companies find the world's most talented people. The legislature intends to accomplish this through the creation of the opportunity scholarship and the opportunity expansion programs to: Help mitigate the impact of tuition increases; increase the number of professional-technical certificates, professional-technical degrees, baccalaureate degrees in high employer demand and other programs, and advanced degrees in health professions; and invest in programs and students to meet market demands for a knowledge-based economy while filling middle-income jobs with a sufficient supply of skilled workers. [2019 c 406 s 62. Prior: 2018 c 209 s 5; 2018 c 114 s 1; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 1.]

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

RCW 28B.145.010 Definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Board" means the opportunity scholarship board.

(2) "Council" means the student achievement council.

(3) "Eligible advanced degree program" means a health professional degree program beyond the baccalaureate level and includes graduate and professional degree programs.

(4) "Eligible county" has the same meaning as "rural county" as defined in RCW 82.14.370 and also includes any county that shares a common border with Canada and has a population of over 125,000.

(5) "Eligible education programs" means high employer demand and other programs of study as determined by the board.

(6) "Eligible expenses" means reasonable expenses associated with the costs of acquiring an education such as tuition, books, equipment, fees, room and board, and other expenses as determined by the program administrator in consultation with the council and the state board for community and technical colleges.

(7) "Eligible school district" means a school district of the second class as identified in RCW 28A.300.065(2).

(8) (a) "Eligible student" means a resident student who:

(i) (A) Received his or her high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington and has been accepted at a four-year institution of higher education into an eligible education program leading to a baccalaureate degree;

(B) Received his or her high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington and will attend a two-year institution of higher education and intends to transfer to an eligible education program at a four-year institution of higher education;

(C) Received his or her high school diploma or equivalent and has been accepted at an institution of higher education into a professional-technical certificate or degree program in an eligible education program; or

(D) Has been accepted at an institution of higher education into an eligible advanced degree program that leads to credentials in health professions;

(ii) Declares an intention to obtain a professional-technical certificate, professional-technical degree, baccalaureate degree, or an advanced degree; and

(iii) Has a family income at or below 125 percent of the state median family income at the time the student applies for an opportunity scholarship. For the advanced degree program, family income may be greater than 125 percent if the eligible student can demonstrate financial need through other factors such as a history of prior household income, income loss caused by entering the advanced

degree program, level of student debt at application and annually thereafter, or other factors determined by the program.

(b) To remain eligible for scholarship funds under the opportunity scholarship program the student must meet satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as determined by the office of student financial assistance in the Washington college grant program under chapter 28B.92 RCW.

(9) "Gift aid" means financial aid received from the federal Pell grant, the Washington college grant program in chapter 28B.92 RCW, the college bound scholarship program in chapter 28B.118 RCW, the opportunity grant program in chapter 28B.50 RCW, or any other state grant, scholarship, or worker retraining program that provides funds for educational purposes with no obligation of repayment. "Gift aid" does not include student loans, work-study programs, the basic food employment and training program administered by the department of social and health services, or other employment assistance programs that provide job readiness opportunities and support beyond the costs of tuition, books, and fees.

(10) "High employer demand program of study" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 28B.50.030.

(11) "Participant" means an eligible student who has received a scholarship under the opportunity scholarship program.

(12) "Private sources," "private funds," "private contributions," or "private sector contributions" means donations from private organizations, corporations, federally recognized Indian tribes, municipalities, counties, and other sources, but excludes state dollars.

(13) "Professional-technical certificate" means a program as approved by the state board for community and technical colleges under RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c), that is offered by an institution of higher education or an eligible registered apprenticeship program under chapter 28B.92 RCW.

(14) "Professional-technical degree" means a program as approved by the state board for community and technical colleges under RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c), that is offered by an institution of higher education or an eligible registered apprenticeship program under chapter 28B.92 RCW.

(15) "Program administrator" means one or more private nonprofit corporations registered under Title 24 RCW and qualified as a tax-exempt entity under section 501(c)(3) of the federal internal revenue code.

(16) "Resident student" means a student meeting the requirements under RCW 28B.92.200(5)(c) as defined in the Washington college grant program.

(17) "Rural jobs program" means the rural county high employer demand jobs program created in this chapter. [2023 c 176 s 1; 2022 c 211 s 1; 2021 c 133 s 2; 2019 c 406 s 63. Prior: 2018 c 254 s 9; 2018 c 209 s 6; 2018 c 114 s 2; 2014 c 208 s 1; 2013 c 39 s 13; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 2.]

Effective date—2023 c 176: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [April 25, 2023]." [2023 c 176 s 7.]

Findings—Intent—2021 c 133: "The legislature finds that higher education is pivotal in delivering training to Washington citizens at all stages of their careers and ages. A skilled workforce increases productivity, boosts outputs, and propels growth in Washington's economy. The legislature further finds that a well-trained, highly skilled workforce provides Washington citizens with greater opportunities and skill sets to efficiently and confidently meet the changing demands of a transforming economy. Furthermore, a STEM-based education provides Washington's citizens with real-world applications to develop a variety of skill sets needed in today's global economy.

The legislature further finds that the Washington state opportunity scholarship is an innovative public-private partnership that has been successful building a qualified workforce to fill Washington's high-demand STEM, health care, and trade industries. The Washington state opportunity scholarship has successfully created opportunities for communities historically left out of higher education and STEM, including women, students of color, and first-generation college students. In addition, the Washington state opportunity scholarship has been shown to change communities by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The legislature also finds that higher education is a key driver of individual growth and prosperity, and is an effective way to bridge societal inequities that disproportionately afflict low-income communities and communities of color. The legislature further finds that these gaps will be further widened in the current global pandemic, which will exacerbate long-term impacts on these communities in intergenerational poverty, job attainment, job stability, and wage growth.

Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to amend the existing Washington state opportunity scholarship program to eliminate false barriers for students eligible for the scholarship and provide additional educational opportunities for Washington's citizens. This legislative intent is particularly urgent during the global pandemic where additional skills and opportunities will be vital for Washington citizens as the state moves toward recovery from the current global pandemic." [2021 c 133 s 1.]

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.100.

RCW 28B.145.020 Opportunity scholarship board. (1) The opportunity scholarship board is created. The board consists of eleven members:

(a) Six members appointed by the governor. For three of the six appointments, the governor shall consider names from a list provided

by the president of the senate and the speaker of the house of representatives; and

(b) Five foundation or business and industry representatives appointed by the governor from among the state's most productive industries such as aerospace, manufacturing, health care, information technology, engineering, agriculture, and others, as well as philanthropy. The foundation or business and industry representatives shall be selected from among nominations provided by the private sector donors to the opportunity scholarship and opportunity expansion programs. However, the governor may request, and the private sector donors shall provide, an additional list or lists from which the governor shall select these representatives.

(2) Board members shall hold their offices for a term of four years from the first day of September and until their successors are appointed. No more than the terms of two members may expire simultaneously on the last day of August in any one year.

(3) The members of the board shall elect one of the business and industry representatives to serve as chair.

(4) Seven members of the board constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. In case of a vacancy, or when an appointment is made after the date of expiration of the term, the governor or the president of the senate or the speaker of the house of representatives, depending upon which made the initial appointment to that position, shall fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term of the board member whose office has become vacant or expired.

(5) The board shall be staffed by one or more program administrators, under contract with the board and the council. The board may cause one or more tax-exempt nonprofit corporations to be created, organized, and operated exclusively to perform some or all of the program administrator duties under chapter 176, Laws of 2023. The board and council may contract directly with any such nonprofit corporation.

(6) The purpose of the board is to provide oversight and guidance for the opportunity expansion program, the opportunity scholarship program, and the rural jobs program, in light of established legislative priorities and to fulfill the duties and responsibilities under this chapter, including but not limited to determining eligible education programs and eligible advanced degree programs for purposes of the opportunity scholarship program and rural jobs program. In determining eligible advanced degree programs, the board shall consider advanced degree programs that lead to credentials in health professions that include, but are not limited to, primary care, dental care, behavioral health, and public health. Duties, exercised jointly with the program administrator, include soliciting funds and setting annual fund-raising goals.

(7) The board may report to the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature with recommendations as to:

(a) Whether some or all of the scholarships should be changed to conditional scholarships that must be repaid in the event the participant does not complete the eligible education program;

(b) A source or sources of funds for the opportunity expansion program in addition to the voluntary contributions of the high-technology research and development tax credit under *RCW 82.32.800; and

(c) Whether the program should include a loan repayment or low-interest or no-interest loan component for the advanced degree portion of the program. [2023 c 176 s 2; 2019 c 406 s 64. Prior: 2018 c 254 s

2; 2018 c 209 s 7; 2018 c 114 s 3; 2014 c 208 s 2; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 3.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 82.32.800 was repealed by 2025 c 399 s 1.

Effective date—2023 c 176: See note following RCW 28B.145.010.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.100.

RCW 28B.145.030 Program administrator—Duties—Specified accounts. (1) The program administrator shall provide administrative support to execute the duties and responsibilities provided in this chapter, including but not limited to publicizing the program, selecting participants for the opportunity scholarship award, distributing opportunity scholarship awards, and achieving the maximum possible rate of return on investment of the accounts in subsection (2) of this section, while ensuring transparency in the investment decisions and processes. Duties, exercised jointly with the board, include soliciting funds and setting annual fund-raising goals. The program administrator shall be paid an administrative fee as determined by the board.

(2) With respect to the opportunity scholarship program, the program administrator shall:

(a) Establish and manage the specified accounts created in (b) of this subsection, into which to receive grants and contributions from private sources as well as state matching funds, and from which to disburse scholarship funds to participants;

(b) Solicit and accept grants and contributions from private sources, via direct payment, pledge agreement, or escrow account, of private sources for deposit into any of the specified accounts created in this subsection (2)(b) upon the direction of the donor and in accordance with this subsection (2)(b):

(i) The "scholarship account," whose principal may be invaded, and from which scholarships must be disbursed for baccalaureate programs beginning no later than December 1, 2011, if, by that date, state matching funds in the amount of five million dollars or more have been received. Thereafter, scholarships shall be disbursed on an annual basis beginning no later than May 1, 2012, and every October 1st thereafter;

(ii) The "student support pathways account," whose principal may be invaded, and from which scholarships may be disbursed for professional-technical certificate or degree programs in the fiscal year following appropriations of state matching funds. Thereafter, scholarships shall be disbursed on an annual basis;

(iii) The "advanced degrees pathways account," whose principal may be invaded, and from which scholarships may be disbursed for eligible advanced degree programs in the fiscal year following appropriations of state matching funds. Thereafter, scholarships shall be disbursed on an annual basis;

(iv) The "endowment account," from which scholarship moneys may be disbursed for baccalaureate programs from earnings only in years when:

(A) The state match has been made into both the scholarship and the endowment account; and

(B) The state appropriations for the Washington college grant program under chapter 28B.92 RCW meet or exceed state appropriations for the state need grant made in the 2011-2013 biennium, adjusted for inflation, and eligibility for Washington college grant recipients is at least seventy percent of state median family income;

(v) An amount equal to at least fifty percent of all grants and contributions must be deposited into the scholarship account until such time as twenty million dollars have been deposited into the scholarship account, after which time the private donors may designate whether their contributions must be deposited to the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, or the endowment account. The board and the program administrator must work to maximize private sector contributions to these accounts to maintain a robust scholarship program while simultaneously building the endowment, and to determine the division between the accounts in the case of undesignated grants and contributions, taking into account the need for a long-term funding mechanism and the short-term needs of families and students in Washington. The first five million dollars in state match, as provided in RCW 28B.145.040, shall be deposited into the scholarship account and thereafter the state match shall be deposited into the specified accounts created in this subsection (2)(b) in equal proportion to the private funds deposited in each account, except that no more than \$5,000,000 in state match shall be deposited into the advanced degrees pathways account in a single fiscal biennium; and

(vi) Once moneys in the opportunity scholarship match transfer account are subject to an agreement under RCW 28B.145.050(5) and are deposited in the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, or the endowment account under this section, the state acts in a fiduciary rather than ownership capacity with regard to those assets. Assets in the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, and the endowment account are not considered state money, common cash, or revenue to the state;

(c) Provide proof of receipt of grants and contributions from private sources to the council, identifying the amounts received by name of private source and date, and whether the amounts received were deposited into the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, or the endowment account;

(d) In consultation with the council and the state board for community and technical colleges, make an assessment of the reasonable annual eligible expenses associated with eligible education programs and eligible advanced degree programs identified by the board;

(e) Determine the dollar difference between tuition fees charged by institutions of higher education in the 2008-09 academic year and

the academic year for which an opportunity scholarship is being distributed;

(f) Develop and implement an application, selection, and notification process for awarding opportunity scholarships;

(g) Ensure that if the private source is from a federally recognized Indian tribe, municipality, or county, an amount at least equal to the value of the private source plus the state match is awarded to participants within that federally recognized Indian tribe, municipality, or county according to the federally recognized Indian tribe's, municipality's, or county's program rules;

(h) Determine the annual amount of the opportunity scholarship for each selected participant. The annual amount shall be at least one thousand dollars or the amount determined under (e) of this subsection, but may be increased on an income-based, sliding scale basis up to the amount necessary to cover all reasonable annual eligible expenses as assessed pursuant to (d) of this subsection, or to encourage participation in professional-technical certificate programs, professional-technical degree programs, baccalaureate degree programs, or eligible advanced degree programs identified by the board;

(i) Distribute scholarship funds to selected participants. Once awarded, and to the extent funds are available for distribution, an opportunity scholarship shall be automatically renewed as long as the participant annually submits documentation of filing both a free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and for available federal education tax credits including, but not limited to, the American opportunity tax credit, or if ineligible to apply for federal student aid, the participant annually submits documentation of filing a state financial aid application as approved by the office of student financial assistance; and until the participant withdraws from or is no longer attending the program, completes the program, or has extended beyond five years or 125 percent of the published program length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent as defined in the Washington college grant program;

(j) Notify institutions of scholarship recipients who will attend their institutions and inform them of the terms of the students' eligibility; and

(k) For participants enrolled in an eligible advanced degree program, document each participant's employment following graduation.

(3) With respect to the opportunity expansion program, the program administrator shall:

(a) Assist the board in developing and implementing an application, selection, and notification process for making opportunity expansion awards; and

(b) Solicit and accept grants and contributions from private sources for opportunity expansion awards. [2022 c 211 s 2; 2021 c 170 s 5; 2019 c 406 s 65. Prior: 2018 c 209 s 8; 2018 c 204 s 2; 2018 c 114 s 4; 2014 c 208 s 3; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 4.]

Findings—Intent—2021 c 170: See note following RCW 71.24.887.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

RCW 28B.145.040 Opportunity scholarship program. (1) The opportunity scholarship program is established.

(2) The purpose of this scholarship program is to provide scholarships that will help low and middle-income Washington residents earn professional-technical certificates, professional-technical degrees, baccalaureate degrees in high employer demand and other programs of study, and advanced degrees in health professions, and encourage them to remain in the state to work. The program must be designed for students starting professional-technical certificate or degree programs, students starting at two-year institutions of higher education and intending to transfer to four-year institutions of higher education, students starting at four-year institutions of higher education, and students enrolled in eligible advanced degree programs.

(3) The opportunity scholarship board shall determine which programs of study, including but not limited to high employer demand programs, are eligible for purposes of the opportunity scholarship. For eligible advanced degree programs, the board shall limit scholarships to eligible students enrolling in programs that lead to credentials in health professions.

(4) (a) The source of funds for the program shall be a combination of private grants and contributions and state matching funds. A state match may be earned under this section for private contributions made on or after June 6, 2011.

(b) (i) The state must provide an annual appropriation for a state match, on an equal dollar basis, not to exceed \$50,000,000 per fiscal year.

(ii) Appropriations for the state match in the biennial omnibus operating appropriations act must be based on estimated donations and pledges for those fiscal years as reported by the board to the office of financial management as of the date each official state caseload forecast is submitted by the caseload forecast council to the legislative fiscal committees, as provided under RCW 43.88C.020.

(iii) Annually in the supplemental omnibus operating appropriations act, the state match must be adjusted to donations received and estimated pledges committed for the current fiscal biennium as reported by the board to the office of financial management as of the date each official state caseload forecast is submitted by the caseload forecast council to the legislative fiscal committees, as provided under RCW 43.88C.020. Additionally, the state match for the current fiscal year must be adjusted to reflect the excess or deficit between donations and pledges actually received in the prior fiscal year and the state match provided in the prior fiscal year.

(iv) The purpose of this subsection (4)(b) is to ensure the predictable treatment of the program in the budget process by clarifying the calculation process of the state match required by this section and ensuring the program is budgeted at maintenance level.

[2023 c 176 s 3; 2019 c 406 s 66. Prior: 2018 c 209 s 9; 2018 c 114 s 5; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 5.]

Effective date—2023 c 176: See note following RCW 28B.145.010.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

RCW 28B.145.050 Opportunity scholarship match transfer account.

(1) The opportunity scholarship match transfer account is created in the custody of the state treasurer as a nonappropriated account to be used solely and exclusively for the opportunity scholarship program created in RCW 28B.145.040 and the local government partner promise programs authorized in RCW 28B.145.140. The purpose of the account is to provide matching funds for the opportunity scholarship program and the local government partner promise programs.

(2) Revenues to the account shall consist of appropriations by the legislature into the account and any gifts, grants, or donations received by the executive director of the council for this purpose.

(3) No expenditures from the account may be made except upon receipt of proof, by the executive director of the council from the program administrator, of private contributions to the opportunity scholarship program. Expenditures, in the form of matching funds, may not exceed the total amount of private contributions.

(4) Only the executive director of the council or the executive director's designee may authorize expenditures from the opportunity scholarship match transfer account. Such authorization must be made as soon as practicable following receipt of proof as required under subsection (3) of this section.

(5) The council shall enter into an appropriate agreement with the program administrator to demonstrate exchange of consideration for the matching funds.

(6) During the 2019-2021 fiscal biennium, expenditures from the opportunity scholarship match transfer account may be used for payment to the program administrator for administrative duties carried out under this chapter in an amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars per fiscal year. [2025 c 254 s 4; 2020 c 357 s 912; 2014 c 208 s 5; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 6.]

Purpose—Intent—2025 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.140.

Effective date—2020 c 357: See note following RCW 43.79.545.

RCW 28B.145.055 Opportunity scholarship program—Awards not considered state-funded. The office of student financial assistance and the institutions of higher education may not consider awards made

under the opportunity scholarship program to be state-funded for the purpose of determining the value of an award for other state financial aid programs. [2019 c 406 s 68.]

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

RCW 28B.145.060 Opportunity expansion program—Generally—Reports. (1) The opportunity expansion program is established.

(2) The board shall select institutions of higher education to receive opportunity expansion awards. In so doing, the board must:

(a) Solicit, receive, and evaluate proposals from institutions of higher education that are designed to directly increase the number of baccalaureate degrees produced in high employer demand and other programs of study, and that include annual numerical targets for the number of such degrees, with a strong emphasis on serving students who received their high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington or are adult Washington residents who are returning to school to gain a baccalaureate degree;

(b) Develop criteria for evaluating proposals and awarding funds to the proposals deemed most likely to increase the number of baccalaureate degrees and degrees produced in high employer demand and other programs of study;

(c) Give priority to proposals that include a partnership between public and private partnership entities that leverage additional private funds;

(d) Give priority to proposals that are innovative, efficient, and cost-effective, given the nature and cost of the particular program of study;

(e) Consult and operate in consultation with existing higher education stakeholders, including but not limited to: Faculty, labor, student organizations, and relevant higher education agencies; and

(f) Determine which proposals to improve and accelerate the production of baccalaureate degrees in high employer demand and other programs of study will receive opportunity expansion awards for the following state fiscal year, notify the state treasurer, and announce the awards.

(3) The state treasurer, at the direction of the board, must distribute the funds that have been awarded to the institutions of higher education from the *opportunity expansion account.

(4) Institutions of higher education receiving awards under this section may not supplant existing general fund state revenues with opportunity expansion awards.

(5) Annually, the office of financial management shall report to the board, the governor, and the relevant committees of the legislature regarding the percentage of Washington households with

incomes in the middle-income bracket or higher. For purposes of this section, "middle-income bracket" means household incomes between two hundred and five hundred percent of the 2010 federal poverty level, as determined by the United States department of health and human services for a family of four, adjusted annually for inflation.

(6) Annually, the council must report to the board, the governor, and the relevant committees of the legislature regarding the increase in the number of degrees in high employer demand and other programs of study awarded by institutions of higher education over the average of the preceding ten academic years.

(7) In its comprehensive plan, the workforce training and education coordinating board shall include specific strategies to reach the goal of increasing the percentage of Washington households living in the middle-income bracket or higher, as calculated by the office of financial management and developed by the agency or education institution that will lead the strategy. [2014 c 208 s 6; 2013 c 39 s 14; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 7.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 82.32.800 creating the "opportunity expansion account" was repealed by 2025 c 399 s 1.

RCW 28B.145.070 Reports—Review for legislative action. (1)

Annually each December 1st, the board, together with the program administrator, shall report to the council, the governor, and the appropriate committees of the legislature regarding the rural jobs program, the opportunity scholarship program, and the opportunity expansion program, including but not limited to:

(a) Which education programs the board determined were eligible for purposes of the opportunity scholarship and which high employer demand fields within eligible counties were identified for purposes of the rural jobs program;

(b) The number of applicants for the opportunity scholarship and rural jobs program, disaggregated, to the extent possible, by race, ethnicity, gender, county of origin, age, and median family income;

(c) The number of participants in the opportunity scholarship program and rural jobs program, disaggregated, to the extent possible, by race, ethnicity, gender, county of origin, age, and median family income;

(d) The number and amount of the scholarships actually awarded, whether the scholarships were paid from the student support pathways account, the scholarship account, or the endowment account, and the number and amount of scholarships actually awarded under the rural jobs program;

(e) The institutions and eligible education programs in which opportunity scholarship participants enrolled, together with data regarding participants' completion and graduation, and the institutions and programs in which recipients of the rural jobs program scholarship enrolled, together with recipients' data on completion and graduation;

(f) The total amount of private contributions and state match moneys received for the rural jobs program and the opportunity scholarship program, how the funds under the opportunity scholarship program were distributed between the student support pathways account, the scholarship account, and the endowment account, the interest or other earnings on all the accounts created under this chapter, and the amount of any administrative fee paid to the program administrator;

- (g) Identification of the programs the board selected to receive opportunity expansion awards and the amount of such awards; and
 - (h) For local government partners as defined in RCW 28B.145.140:
 - (i) The total amount of private contributions and state match moneys received; and
 - (ii) The total number of students served by each local government partner.
- (2) In the next succeeding legislative session following receipt of a report required under subsection (1) of this section, the appropriate committees of the legislature shall review the report and consider whether any legislative action is necessary with respect to the rural jobs program, the opportunity scholarship program, or the opportunity expansion program, including but not limited to consideration of whether any legislative action is necessary with respect to the nature and level of focus on high employer demand fields and the number and amount of scholarships. [2025 c 254 s 5; 2018 c 254 s 8; 2014 c 208 s 7; 2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 8.]

Purpose—Intent—2025 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.140.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.100.

RCW 28B.145.080 Evaluation of opportunity scholarship and opportunity expansion programs by joint legislative audit and review committee. (1) Beginning in 2018, the joint legislative audit and review committee shall evaluate the opportunity scholarship and opportunity expansion programs, and submit a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 1, 2018. The committee's evaluation shall include, but not be limited to:

- (a) The number and type of eligible education programs as determined by the opportunity scholarship board;
- (b) The number of participants in the opportunity scholarship program in relation to the number of participants who completed a baccalaureate degree;
- (c) The total cumulative number of students who received opportunity scholarships, and the total cumulative number of students who gained a baccalaureate degree after receiving an opportunity scholarship and the types of baccalaureate degrees awarded;
- (d) The amount of private contributions to the opportunity scholarship program, annually and in total;
- (e) The amount of state match moneys to the opportunity scholarship program, annually and in total;
- (f) The amount of any administrative fees paid to the program administrator, annually and in total;
- (g) The source and amount of funding, annually and cumulatively, for the opportunity expansion program;
- (h) The number and type of proposals submitted by institutions for opportunity expansion awards, the number and type of proposals that received an award of opportunity expansion funds, and the amount of such awards;
- (i) The total cumulative number of additional high employer demand degrees produced in Washington state due to the opportunity expansion program, including both the initial opportunity expansion awards and the subsequent inclusion in base funding; and

(j) Evidence that the existence of the opportunity scholarship and opportunity expansion programs have contributed to the achievement of the public policy objectives of helping to mitigate the impact of tuition increases, increasing the number of baccalaureate degrees in high employer demand and other programs, and investing in programs and students to meet market demands for a knowledge-based economy while filling middle-income jobs with a sufficient supply of skilled workers.

(2) In the event that the joint legislative audit and review committee is charged with completing an evaluation of other aspects of degree production, funding, or other aspects of higher education in 2018, and to the extent that it is economical and feasible to do so, the committee shall combine the multiple evaluations and submit a single report. [2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 9.]

RCW 28B.145.085 Eligibility verification—Outcome data. (1) All institutions of higher education that participate in the opportunity scholarship program, including a local government partner promise scholarship program pursuant to RCW 28B.145.140, shall provide timely verification of eligibility information to the program administrator.

(2) Beginning in 2025, the education research and data center shall provide data on the outcomes of Washington state opportunity scholarship recipients and graduates by November 1st of each year. [2025 c 254 s 3.]

Purpose—Intent—2025 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.140.

RCW 28B.145.090 Investments by the state investment board. (1) The board may elect to have the state investment board invest the funds in the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, and the endowment account described under RCW 28B.145.030(2)(b). If the board so elects, the state investment board has the full power to invest, reinvest, manage, contract, sell, or exchange investment money in these accounts. All investment and operating costs associated with the investment of money shall be paid under RCW 43.33A.160 and 43.84.160. With the exception of these expenses, the earnings from the investment of the money shall be retained by the accounts.

(2) All investments made by the state investment board shall be made with the exercise of that degree of judgment and care under RCW 43.33A.140 and the investment policy established by the state investment board.

(3) As deemed appropriate by the state investment board, money in the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, and the endowment account may be commingled for investment with other funds subject to investment by the state investment board.

(4) Members of the state investment board shall not be considered an insurer of the funds or assets and are not liable for any action or inaction.

(5) Members of the state investment board are not liable to the state, to the fund, or to any other person as a result of their activities as members, whether ministerial or discretionary, except for willful dishonesty or intentional violations of law. The state

investment board in its discretion may purchase liability insurance for members.

(6) The authority to establish all policies relating to the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, and the endowment account, other than the investment policies as provided in subsections (1) through (3) of this section, resides with the board and program administrator acting in accordance with the principles set forth in this chapter. With the exception of expenses of the state investment board in subsection (1) of this section, disbursements from the scholarship account, the student support pathways account, the advanced degrees pathways account, and the endowment account shall be made only on the authorization of the opportunity scholarship board or its designee, and moneys in the accounts may be spent only for the purposes specified in this chapter.

(7) The state investment board shall routinely consult and communicate with the board on the investment policy, earnings of the accounts, and related needs of the program. [2019 c 406 s 67. Prior: 2018 c 254 s 3; 2018 c 209 s 10; 2018 c 114 s 6; 2014 c 208 s 4.]

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.79.195.

Findings—Short title—2019 c 406: See notes following RCW 28B.92.200.

Findings—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28B.94.020.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 28C.30.050.

Findings—Intent—2019 c 406: See note following RCW 43.216.135.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.100.

RCW 28B.145.100 Rural jobs program. (1)(a) The rural county high employer demand jobs program is created to meet the workforce needs of business and industry in rural counties by assisting students in earning certificates, associate degrees, or other industry-recognized credentials necessary for employment in high employer demand fields.

(b) Subject to the requirements of this section, the rural jobs program provides selected students scholarship funds and support services, as determined by the board, to help students meet their eligible expenses when they enroll in a community or technical college program that prepares them for high employer demand fields.

(c) The source of funds for the rural jobs program shall be a combination of private donations, grants, and contributions and state matching funds.

(d) The state must provide an annual appropriation for the state match, on an equal dollar basis, not to exceed \$1,000,000 each fiscal biennium.

(i) Appropriations for the state match in the biennial omnibus operating appropriations act must be based on estimated donations and pledges for those fiscal years as reported by the board to the office of financial management as of the date each official state caseload

forecast is submitted by the caseload forecast council to the legislative fiscal committees, as provided under RCW 43.88C.020.

(ii) Annually in the supplemental omnibus operating appropriations act, the state match must be adjusted to donations received and estimated pledges committed for the current fiscal biennium as reported by the board to the office of financial management as of the date each official state caseload forecast is submitted by the caseload forecast council to the legislative fiscal committees, as provided under RCW 43.88C.020. Additionally, the state match for the current fiscal year must be adjusted to reflect the excess or deficit between donations and pledges actually received in the prior fiscal year and the state match provided in the prior fiscal year.

(iii) The purpose of this subsection (1)(d) is to ensure the predictable treatment of the program in the budget process by clarifying the calculation process of the state match required by this section and to ensure the program is budgeted at maintenance level.

(2) The program administrator has the duties and responsibilities provided under this section, including but not limited to:

(a) Publicize the rural jobs program and conducting outreach to eligible counties;

(b) In consultation with the state board for community and technical colleges, any interested community or technical college located in an eligible county, and the county's workforce development council, identify high employer demand fields within the eligible counties. When identifying high employer demand fields, the board must consider:

(i) County-specific employer demand reports issued by the employment security department or the list of statewide high-demand programs for secondary career and technical education established under RCW 28A.700.020; and

(ii) The ability and capacity of the community and technical college to meet the needs of qualifying students and industry in the eligible county;

(c) Develop and implement an application, selection, and notification process for awarding rural jobs program scholarship funds. In making determinations on scholarship recipients, the board shall use county-specific employer high-demand data;

(d) Determine the annual scholarship fund amounts to be awarded to selected students;

(e) Distribute funds to selected students;

(f) Notify institutions of higher education of the rural jobs program recipients who will attend their institutions of higher education and inform them of the scholarship fund amounts and terms of the awards; and

(g) Establish and manage an account as provided under RCW 28B.145.110 to receive donations, grants, contributions from private sources, and state matching funds, and from which to disburse scholarship funds to selected students.

(3) To be eligible for scholarship funds under the rural jobs program, a student must:

(a) Either:

(i) Be a resident of an eligible county;

(ii) Have attended and graduated from a school in an eligible school district; or

(iii) Be enrolled in either a community or technical college established under chapter 28B.50 RCW located in an eligible county or

participating in an eligible registered apprenticeship program under chapter 28B.92 RCW in an eligible county;

(b) Be a resident student as defined in the Washington college grant program in RCW 28B.92.200(5)(c);

(c) Be in a certificate, degree, or other industry-recognized credential or training program that has been identified by the board as a program that prepares students for a high employer demand field;

(d) Have a family income that does not exceed seventy percent of the state median family income adjusted for family size; and

(e) Demonstrate financial need according to the free application for federal student aid or the Washington application for state financial aid.

(4) To remain eligible for scholarship funds under the rural jobs program, the student must meet satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as established by the program. Rural jobs program eligibility may not extend beyond five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(5) A scholarship award under the rural jobs program may not result in a reduction of any gift aid. Nothing in this section creates any right or entitlement. [2023 c 176 s 4; 2022 c 211 s 3; 2021 c 133 s 3; 2018 c 254 s 4.]

Effective date—2023 c 176: See note following RCW 28B.145.010.

Findings—Intent—2021 c 133: See note following RCW 28B.145.010.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: "(1) The legislature recognizes that:

(a) According to research from Georgetown University, by the year 2020, seventy percent of jobs in Washington state will require at least some education and training beyond high school, which aligns with Washington's educational attainment goals established under RCW 28B.77.020; and

(b) Research by the state board for community and technical colleges and other entities has found that attending college for at least one year and earning a credential results in a substantial boost in earnings for adults who enter a community college with a high school diploma or less.

(2) In addition, the legislature finds that:

(a) Rural counties face unique challenges to achieving full economic and community development in the face of societal trends that concentrate job and population growth in larger metropolitan areas. For example, seventy-five percent of the job growth in Washington by 2018 is projected to be confined to just five large counties. In addition, two-thirds of the state's recent population growth has occurred in the three largest counties and seven counties have actually lost population in recent years.

(b) One barrier to economic growth and investment in many rural counties is the lack of a trained, qualified workforce for the opportunities present in rural areas, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health care fields of study. These opportunities often require specialized skills tailored for specific, regional employer needs. In many cases, employment opportunities are available in rural communities; however,

some assistance is needed to help local residents acquire the skills necessary to access the opportunities in their own backyards.

(3) The legislature declares that opportunity, community vitality, quality of life, and prosperity are essential for all Washington communities. Therefore, the legislature intends to create a program to assist rural communities in growing the workforce the community needs to meet its specific industry sector demands." [2018 c 254 s 1.]

RCW 28B.145.110 Rural jobs program—Administrator duties—Student support pathways account. (1) For the purposes of the rural jobs program, the program administrator shall:

(a) Jointly with the board, solicit and accept donations, grants, and contributions from private sources via direct payment, pledge agreement, or escrow account, for deposit into the student support pathways account created in this section, and set annual fund-raising goals;

(b) Establish and manage the student support pathways account to receive grants, contributions from private sources, and state matching funds, and from which to disburse scholarship funds to selected students; and

(c) Provide proof of receipt of grants and contributions from private sources to the council, identifying the amounts received by the name of the private source and date received, and whether the amounts received were deposited into the student support pathways account.

(2) The student support pathways account, whose principal may be invaded, must be created by the board from which scholarship funds will be disbursed beginning no later than the fall term of the 2020 academic year, if by that date, state matching funds have been received. Thereafter, scholarship funds shall be disbursed on an annual basis. [2018 c 254 s 5.]

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.100.

RCW 28B.145.120 Rural jobs program—Match transfer account. (1) The rural jobs program match transfer account is created in the custody of the state treasurer as a nonappropriated account to be used solely and exclusively for the rural jobs program created in RCW 28B.145.100. The purpose of the rural jobs program match transfer account is to provide state matching funds for the rural jobs program.

(2) Revenues to the rural jobs program match transfer account shall consist of appropriations by the legislature into the rural jobs program match transfer account.

(3) No expenditures from the rural jobs program match transfer account may be made except upon receipt of proof, by the executive director of the council from the program administrator, of private contributions to the rural jobs program. Expenditures, in the form of matching funds, may not exceed the total amount of private contributions.

(4) Only the executive director of the council or the executive director's designee may authorize expenditures from the rural jobs program match transfer account. Such authorization must be made as

soon as practicable following receipt of proof as required under this section.

(5) (a) The council shall enter into an appropriate agreement with the program administrator to demonstrate exchange of consideration for the matching funds.

(b) Once moneys in the rural jobs program match transfer account are subject to an agreement under this subsection and are deposited in the student support pathways account, the state acts in a fiduciary rather than ownership capacity with regard to those assets. Assets in the student support pathways account are not considered state money, common cash, or revenue to the state. [2023 c 176 s 5; 2018 c 254 s 6.]

Effective date—2023 c 176: See note following RCW 28B.145.010.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: See note following RCW 28B.145.100.

RCW 28B.145.140 Local government partner promise scholarship program. (1) A local government partner may establish its own promise scholarship program within the opportunity scholarship program. The local government partner promise scholarship program shall be administered by the Washington state opportunity scholarship program. The program administrator shall assist the local government partner in the selection, notification, and disbursement of scholarship awards.

(2) To be eligible to participate in a local government partner promise scholarship program, a student must have received his or her high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 in Washington and attend a public two-year institution of higher education or a professional-technical certificate or degree program as approved by the state board for community and technical colleges under RCW 28B.50.090 (7) (c). Eligibility may not extend beyond three years or 125 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(3) A local government partner that establishes a promise scholarship program may establish separate rules for its program that are independent from the broader Washington state opportunity scholarship program.

(4) The value of the scholarship award under the local government partner promise scholarship program is, at minimum, the difference between the recipient's total tuition fees as defined in RCW 28B.15.020 and services and activities fees as defined in RCW 28B.15.041, less the value of any state-funded grant including the college bound scholarship program established in chapter 28B.118 RCW and the Washington college grant created in RCW 28B.92.200, scholarship, gift aid, or waiver assistance the recipient receives. The local government partner may provide additional scholarship awards to cover reasonable expenses associated with the costs of acquiring an education such as books, equipment, room and board, and other expenses as determined by the local government partner.

(5) The office of student financial assistance and the institutions of higher education may not consider awards made under a local government partner's promise scholarship program to be state-funded for the purpose of determining the value of an award for other state financial aid programs.

(6) If a student participating in a local government partner promise scholarship program transfers to an institution not eligible under the local government partner's promise scholarship program rules, the student must reapply to the broader opportunity scholarship program and meet all eligibility requirements. A local government partner may continue to provide funds to the student through its own promise scholarship program if the local government partner's program rules allow continued payment. A student may not receive funds from the broader Washington state opportunity scholarship program and the local government partner promise scholarship program at the same time.

(7) A participating student's eligibility must be reconfirmed prior to each disbursement of funds.

(8) In consultation with the local government partner, the administrator's duties include:

(a) Implementing a selection and notification process for awarding local government scholarship funds;

(b) Distributing funds to selected students; and

(c) Notifying institutions of higher education of the local government scholarship recipients who will attend their institutions of higher education and informing the institutions of the scholarship fund amounts and terms of the awards.

(9) Ten percent of the local government partner funds, excluding state matching funds, may be used for the operational costs listed in subsection (8) of this section. The local government partner may opt to have additional programmatic support from the broader Washington opportunity scholarship program, such as application or marketing support, for an additional agreed-upon fee.

(10) In the event that there are not enough funds to serve all eligible applicants, priority must be given to applicants to the broader Washington state opportunity scholarship program over applicants to a government partner promise scholarship program.

(11) For each local government partner promise scholarship program, state matching funds shall be limited to \$250,000 per fiscal year.

(12) For purposes of this section, "government partner" means municipalities, counties, or federally recognized Indian tribes.

(13) To be eligible for a state match in the 2025-27 biennium, a local government partner shall submit a pledge amount to the program administrator referencing the local government partner promise scholarship program by February 1, 2025. [2025 c 254 s 2.]

Purpose—Intent—2025 c 254: "The legislature recognizes that postsecondary credentials are vital for creating and maintaining a skilled workforce. To increase Washington's skilled workforce, local governments are encouraged to establish their own local government partner promise scholarship programs within the Washington state opportunity scholarship program to further reduce barriers for students within their jurisdiction. Current barriers may include scholarship applications, income limits, and degree program requirements. The purpose of this act is for local governments that establish local government partner promise scholarship programs to have minimal administrative duties, making benefits to students substantial. Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to encourage additional local government partner promise scholarship programs to serve more students with fewer barriers." [2025 c 254 s 1.]

RCW 28B.145.900 Short title. This chapter may be known and cited as the opportunity scholarship act. [2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 11.]

RCW 28B.145.901 Effective date—2011 1st sp.s. c 13. This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [June 6, 2011]. [2011 1st sp.s. c 13 s 13.]