



Highline College Legislative Agenda- Washington State Legislative Session

Supplemental Budget Request

The overriding theme is to preserve funding for community and technical colleges in our region and for Highline College to ensure that the contract with our represented employees in WPEA is included. At Highline College, our personnel costs are the biggest part of our budget. Over a 5-year period, our enrollment has grown to pre-pandemic levels (11% increase from 2021-2022 to 2024-2025), and our percentage of students on federal and state financial aid has increased from 35% to over 60% in that same period. Highline College has more students and more students accessing aid and yet what often stands between a student accessing their aid and getting into their classes is access to financial aid and access advisors to assist them to plan and schedule the classes they need to earn their degree.

Federal Issues

The dismantling of the Department of Education and the threats to the TRIO programs, which have been a cornerstone of programming to assist first generation, low income and individuals with disabilities to navigate higher ed and access critical resources. Students in TRIO programs far outperform their peers, and at Highline College we have had TRIO Student Support Services since 2010 and more than 1100 students have participated. Highline also has a current TRIO Talent Search grant, which partners with K12 to build pathways to college with middle school and high school students and is an applicant for a TRIO SSS Stem grant.

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2026 SUPPLEMENTAL OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST

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Washington's community and technical colleges ask the Legislature to keep our colleges whole by fully funding compensation increases for faculty and staff as they support our students on their journey to well-paying jobs that support themselves, their families, and their communities.

Our top priority: serving students

While we recognize the constraints of the current deficit, our colleges face challenges that directly impact our ability to fulfill our mission of providing high-quality, career-relevant, and accessible education and training to our students. To provide the education that students and employers want and demand, our colleges need faculty and staff who are well versed in their fields as well as classrooms, labs, and support services. With already tight budgets, legislatively-mandated compensation increases that are not fully funded means colleges have to make cuts elsewhere — whether it be student services, instructional programs, or critical infrastructure — impacting their ability to serve students and accomplish that priority.

This year, the community and technical college system respectfully requests the Legislature return to its past policy of fully-funding compensation increases as well as correcting a technical error in the enacted budget that underfunds academic employee cost-of-living adjustments.

Both items are essential to maintaining instructional capacity, recruiting and retaining qualified employees, and supporting equitable student success. Without full funding, colleges will face untenable choices between funding mandated compensation and providing critical student services in areas like technology for online learning, software subscriptions, utilities, instructional materials, cybersecurity, and campus safety.

Fully-funded compensation increases (\$15.3 million)

We're grateful to the Legislature for providing much-needed general wage increases in FY 2026 and FY 2027 for our classified and non-represented staff. However, with only partial funding of the general wage increase in the enacted budget, colleges must backfill the unfunded portion of these increases with tuition and local funds. With more than 80% of college operating budgets tied to personnel costs, colleges are severely constrained in where they can find funds for the mandated increases. To relieve that pressure, we urge the Legislature to return to providing 100% funding for compensation in the 2026 supplemental operating budget. Requested funds are for FY 2027.

I-732 COLA correction (\$7.1 million)

Under RCW 28B.50.465 and RCW 28B.50.468, and reaffirmed by SB 5790 (2025), the state is required to fully fund COLAs for academic employees and classified employees at technical colleges under I-732. Instead, the 2025-27 enacted budget provided only partial state support and shifted the remainder to local tuition operating fees. This created an unfunded mandate. Therefore, we respectfully ask that the Legislature correct this technical error in the budget. Requested funds are for FY 2027.