

RCW 28B.10.935 Hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plan
—Benefits navigators—Survey and reports—Definitions. (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, each institution of higher education, the university campuses created under chapter 28B.45 RCW, and the tribal college must have a minimum of one benefits navigator employed at a minimum .75 full-time equivalent rate, not to be divided between two or more staff, to assist students in accessing public benefits, existing emergency assistance programs such as those funded by RCW 28B.50.295, and other community resources. Each benefits navigator must be stationed at a single location on campus where students are directed to receive assistance. The institutions of higher education and the tribal college, in coordination with the respective benefits navigators, must each develop a hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plan by April 1, 2024. Each strategic plan must:

- (a) Identify campus food pantry policies that, in practice, create barriers to access and reduce or remove those barriers in the implementation of this subsection;
- (b) Review and update methods to identify likely low-income and food-insecure students and conduct communications and outreach methods by the institution to promote opportunities for benefits assistance (such as basic food enrollment, working connections child care enrollment, referrals to the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children, affordable housing assistance) and emergency financial resources;
- (c) Assess the needs and advantages of the benefits navigators;
- (d) Identify opportunities for the institution and partnerships with community-based organizations to holistically support students' basic needs, access to benefits and community resources;
- (e) Facilitate discussions and generate recommendations amongst community stakeholders on the basic needs of the institution's geographic postsecondary student population; and
- (f) Assess the distribution of state funds for basic needs support provided to institutions of higher education and the tribal college.

(2) By the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year, the Washington student achievement council must collect and disseminate results of a student survey developed by the student achievement council, in collaboration with the state board for community and technical colleges and an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher education, to assess food security, housing security, and access to basic economic supports. Results from the survey may be used by the institutions of higher education and the tribal college. Existing survey tools may be used for this purpose.

(3) Public four-year institutions of higher education and their respective university campuses shall coordinate with an organization representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions to submit a report that must include outcomes from implementation of benefits navigators and findings and activities from their respective hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plans. The community and technical colleges shall coordinate with the state board for community and technical colleges to submit a report that must include outcomes from implementation of benefits navigators and findings and activities from their respective hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plans. The organizations representing the presidents of the public four-year institutions and the state board for community and technical

colleges must submit the reports by December 1, 2025, and every other year thereafter, to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036.

(4) The tribal college shall submit a report that must include the findings and activities from implementation of the benefits navigator and findings and activities from the hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plan. The tribal college must submit the report by December 1, 2025, and every other year thereafter, to the appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036.

(5) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Benefits navigator" means an individual who is employed by an institution of higher education for the purpose of helping students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

(b) "Institutions of higher education" has the same meaning as in RCW 28B.10.016.

(c) "Student basic needs" means food, water, shelter, clothing, physical health, mental health, child care, or similar needs that students enrolled at an institution of higher education or tribal college may face difficulty with and that hinders their ability to begin or continue their enrollment.

(d) "Tribal colleges" means institutions of higher education operated by an Indian tribe as defined in RCW 43.376.010. [2023 c 421 s 2.]

Findings—Intent—2023 c 421: "In 2022, students at 39 colleges and universities across Washington state participated in a survey about basic needs insecurities, including access to food, housing, child care, and more. The survey found that nearly half of all students in all regions of the state experienced some type of basic needs insecurity. One in every three students experienced either food insecurity or housing insecurity. One in every 10 students had also experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months. Some students experienced these insecurities at higher rates than others, and former foster youth had the highest rates of basic needs insecurities with 75 percent experiencing either food or housing insecurity. Addressing basic needs challenges for students contributes to their ability to remain enrolled and pursue their educational goals as evidenced by data from the two student support programs the legislature previously enacted, the student emergency assistance grant program and the supporting students experiencing homelessness pilot program. When students received this assistance, an average of 88 percent of them were able to persist in their programs.

Therefore, the legislature intends to continue to support students and help students meet their basic needs by increasing access to resources and support services." [2023 c 421 s 1.]