

RUNNING START

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Jump-Start on College

Every year, tens of thousands of Washington's high school juniors and seniors decide they're ready for college-level work. Thanks to Running Start, they can show it.

The Washington state Legislature created Running Start in 1990 as a way for students to earn dual high school and college credit, tuition free. The program began as a pilot in the 1992-93 school year. Now students can take classes at all 34 community and technical colleges, Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Washington State University and Northwest Indian College.

The vast majority of students take Running Start at community and technical colleges. Washington ranks fourth in the nation for dual-enrolled high school students earning an associate degree or certificate or a bachelor's degree.¹

A True College Experience

Running Start students have the same responsibilities as every other college student: they enroll, attend class, do homework, take tests, and are graded with the same expectations as their classmates. They can attend full- or part-time, and, upon successful completion of a college-level course, receive high school and college credit.

Running Start students also receive the same level of academic and support services from their college as any other student — in addition to support services offered by their high school. At their college, students can find tutoring, receive reasonable accommodations from disability support offices, participate in clubs, and get advice from a counselor at no additional cost to them or their families.



Photo courtesy of Bellingham Technical College.

Eligibility

To take part in Running Start, the student's school district and selected college first decide whether the student is ready for college-level work. The student must be in 11th or 12th grade and take any placement tests required by the college.

Once admitted to the college, students may enroll in any class the college offers, as long as prerequisites are met. In order to get credit for high school courses, the high school must determine whether the college course meets its requirements.

Savings for Families, Taxpayers

Running Start students and their families can save hundreds or even thousands of dollars on the cost of a college education. Students attend college tuition-free, only paying for books, class-based fees and transportation to and from their college.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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A full-time community or technical college Running Start student saves about \$4,500 in tuition² and over \$3,500 in room and board³. This allows students to use those savings or future financial aid eligibility for additional years college.

Students from low-income families are eligible for financial assistance from their selected college or university, and some colleges help with transportation.

Growing Popularity

Since its pilot year, Running Start's popularity continues to grow. At Washington's community and technical colleges, the program has seen an over 50% enrollment increase over the last 12 years, with 31,732 students participating in the program in 2021.⁵

Ready for Success

Running Start students are serious and well-prepared for the rigors of college. Students generally take two to three classes a quarter and pass nearly all of them — an average 91% course pass rate.⁶

Running Start students' success stand out: The percentage of students who complete an associate degree while enrolled in Running Start has steadily increased, with 4,563 students in the 2021-22 school year earning a degree. That's 24% of the students enrolled.⁷ About 15% of students finish their associate degree within a year or two of graduating from high school. Thousands of others — 25% — earned at least a year of college credit to apply to future higher education.⁸

How does the funding work?

Running Start students are K-12 students, funded with basic education dollars. Running Start does not have its own appropriation — the money follows the student.

The student's basic education funds first go to the school district, which then divides it between the high school and college depending on the student's course load at each institution.

For a full-time Running Start student, the school district is allowed to keep 7% of the funding for administrative purposes while the college receives the other 93%.

When crafting their budgets, school districts and colleges alike project their Running Start enrollments for the following school year.

Higher Education for Students, and for Washington

Running Start students save time and money, and stretch the state's educational investments further. These motivated students hit the ground running into college. As more bright minds in our state receive higher education, we all move ahead

Sources

1. Fink, J., Jenkins, D., & Yanagiura, T. (September 2017). What Happens to Students Who Take Community College "Dual Enrollment" Courses in High School?. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-happens-community-college-dual-enrollment-students.pdf>
2. Full-time resident lower division community and technical college tuition for the 2022-23 school year is \$4,458.
3. Washington Financial Aid Association estimates dependents living with parent room and board cost to be \$3,516 for the 2021-22 academic year. <https://www.wfaa.org/assets/docs/2122%20%20WFAA%20COA%20student%20budgets.Nov3.2020.pdf>
4. SBCTC budget office estimate based on FY19 state allocation by 2016-17 state FTE.
5. SBCTC Enrollment Dashboard <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/enrollment-public>
- 6-7. DuPree, D. (2018, March 6). Running Start Participation and Success. Retrieved May 9, 2018, from <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/research/research-briefs/running-start-participation-success-research-brief-18-1.pdf>