



Agency Recommendation Summary

Remote options hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic are now the new normal. Students, especially working adults, value the flexibility of learning in classrooms, online, or in a mix of the two. This request builds on the lessons of the past few years to develop a technology and learning infrastructure at the colleges that is robust, safe, engaging, and fully supportive of the needs of students in online, hybrid, and hi-flex environments.

Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001 - 1	\$53,185	\$39,804	\$92,989	\$39,804	\$39,804	\$79,608
Total Expenditures	\$53,185	\$39,804	\$92,989	\$39,804	\$39,804	\$79,608

Decision Package Description

In spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all colleges to suddenly shift all face-to-face instruction online, including a number of professional-technical courses that were not aligned with the Governor’s list of essential occupations. Although our college system already offered a number of classes online, COVID-19 revealed the potential for broader, permanent online delivery methods. At the same time, it reset students’ expectations for online instruction and services moving forward.

More than two years after the onset of the pandemic, remote options are here to stay, whether students choose to learn completely online, in classrooms, or in a mix of the two. Students — particularly students who are working and raising families — have become accustomed to the additional time flexibility these options provide. Their choice to fill full or partially online classes over traditional face-to-face classes is telling.

In the academic year that ended in June 2019, the percent of students taking one or more hybrid or online courses was 39%. That percent jumped to 70% in spring quarter of 2022, even though daily life in Washington had nearly returned to pre-pandemic norms by then.

This transformational shift in the use of technology holds considerable promise for making college more available to people of all ages and life circumstances in Washington. But just as the COVID-pandemic revealed opportunities, it also revealed weaknesses that must be addressed on a permanent basis, past the necessary stop-gap measures that were funded by federal emergency relief funds.

Students have become accustomed to the additional time flexibility that online coursework provides, and their choice to fill online, hybrid, and hi-flex coursework prior to filling traditional face-to-face coursework is telling. The changing student preferences and the experience of taking all classes online have revealed weaknesses in the colleges’ capabilities and capacities to provide quality educational opportunities in these new environments and methodologies.

Based on lessons learned during the COVID pandemic, this decision package will build a technology and learning infrastructure at colleges that is robust, safe, engaging, and fully supportive of the needs of students in online, hybrid, and hi-flex environments.

The difference between these three methods — online, hybrid, and hi-flex — is important to understanding this request.

- **Online:** The course is entirely online, including material presentation, discussion, and evaluation. Sometimes these courses are synchronous, so the instructor and all students are online at the same time using Zoom or another type of videoconferencing system. Other times it can be asynchronous, where students and instructors may be online at different times.
- **Hybrid:** Portions of a class are in-person and other portions are online, but all students participate in the same way at the same time (synchronously). For example, all students may be in the classroom on Tuesday and Thursday, with online sessions on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
- **Hi-Flex:** This method allows students to decide on any day whether to be online or in the classroom. Students have maximum flexibility to decide how to approach each class session. This may depend on the day of the week, or may depend on the specific topic being covered for the day. By livestreaming every class session, students have full access to all of the elements of a class including classroom discussions, even in a remote setting.

Hardware and Software to Support All Learning Methods

In the early 2000s, the Legislature invested in technology infrastructure at community and technical colleges. With that investment, colleges installed high-speed network cabling and equipment, and connected to the K-20 Network for internet access. This investment was critical for the future educational needs of students, and many colleges still have that base infrastructure in place all these years later. It was a long-lived and successful investment.

While colleges have replaced and expanded some of that technology on a piecemeal basis over the years, there has not been a concerted, unified investment since then. If funded, colleges would invest in additional technology to improve student experience in all learning methods. The funding would enable the following investments:

- Enhanced and resilient internet access for campuses, so that the critical timeline of students' coursework would not be interrupted because of internet access, and to recognize the additional bandwidth needs of online teaching.
 1. Enhanced network capacity and resilience for campus technology services to ensure uninterrupted coursework delivery and access for students.
- Equipment that solves real-time audio/video issues for hybrid and hi-flex teaching environments, where some students are sitting in class and others are participating online at the same time. Echoing and stuttering are just some of the issues students and instructors experience with online participation.
- Campus-wide software needs for student productivity and learning, such as lab simulation and homework creation and management.

Online Support for Online Students

It's challenging for colleges to provide the full array of wrap-around services online for students who are primarily or exclusively online. Many students choose online coursework because they are place-bound, time-bound, or a combination of both. Those students have limited ability to visit campus to access support services, including academic advising, tutoring, career placement, and student programs.

This request provides funding for professional expertise, software, and tools to provide wrap-around student services that mimic the on-campus student service experience.

Student Access to Laptops and Internet

During the pandemic, when nearly all courses were moved online, it became obvious that many students lacked access to computers and high-speed internet services. Many students resorted to using smartphones to access online tools and curriculum. A number of students reportedly typed multi-page term papers on their phones.

Just as technology can broaden access to college education for many Washingtonians, the lack of adequate technology can create barriers. First-generation and low-income students are particularly affected by technology barriers, exacerbating the equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges these students already face.

If funded, this request would provide enough laptops and internet access hotspots for each college to provide approximately 10% of their FTE with technology access, and provide ongoing funding to continue replacing laptops on a four-year cycle. This funding is critical because the federal emergency funds to provide college students equipment during the pandemic has run out.

Training for New Teaching Methods

Virtually all community and technical college faculty were immediately thrust into the online teaching world during the pandemic. While not ideal, faculty continue to find ways to triage their teaching in an attempt to ensure students are successful both in-person and online. This request would begin a comprehensive process to ensure faculty receive training to support their online, hybrid, and hi-flex teaching methods. If provided, funding would be used for:

- Faculty release time to allow faculty time to learn and implement best practices and techniques for ensuring student success in online, hybrid, and hi-flex classrooms. ("Faculty release time" is compensated work, outside of regular teaching hours, for professional development or other supplemental activities.)
- Training materials and supplies to support faculty who are learning best practices.
- The establishment and continued support of a community of practice in which faculty across the state develop, share, and implement new teaching strategies instead of "reinventing the wheel" when it comes to curricular design.

Strengthen Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Staffing

Cybersecurity threats are on the rise and attacks are becoming more sophisticated. Colleges' increasing reliance on technology and online access make them more vulnerable now than before the pandemic. This investment would strengthen the foundational cybersecurity infrastructure and expertise to ensure that students, staff, and faculty have safe and secure data environments, and reliable teaching and learning environments. The increased quantity of threats and sophistication of attacks, coupled with the colleges' increased reliance on technology and online connections to provide education, yield a security challenge that is more serious than ever.

This investment would provide up-to-date firewall hardware and software, and keep those items updated into the future. Funding would also support cybersecurity experts or services at the State Board to guide, assist, and monitor college cybersecurity strategies and help colleges respond to immediate threats.

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:

In response to increased demand for online coursework due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this request would expand current online, hybrid, and hi-flex teaching options for students.

Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:

This decision package encompasses a number of different, but interrelated, aspects of funding the success of students who primarily engage in learning environments beyond the traditional on-campus environment. As such, the assumptions and cost formulas vary based on the particular aspect of the package.

Detailed calculations:

The table below is also attached as an Excel file, including additional detail on assumptions.

	Initial Cost per Stu FTE	Ongoing Cost per Stu FTE	Total Cost Y1	Total Cost Y2	Notes
Hardware and Software to Support All Learning Methodologies					
Enhanced Campus Network Capacity & Resilience	\$ 25.00	\$ 25.00	\$ 3,250,000	\$ 3,250,000	Cost for enhanced campus network capacity and resilience to support online, hybrid, and hi-flex
Software Maintenance	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 6,500,000	\$ 6,500,000	Ongoing costs for simulation and pedagogical tools
Hybrid & Hi-Flex Equipment			\$ 8,500,000	\$ 3,400,000	Cameras, Owls, microphones, etc.; \$250k per college, 4-year replacement
Online Student Services for Online Students					
Online Navigators			\$ 13,689,000	\$ 14,373,450	Assumes 300/1 Ratio online headcount to Navigator
Software Platform Integration			\$ 1,000,000	\$ 100,000	Integrate online Navigation activities to ctcLink
Faculty Training for New Teaching Methodologies					
Community of Practice			\$ 237,600	\$ 249,480	2 FTE @SBCTC + Supplies/Equipment
Faculty Release Time			\$ 3,400,000	\$ 3,570,000	20 Faculty per year at each college, each equivalent of a 5 credit class release time
Training Materials			\$ 68,000	\$ 68,000	\$100 per faculty
Strengthen Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Staffing					
Security Services & Expertise			\$ 810,000	\$ 850,500	Contracts or FTE equivalent to cost of 5 Security Specialists @ SBCTC to work with districts
Firewall Update	\$ 10.00	\$ 2.50	\$ 1,300,000	\$ 325,000	Enhanced Firewalls at all colleges
Student Access to Laptops and Internet					
Student Laptops	\$ 75.00	\$ 18.75	\$ 9,750,000	\$ 2,437,500	Assumes 0.1 of our students need laptops
Student Hotspots	\$ 36.00	\$ 36.00	\$ 4,680,000	\$ 4,680,000	Assumes 0.1 of our students need hotspots
Total			\$ 53,184,600	\$ 39,803,930	

Workforce Assumptions:

Staffing levels include Online Navigators to help students at a 300/1 student to navigator ratio; 2 FTE for staff at the State Board to help develop faculty training; faculty release time for 20 faculty per year at each college.

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic Framework:

This request contributes to the Governor’s Results Washington first goal: **World-class education:** Providing every Washingtonian a world-class education that prepared him or her for a healthy and productive life, including success in job or career, in the community and as a lifelong learner.

The 2020-30 strategic plan for the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges begins with a vision: *Leading with racial equity, our colleges maximize student potential and transform lives within a culture of belonging that advances racial, social, and economic justice in service to our diverse communities.*

This budget request supports all three of the system’s strategic goals:

1. Achieve educational equity for students who are historically underrepresented in higher education.
2. Improve completion rates for all enrolled students across all types of programs and credentials — workforce degrees, transfer degrees, certificates and apprenticeships.
3. Increase access and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college access. This includes young adults, working adults, low-income people, people of color, immigrants and single parents.

Performance Outcomes:

Our [strategic plan](#) establishes aspirational goals, metrics and targets through the year 2030. To track our progress, we will regularly examine the following metrics. These metrics are based upon recommendations to the [Workforce Education Investment Oversight Board](#). They are also consistent with those used for the college system’s [Guided Pathways program](#) and in the college system’s performance funding system, the [Student Achievement Initiative](#).

Metrics

We track the following metrics, each of which can be disaggregated by college, race/ethnicity, gender and low-income status.

- **Math Year 1** – Percentage of students earning college-level math credit within their first four (4) quarters after starting, including their college entry term. College-level math courses are identified by the following criteria: course CIP code begins with 27 or philosophy 117/120 (logic).
- **English Year 1** – Percentage of students earning college-level English/communication credit within their first four (4) quarters after starting, including their college entry term. College-level English courses are identified by the following criteria: English 101 or equivalent.
- **First to Second Term Retention** – Percentage of first-time in fall students who enrolled in classes or completed a program in the winter quarter.
- **Year-to-Year Retention** – Percentage of first-time in fall students who enrolled in classes or completed a program in their second Fall quarter.
- **Completion or Transfer Year 4** – Percentage of first-time students who completed a program OR transferred to a four-year college within four years after and including, their college entry term.

Equity Impacts

Community outreach and engagement:

N/A

Disproportional Impact Considerations:

N/A

Target Populations or Communities:

The gaps in educational attainment by race and economic status are well documented in Washington State. Community and technical colleges are the higher education sector serving the largest percentage of low-income, historically underrepresented students of color and first-generation students. First-generation and low-income students are particularly affected by technology barriers, exacerbating the equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges these students already face. In addition, many students choose online coursework because they are place-bound, time-bound, or a combination of both and have limited ability to visit campus to access support services, including academic advising, tutoring, career placement, and student programs. This request provides funding for professional expertise, software, and tools to provide wrap-around student services that mimic the on-campus student service experience. This will help respond to student needs such as maintaining consistency in delivery of courses, mentoring and advising. This in turn helps students stay in school and on track.

Other Collateral Connections

Puget Sound Recovery:

This request is not related to Puget Sound recovery efforts.

State Workforce Impacts:

There are no statewide workforce impacts.

Intergovernmental:

There are no intergovernmental impacts.

Stakeholder Response:

N/A

State Facilities Impacts:

There are no statewide facility impacts.

Changes from Current Law:

This proposal would not require changes to current law.

Legal or Administrative Mandates:

This proposal is not in response to any legal or administrative mandates.

Reference Documents

[Hybrid Education Request Backup Attachment.xlsx](#)

[Hybrid Education Request IT Worksheet.xlsx](#)

[IT Addendum 2023-25 attachment.docx](#)

IT Addendum

Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?

Yes

Objects of Expenditure

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Obj. A	\$12,995	\$13,645	\$26,640	\$13,645	\$13,645	\$27,290
Obj. B	\$4,332	\$4,548	\$8,880	\$4,548	\$4,548	\$9,096
Obj. C	\$810	\$851	\$1,661	\$851	\$851	\$1,702
Obj. E	\$10,818	\$9,918	\$20,736	\$9,918	\$9,918	\$19,836
Obj. J	\$24,230	\$10,842	\$35,072	\$10,842	\$10,842	\$21,684

Agency Contact Information

Cherie Berthon
(360) 704-1023
cberthon@sbctc.edu