

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2694

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Higher Education

**Title:** .

**Brief Description:** Creating an informational program to increase applications from high-achieving low-income students to selective institutions of higher education.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Hansen, Magendanz, Zeiger, Walsh, Hargrove, Ormsby, Haler, Tharinger and Freeman.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Higher Education: 2/4/14, 2/5/14 [DPS].

### Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Recognizes that each year a large number of high-achieving students from low-income families do not apply to a selective college or university, even though they would have a good chance of acceptance.
- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to design and implement, by the fall of 2015, a program that provides information to high-achieving, low-income high school students with the purpose of increasing the number of applications from this group of students to public baccalaureate institutions and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in Washington.
- Requires the WSAC to partner with a national entity that offers aptitude tests and consult with the public baccalaureate institutions and the independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in Washington.
- Describes key elements of the packet to be mailed to students.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass.  
Signed by 16 members: Representatives Seaquist, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Minority Member; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Hansen, Johnson, Magendanz, Muri, Reykdal, Sawyer, Sells, Tarleton, Walkinshaw, Walsh and Wylie.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Scott and Smith.

**Staff:** Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

**Background:**

Several national studies have found that only a small portion of high-achieving, low-income students apply to selective colleges and universities compared to the number of high-achieving, high-income students that apply to selective institutions. This occurs despite the finding that high-achieving, low-income students who apply are also admitted, enroll, progress, and graduate at the same rates as high-income students with similar test scores and grades. Studies have also found that for high-achieving, low-income students, the net costs are often lower at selective institutions than at less selective institutions because of financial aid options available at selective institutions. In addition, most application fees for selective institutions and national aptitude testing fees can be waived for low-income students.

Researchers from Stanford University and the University of Virginia designed an experiment, known as the Expanding College Opportunities project (ECO), to test whether high-achieving, low-income students would change their behavior if they knew more about colleges and also to test whether there was a cost-effective method to inform such students of their college opportunities. The ECO combined application guidance, customized information about the net cost of attending different colleges, and no-paperwork application fee waivers in a mailing to students that cost \$6 per student. The intervention was found to increase the number of applications and enrollments of low-income students to selective institutions.

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**Summary of Substitute Bill:**

It is recognized that each year a large number of high-achieving students from low-income families do not apply to a selective college or university, even though they would have a good chance of acceptance. At the same time, high-achieving students from high-income families are very likely to apply to selective colleges and universities.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) must design and implement a program that provides information to high-achieving, low-income high school students through the mail, or electronically if the WSAC deems it appropriate, with the purpose of increasing the number of applications from this group of students to public four-year institutions of higher education and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the state.

In order to design and implement the program, the WSAC is required to partner with a national entity that offers aptitude tests, and consult with the public baccalaureate institutions and the independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

The WSAC is directed to identify high-achieving students from low-income families using methods the WSAC determines to be appropriate, including, but not limited to, national aptitude test scores, scores on AP tests, and Running Start and other dual credit programs.

The WSAC is directed to identify low-income students using methods the WSAC deems appropriate including eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, self-reported information, or participation in federal and state programs for low-income students.

A key element of the program is to mail an information packet to high-achieving, low-income students. The packet should include the following, at a minimum:

- materials to help students choose colleges;
- an application guidance booklet;
- application fee waivers, if available, that enable students to apply to public baccalaureate institutions in Washington or independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in Washington, without paying application fees;
- information on college affordability and financial aid, outlining the net cost of attendance for each baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, and information on merit and need-based aid from federal, state, and institutional sources; and
- a personally addressed cover letter signed by the Governor and all the presidents of the state's public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

Each packet is to be mailed and students must be provided with a personal password to access a website where the same information, customized to the student, can be accessed.

The WSAC is directed to:

- establish agreements with a national entity that offers aptitude tests and work with higher education institutions in the state to share costs of producing and mailing the materials; and
- implement the program no later than the fall of 2015 giving consideration to spring mailings in order to capture early action decisions offered by baccalaureate institutions.

### **Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill clarifies that the information sent to students is about public baccalaureate institutions in Washington and the independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in Washington. References to selective universities are replaced with references to all public baccalaureate institutions in Washington.

Permission is added for information to be sent to students electronically in addition to being mailed, if the WSAC deems it appropriate.

The direction that the WSAC must partner with an entity that offers aptitude tests for the purpose of predicting college success is replaced with a requirement that the entity must offer aptitude tests.

Additional language is added requiring the WSAC to identify high-achieving students from low-income families using methods the WSAC determines to be appropriate, including, but not limited to, national aptitude test scores, scores on AP tests, and Running Start and other dual credit programs.

The WSAC is directed to identify low-income students using methods the WSAC deems appropriate including eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, self-reported information, or participation in federal and state programs for low-income students.

The requirements to: (1) customize the financial aid information; (2) provide website access to information contained in the mailed packet; and (3) partner with a third-party evaluator, are removed.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) This program could make a significant difference in the lives of low-income students for very little expense to the state. Every kid who is low-income and scores high on the SAT or other aptitude tests will get a letter that congratulates them for their achievements and tells them they are the kind of person that is going to succeed in college. The proposal aligns very well with an action item in the state's plan for education attainment related to increasing awareness to educational opportunities for all students. There is a need to increase applications to schools and filings of financial aid forms. There is the opportunity to leverage other college access programs to expand the students who could benefit from this proposed program.

(With concerns) The use of the word "selective" to describe baccalaureate institutions could be misleading and it would be better to clarify that this program includes all public baccalaureate institutions in Washington. The responsibility for providing customized information ultimately rests with the baccalaureate degree-granting institutions and there is a chance of creating confusion about the financial aid. Using other aptitude tests, not just those that predict college success, would be preferable. It is possible to evaluate this program without a third-party evaluator.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Hansen, prime sponsor; and Rachelle Sharpe, Washington Student Achievement Council.

(In support with concerns) Sherry Burkey, Western Washington University; and Julie Garver, The Evergreen State College.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.