

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Representative Don Carlson, Chair

BILL ANALYSIS
SB 5503

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: An act relating to the merger of technical and community colleges.

BACKGROUND: In 1991, the state's five technical colleges were removed from the jurisdiction of local school boards and merged with the community college system. The service areas created for the technical colleges overlapped service areas of nearby community colleges. In order to diminish the potential for program duplication and to preserve the workforce mission of the technical colleges, the legislation that created the merged system addressed both issues.

At the time of the merger, the technical colleges had an exclusive mission to prepare people 16 years of age and older for the workforce. In most respects, they operated under an educational model in which the basic and technical skills needed to succeed in a particular occupation were all provided by the instructor of the technical or occupational program in which a student was enrolled. The legislation that created the merged system attempted to preserve the exclusive workforce preparation and basic skills mission of the technical colleges by restricting the types of programs that technical colleges may offer. Technical colleges may offer only nonbaccalaureate technical degrees, certificates, or diplomas for occupational courses of study. The two technical colleges in Pierce County were permitted to offer the nonbaccalaureate associate of technical or applied arts degrees only in conjunction with a community college in Pierce County.

In Whatcom County, the authority to offer transfer level academic support and general education became the exclusive jurisdiction of Whatcom Community College. Bellingham Technical College was not permitted to offer classes in those areas.

The legislation required the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to prepare and distribute a report evaluating the successes and difficulties associated with the merger. The report was due by December 1, 1996. In the report, the state board recommended retaining the exclusive workforce preparation and basic skills mission of the technical colleges. It also recommended lifting the restrictions specifically directed to technical colleges in Pierce and Whatcom Counties.

SUMMARY: Technical colleges may offer only technical degrees whose primary purpose is preparation for employment in a specific occupation. Technical colleges may not offer transfer degrees.

Technical colleges in Pierce County may offer nonbaccalaureate associate of technical or applied arts degrees without the agreement of a community college in the county. All technical colleges may offer transfer level support courses that are required of all students seeking a particular certificate or degree.

The technical colleges will abide by any rules adopted by the state board concerning these authorities.