

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1861

As Reported by House Committee On:
Technology, Telecommunications & Energy

Title: An act relating to a statewide web-based clearinghouse for high quality, diverse resources and learning tools for the twenty-first century.

Brief Description: Establishing a statewide web-based clearinghouse for resources and learning tools.

Sponsors: Representatives Tom, Ruderman, Talcott, Priest, McMahan and Anderson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Telecommunications & Energy: 2/25/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Washington Digital Learning Commons to establish a web-based clearinghouse for online learning programs and resources available anywhere in the state.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS & ENERGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Morris, Chair; Ruderman, Vice Chair; Sullivan, Vice Chair; Crouse, Ranking Minority Member; Nixon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Blake, Bush, DeBolt, Delvin, Hudgins, Kirby, McMahan, Romero, Tom, Wallace and Wood.

Staff: Pam Madson (786-7166).

Background:

In 1996 the Legislature authorized the building of an educational telecommunications network known as the K-20 network. It is a high-speed telecommunications backbone that allows use of the Internet and live two-way videoconferencing. The network connects 430 public education sites throughout the state including community and technical colleges, public libraries, regional universities, research institutions, K-12 school districts, and educational service districts. For K-12 school districts, the network

provides one central point of connectivity in each school district. It is the responsibility of the school district to connect school buildings or networks within buildings.

In 2002 Governor Locke appointed a task force of representatives from education, business, and government to explore ways to better use the opportunity presented by this existing technology resource. After research into assets and resources available in the state, a look at what other states were doing, and an assessment of the demand for online digital learning, the task force made a recommendation to establish a digital learning commons. The commons would provide a web-based portal allowing access to digital resources, learning tools, and online course work.

To implement the task force recommendation, a non-profit organization is proposed to build and run the Washington Digital Learning Commons.

The funding over the next two years includes grants from private sector sources (\$3 million), and public sources (\$2 million state general fund request).

Summary of Bill:

The Washington Digital Learning Commons is directed to establish a web-based clearinghouse for online learning programs and resources available in the state. The clearinghouse will serve as a central point of information, reference, and review of online learning programs.

The clearinghouse must be designed and managed to achieve four objectives: (1) Make more online resources available to teachers; (2) provide students with tools and resources to enrich their educational experience; (3) offer students and families tools and resources that will allow families more direct involvement in their children's education; and (4) create connectivity through existing infrastructure and community assets to avoid expensive and duplicative efforts.

Digital providers will submit descriptions of their online program offerings and the clearinghouse will produce a reference grid comparing the various offerings and make the grid available online. Links must be available to the various digital providers.

The clearinghouse must be accomplished through a public and private partnership.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill

is passed.

Testimony For: This bill gives us a glimpse into the future with the convergence of technology and education. This could revolutionize education and how we educate our children. The Governor is proposing to create a digital learning commons. The bill specifically deals with the web-based clearinghouse for online courses and resources. Providing digital learning curriculums online will allow access to anyone, anywhere, at any time. It can provide choice, flexibility, and variety. Currently, that material is not available in a systematic format. Teachers need to be able to access teaching techniques and parents need a place to go to find additional resources to help their children. The Legislature needs to keep an eye on the development of this portion of the Governor's proposal for a digital learning commons because of its profound impact on education. The bill is necessary to clarify that these resources should be available to all students whether attending public or private school or being home schooled. This proposal is a small piece of a much larger picture that is included as part of the Governor's proposal.

(Comments) Governor Locke convened a task force during 2002 of a diverse mix of educators, legislators, and technology experts. Funding was obtained from the Gates and Hewlett Foundations. The task force conducted forums and focus groups in six communities, conducted phone interviews with 200 students and 200 parents, and researched initiatives on digital learning from 10 states and foreign countries. The task force found a demand for online education. The primary reasons for the demand were choice and flexibility when compared to traditional education curriculum. Other state efforts focused on online courses, targeted a low-bandwidth and focused on high school courses. Course credit was given by the local school. The task force recommended that a digital learning commons be developed using a non-profit organization to provide access to learning tools, resources, and online courses. The commons should use existing infrastructure and available tools. The Governor has requested \$2 million in his budget proposal for the next biennium. The first phase of the project would capture data from 7th to 12th grade users over a period of two years. Funding would come from a combination of private grants and public money. The first phase would also explore how to grant statewide credit for online courses and what the costs would be to users. A bill may not be needed at this point. As the first phase is completed, there may be issues that are more appropriate for legislative action once the commons is launched statewide.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Tom, prime sponsor.

(Comments) Fred Morris and Kristin Bunce, Governor's Office.