
Higher Education Committee

HB 2076

Brief Description: Requiring a statewide strategic plan for higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Kenney, Cox, Fromhold, Chase, Miloscia, Conway, Berkey, Upthegrove, Moeller, Wood and Schual-Berke.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Clarifies and expands the role of the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) in strategic planning for higher education. Requires institution-level strategic plans and the HECB's review of new programs and budget requests to be aligned with the statewide strategic plan.
- Creates a Joint Select Committee for the 2003 interim to examine options for reassigning or altering other HECB responsibilities.

Hearing Date: 2/28/03

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The HECB was created by the 1985 Legislature. It has responsibilities for planning and coordination; is assigned a variety of rule-making, regulatory, and administrative responsibilities; and manages an array of state financial aid programs.

Comprehensive Master Plan: The HECB is charged with identifying the state's higher education goals, objectives, and priorities. The HECB is also directed to establish role and mission statements for the various institutions, including the community and technical college system. Every four years the HECB updates a master plan for higher education, in consultation with public and private institutions and other state education agencies. The statute outlines a number of needs assessments to be included in the master plan, such as:

- Basic and continuing needs of various age groups;
- Business and industrial needs for a skilled workforce;
- Demographic, social, and economic trends;
- College attendance, retention, and dropout rates; and

- Needs of recent graduates and placebound adults.

At the time of its creation, the HECB was directed to place its initial planning priorities on heavily populated areas underserved by public institutions. In addition the HECB recommends enrollment levels, tuition and fee policies, and priorities for financial aid based on comparisons with peer institutions.

When a new master plan is created, the HECB submits it to the Legislature for approval by concurrent resolution. Once approved, the plan is intended to serve as the state's higher education policy. The next master plan is due to the Legislature by December 1, 2003.

In addition to the state master plan, institutions are supposed to develop their own institution-level plans and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) develops a system plan for community and technical college training and education.

HECB Regulatory Responsibilities: The HECB is responsible for reviewing and approving certain activities of the four-year institutions, including new degree programs and off-campus programs and education centers. There are no statutory criteria for this review. The HECB also evaluates and makes recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on operating and capital budget requests from the four-year institutions and the community and technical college system. This review is based in part on the findings from the master plan.

Review of the HECB Mission. In a 2003 report the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found varying opinions among interview respondents about how the HECB is meeting its mission. Generally, the HECB's regulatory responsibilities were viewed less favorably than its administrative responsibilities. Many respondents spoke of the HECB role in planning as its most important function, at least in theory. There was, however, criticism of recent master plans.

Summary of Bill:

Statewide Strategic Plan: The HECB is directed to develop a statewide strategic plan for higher education that proposes a vision, goals, priorities, and specific strategies for maintaining and expanding access, affordability, quality, efficiency, and accountability. The HECB's current responsibility to develop institutional role and mission statements forms a foundation for the plan. In performing this function, the HECB is also directed to consider whether certain major lines of study or types of degrees, including applied or research degrees, should be uniquely assigned to some institutions.

Most of the needs assessment information referred to in the current master plan is included in the new strategic plan. New information for consideration includes: demand for opportunities for lifelong learning; technological trends and their impact on service delivery; and transfer rates.

The strategic plan is required to have certain components. The HECB continues to recommend enrollment levels, tuition and fee policies, and priorities for financial aid. New aspects of the plan include state or regional priorities for new or expanded degree programs or off-campus programs and for addressing needs in high demand fields. The plan will

recommend policies to improve the efficiency of student transfer and graduation or completion. Finally, the plan must recommend specific actions to be taken and identify measurable performance indicators and benchmarks for gauging progress in achieving the state's goals and objectives for higher education.

The HECB must present the plan in a way that provides guidance for other planning and decision-making efforts by institutions, the Governor, and the Legislature. The first statewide strategic plan based on these revisions is due to the Legislature by December 1, 2003.

In exercising its regulatory responsibilities regarding program approval and review of institution capital and operating budgets, the HECB must consider how the proposals align with and implement the statewide strategic plan. Institution-level plans (including the comprehensive plan prepared by the SBCTC for the community and technical college system) must implement the statewide strategic plan and also contain measurable performance indicators and benchmarks.

Joint Select Committee. A Joint Select Committee to review other responsibilities of the HECB is created with eight legislative members. The Committee will examine options for reassigning the HECB's responsibility to administer financial aid and other programs. The Committee will also consider options either to strengthen, reduce, or eliminate other HECB responsibilities, or to have the HECB carry out those responsibilities through performance-based compacts between higher education institutions and the state. The Committee will report its findings and recommendations by December 15, 2003.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 24, 2003.

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