
Education Committee

SSB 6138

Brief Description: Developing a master plan for education from prekindergarten through university.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Carlson, Rasmussen, Schmidt and McAuliffe).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requiring four legislative committees to collaboratively prepare a set of recommendations to the Legislature on the creation of a master plan for prekindergarten through university education.

Hearing Date: 2/19/04

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

In Washington, for most issues, the challenges facing education and higher education are considered by separate agencies and separate legislative committees. A notable exception: the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) helps coordinate workforce policy for education, the community and technical colleges, and the Department of Employment Security. Most prekindergarten, early learning, and child care issues are considered by different legislative committees and by a variety of agencies.

The Education Commission of the States has produced a number of reports and issue papers on the potential benefits of taking a more coordinated approach to public education. One of the reports, entitled **What Is P-16 Education? A Primer for Legislators – A Practical Introduction to the Concept, Language and Policy Issues of an Integrated System of Public Education**, describes the reasons lawmakers might wish to consider creating a coordinated education system that encompasses prekindergarten through higher education. The report states:

"A growing number of states are taking steps to infuse three largely disconnected levels of public education – preschool, K-12 and postsecondary – with greater coherence and a stronger sense of connectedness. Driving these efforts are a host of new challenges and pressures: demographic shifts, changes in the economy and in the workplace, and continuing advances in technology and telecommunications.

Creating a more integrated, seamless education system involves grappling with a host of complex issues, including standards, testing, teacher education, college admissions policies, governance, funding streams and institutional turf issues, to name just a few. Over the past decade, states have begun to move away from dealing with such issues on a piecemeal basis in favor of a more comprehensive approach. The shorthand term for such initiatives, P-16, reflects the central vision of a coherent, flexible continuum of public education that stretches from preschool to grade 16, culminating in a baccalaureate degree.

Among the major goals of a P-16 system are:

- Expanding access to early learning for children ages 3 to 5, and improving their readiness for kindergarten;
- Smoothing student transitions from one level of learning to the next;
- Closing the achievement gap between white and minority students;
- Upgrading teacher education and professional development;
- Strengthening relationships between families and schools;
- Creating a wider range of learning experiences and opportunities for students in the final two years of high school; and
- Improving college readiness and college success.

Legislators are uniquely positioned to provide vision, support and leadership for P-16 initiatives in their states. They can play a crucial role in identifying and calling attention to the shortcomings of the current system; exploring strategies for closing gaps and overcoming institutional resistance; and building and sustaining consensus for change."

By law, the Higher Education Coordinating Board is required to prepare and update a master plan for higher education. The Workforce Board is required to develop and maintain a comprehensive plan for workforce education and training.

Summary of Bill:

The House and Senate committees on education and higher education will work collaboratively to study and make recommendations to the Legislature on the creation of a master plan for education from prekindergarten through university. The committees will develop recommendations on the development of a plan that supports students' needs, focusing on the organization and management of delivery systems to eliminate barriers to a seamless education. The recommendations will address but not be limited to issues of access, achievement, accountability, affordability, and the quality of our schools and institutions of higher education.

The committees will involve interested parties, including but not limited to educators from the public and private sectors, regional and national public policy groups and state organizations, advocacy groups, researchers, business and labor leaders, community leaders, parents and students.

The committees must complete an interim report by December 1, 2004 and a final report by December 1, 2005. The committees will use legislative facilities and receive staff support from Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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