

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5139

As Passed Senate, February 9, 2004

Title: An act relating to remedial postsecondary education.

Brief Description: Concerning student preparation for college-level work.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senator Carlson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/13/03; 1/12/04; 1/19/04 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 2/9/04, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5139 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Carlson, Chair; Schmidt, Vice Chair; Horn, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, B. Sheldon and Shin.

Staff: Jean Six (786-7423)

Background: Colleges and universities all over the country provide remedial courses for under-prepared students. During the last few years a growing concern has emerged over the costs of these courses to the students and to the state both in time and in money. While students who have been away from the academic environment for a number of years, or who are learning English as a second language, or facing other mitigating factors might need to complete some pre-college coursework, concern has been raised about the number of students right out of high school who are not prepared to do college level work. Many believe the high school diploma should demonstrate a readiness to succeed in college coursework.

A report from the state of California indicates that the California State University system recently threw out 8.2 percent of its freshmen for failing to master basic English or math skills, the highest rate in the four years it has tracked such dismissals.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the four-year institutions have issued reports about the role of pre-college course enrollment.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature recognizes current work among education sectors to strengthen communication with parents and students about what students need to do to gain and maintain the skills necessary to do college-level work. Before the 2005 legislative session, the K-20 community is to engage in an organized strategy aimed at reducing the need for remediation of recent high school graduates.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy will conduct a study to: (1) report the extent to which school districts are unable to provide enough sections of the courses needed for students to gain and maintain appropriate math, writing, and reading skills; and (2) then make

recommendations about how to fill the gaps revealed through its research. The preliminary report is due by September 1, 2004, with a final due to the Legislature by December 1, 2004.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2004.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Students must understand the importance of the K-12 curriculum. The open-door policy gives a false sense of college accessibility. Counselors need to do a better job and we have to find a way to stop paying more than one time for the same courses. Statistics show that 59 percent of recent high school graduates must take remedial course work of some sort. This is a bigger problem than just students – there are not enough high school math classes currently available. We need more math teachers to solve the problem. The issue of alignment among the sectors must be addressed. Punishing students at this time will not solve the problem. Senator Carlson is asking for accountability not punishment.

Franklin Pierce High School has developed a model program. Students must understand the difference between admissions to the institution and placement in college-level classes. Clarity is required about the meaning of a high school diploma versus a college admissions/readiness diploma.

Thank you for recognizing the work we currently have underway. Many more students and parents will hear our message about college readiness. The WSIPP gap analysis is very important. We will look for incentives. The Value of Expanding Your Horizons program is emphasized. Math can be infused throughout many courses.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Don Carlson, prime sponsor; Larry Davis, SBE; Kyra Kester, OSPI; Loretta Seppanen, SBCTC; Terry Teale, COP; Brady Horenstein, WSU, WSL; Bruce Botka, HECB; Scott Copeland, Centralia College.

House Amendment(s): The HECB, SBCTC, and OSPI are directed – within current budgets – to convene a work group to discuss standards and expectations for college-level work, identify the causes of current gaps in students' knowledge and skills, and initiate actions to address those gaps so that the need for remediation of recent high school graduates is reduced. The work group includes representatives of the two- and four-year colleges and K-12 school districts. Strategies are to be developed for communicating the standards in all Washington high schools. A report is due January 1, 2005, to legislative education and higher education committees including strategies, timelines, and benchmarks for reducing remediation over the next three years.