

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5759

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, February 23, 2005

**Title:** An act relating to improving educational opportunities for low-income students.

**Brief Description:** Supporting the state achievers' scholarship program.

**Sponsors:** Senators Weinstein, Schmidt, Prentice, McAuliffe, Rockefeller, Rasmussen and Berkey.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 2/18/05, 2/23/05 [DPS-WM].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5759 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair; Weinstein, Vice Chair; Benton, Berkey, Carrell, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

**Staff:** Susan Mielke (786-7422)

**Background:** The Washington Education Foundation (WEF) is an independent, non-profit organization that was created in 2000 to provide scholarships and mentors to low-income students who exhibit high potential for academic success. WEF has partnered with The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create and offer the Washington State Achievers Scholarship program. The program provides college scholarships to motivated students from 16 high-poverty schools with diverse ethnic populations. Other private donors also sponsor scholarship programs through the WEF.

In addition to providing scholarships, the Achievers Scholarship program matches students with a mentor to assist in the college preparation and application processes. Under the Hometown Mentor program, community involvement officers recruit, train, and match community volunteer mentors with students in their junior year of high school. Hometown Mentorship continues until the student enters college, at which time a college mentor is provided.

The WEF reports that at the 16 participating high schools, approximately 2,114 mentors have been matched with students since the program began, and that community involvement officers may work with up to 240 volunteer mentors at one time. In the 2003-05 biennium, one million dollars from the state general fund was provided to support the Hometown Mentor program.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** The Legislature recognizes the value of the State Achievers Scholarship program operated by the Washington Education Foundation. To the extent funds are appropriated, the Legislature supports the program in providing mentors for students, helping reduce financial barrier for talented, low-income students, and assisting in leveraging private funding for the program.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The two million dollar appropriation is removed and language is added to state that the Legislature's support is to the extent funds are appropriated.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** This is an amazing program, and it is one that really works. This is a great investment in terms of both money and results. The Foundation has been able to raise a considerable amount of money from private sources to provide both mentoring and scholarships. Every million that the legislature appropriates, will leverage 10 million from private sources. Children need a support system to succeed in college and the Foundation provides that support system for many students who otherwise might not have it. Washington has a high student poverty rate and we are below the national average in how many students enroll in college. This program is meant to help change that by getting students the financial resources, encouragement, and academic preparation they need to go to and succeed in college. The mission of the Foundation is to provide scholarships and mentoring to low-income, high potential students. About 60 percent of the student served by the Foundation are students of color and a majority are first generation students. The students involved in this program are succeeding. They are going to, staying in and finishing college. This program helps students who, because of other difficulties in their lives, need a little extra help and support in order to get to college and succeed.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Senator Weinstein, prime sponsor; Steve Thorndhill, WEF; Micheal Bios, Amaria Price, Foss High School Student; Colleen Philbrook, Foss High School CIO; Greg Williamson, OSPI.