

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESSB 6295

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Higher Education

**Title:** An act relating to workplace-based electronically distributed learning.

**Brief Description:** Creating workplace-based electronically distributed learning opportunities.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Kilmer, Rockefeller, Hobbs, Shin, Franklin, Marr, Rasmussen, Kastama, Kauffman, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Hatfield, Berkey and Regala).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Higher Education: 2/21/08, 2/25/08 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill**  
**(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Creates a pilot program to evaluate workplace-based electronic learning and creates a workgroup to: (1) study and evaluate national private employer workplace-based electronic learning program; (2) establish standards regarding electronic learning; (3) recommend methods to increase student access as well as identify barriers to participation and completion; (4) determine methods to increase the supply of open course materials; (5) recommend methods to increase the availability of digital open textbooks; and (6) review and report demographic information on programs of study including enrollments, retention, and completion.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts, Schmick and Sommers.

**Staff:** Andi Smith (786-7304).

**Background:**

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

In the fall term of 2006, almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course in the United States; a nearly 10 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. That growth rate exceeds the 1.5 percent growth rate of the overall higher education student population. Nationally, two-year associate degree granting institutions have the highest growth rates and account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years. Baccalaureate institutions began the period with the fewest online enrollments and have had the lowest rates of growth.

Since data started being collected in 2000 for Washington, enrollments in electronic learning (e-learning) courses have remained relatively flat at the public Baccalaureate institutions and have increased significantly in the community and technical college system. In the fall term of 2000, enrollments in Baccalaureate institutions accounted for 2 percent of the total full-time equivalent. In the community and technical colleges system, e-learning enrollments made up 3.5 percent of the total. In fall of 2006, e-learning enrollments comprised 2.4 percent of Baccalaureate enrollments, while the percentage had grown to 8.4 percent for the community and technical colleges.

The 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education (Master Plan) recognizes that e-learning can play an important role in creating more career-friendly pathways for individuals who are unable to leave work to attend school. The Master Plan cites the need for more portable and flexible options for promoting and financing skill upgrades, training, and professional development. State and national surveys reinforce contentions in the Master Plan. Each year Washington employers report that they continue to face shortages of skilled workers and that limited access to a skilled workforce is the largest barrier to expansion; at the same time students report that work and family commitments are the issues that prevent them from returning to school.

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### **Summary of Amended Bill:**

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) identifies and evaluates current national private employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components provided by higher education public institutions. The evaluation must include a literature review, direct surveys of programs, determination of feasibility, an overview of technological considerations, and cost factors. The results of the study are to be reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

The WTECB forms a task force to select up to eight institutions of higher education, including at least four community or technical colleges, to develop and offer pilot projects providing employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components.

Institutions apply to become pilot colleges and are selected based upon established criteria. By September 2008, the WTECB selects employers using established criteria. They have the ability to offer employment and workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components in cooperation with selected higher education institutions. The pilot program evaluated by December 1, 2012; after which the pilot program expires.

### **Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill:**

The amended bill creates a workgroup, jointly convened by the WTECB and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to take the following actions related to electronically distributed learning in addition to the study outlined in the original bill: (1) review and establish standards and best practices; (2) recommend methods to increase student access as well as identify barriers to participation and completion; (3) determine methods to increase the supply of open course materials; (4) recommend methods to increase the availability of digital open textbooks; and (5) review and report demographic information on programs of study including enrollments, retention, and completion.

The amended bill also requires a demonstrated commitment from workplaces applying for the grant and identifies specific criteria by which an employer's commitment is evaluated.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

### **Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) One of the core challenges facing our state is how do we upscale workers. The biggest issue causing the business community heartburn is finding skilled workers. Now, new skills are being required and our state lags in "tools in the toolbox" to upscale workers. This bill accomplishes that. Because it is workplace based, it is more easily accessed. It is also great for the employers; it focuses on entry-level workers and helps move them up into the system.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Senator Kilmer, prime sponsor; Carolyn Cummins, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Maddy Thompson, Workforce Board; and Amber Carter, Association of Washington Businesses.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.