

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5410

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 21, 2007

Title: An act relating to creating postsecondary opportunity programs.

Brief Description: Creating postsecondary opportunity programs.

Sponsors: Senators Berkey, Shin, Delvin and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/21/07 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/22/07.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Shin, Chair; Kilmer, Vice Chair; Delvin, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Schoesler and Sheldon.

Staff: Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Tim Yowell (786-7435)

Background: Regular surveys of employers conducted by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) show that employers in the state consistently report difficulty finding workers for jobs with mid-level skills that require some postsecondary education, but less than a bachelor's degree. The WTECB projects job openings for new workers with mid-level skills in Washington at 31,000 annually between 2009 and 2012. The WTECB estimates that to meet this demand, an additional 1,170 full-time equivalent (FTE) workforce education students are needed annually, in addition to increases tied to student-age population growth.

In 2006-2007, the average cost of community and technical college attendance is \$12,900 per year, when tuition and fees, books, living expenses and transportation are included. Seven different state agencies currently administer 18 state and federally-funded workforce programs in Washington. However, not all low-income students are eligible for need-based aid and there is no guarantee that a student will receive aid to cover all of his/her costs.

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.

A 2006 budget provision required the WTECB to conduct a study on financial aid and access issues for workforce education students. The study found that during 2004-05, after accessing traditional student aid and aid from workforce development programs, the remaining unmet need for students was \$97 million per year. The study found financial need to be the biggest barrier to increased student access and retention in workforce programs. The 2006 operating budget provided \$4 million for the community and technical college system to develop and implement the Opportunity Grants Pilot Program, which was designed to test strategies for increasing access to postsecondary education for low income students in job-specific programs. As of December 2006, 436 students were participating in the ten colleges selected from across the state to participate in the pilot.

Summary of Bill: The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) develops and implements the Opportunity Grant Program. Students enrolled in the program are eligible to receive funding for tuition and fees at the public community and technical college rate, plus \$1,000 per academic year for books, tools, and supplies. Funding is limited to 45 credits or three years, whichever comes first. Both are prorated if the credit load is less than full time. The students must be Washington residents enrolled in "opportunity grant-eligible programs of study." A student must make satisfactory progress and maintain a cumulative 2.0 grade point average for continued eligibility.

Students who enroll prior to January 2010 must have a family income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Students who enroll between January 2010 and January 2012 must have a family income that is at or below the state median family income. After January 2012, all students in eligible programs will qualify.

Colleges will receive an enhancement of \$1,500 per FTE student enrolled in the Opportunity Grant Program whose income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. These funds must be used for individualized support services necessary for student success. The SBCTC, in partnership with business, labor, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB): (1) identify high demand training programs offered by qualified postsecondary institutions that lead to a credential, certificate, or degree;(2) gain recognition of the credentials, certificates, and degrees by Washington's employers and labor organizations, and designate them as "opportunity grant-eligible programs of study;" and (3) market the credentials, certificates, and degrees to potential students, businesses, and apprenticeship programs.

Community and technical colleges and local workforce development councils partner to develop the opportunity partnership program, which provides mentoring to opportunity grant students. Participating students are matched with a business or labor mentor employed in their field of study. The mentor helps the student explore careers and employment options through any combination of tours, informational interviews, job shadowing, and internships.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education): PRO: This bill provides for accountability as well as increased access by providing financial aid, incentives for colleges, and mentoring. The program is very responsive to industry needs. It builds upon the very successful pilot project. These grants will help people get the education they need to obtain family wage jobs.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education): PRO: Senator Berkey, prime sponsor; Chris Reykdal, SBCTC; Lee Lambert, President of Shoreline Community College; Jesus Jasso, Student at Shoreline Community College; Jon Pazega, Vice President for Student Services at Renton Technical College; Michael Itti, League of Education Voters; Meridith Weilert; Kim Justice, Statewide Poverty Action Network.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This bill would help employers find skilled workers for high-demand jobs by giving students the financial help they need to prepare for those jobs. It's about addressing unmet needs, so that students don't have to choose between paying for daycare or going to school.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Chris Reykdal, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Lee Lambert, President of Shoreline Community College.