
Higher Education Committee

HB 1522

Brief Description: Regarding academic credit for prior learning.

Sponsors: Representatives Kenney, Haler, Maxwell, Probst, Haigh, Hasegawa, Frockt, Santos, Reykdal, Goodman, Ormsby and Moscoso.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires collaboration of higher education institutions and state agencies to increase the number of students who receive credit for prior learning and increase the types of credits awarded for prior learning.
- Establishes a work group to oversee implementation of the recommendations in the December 2010 report of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.
- Defines "prior learning" and requires the development of prior learning measures and a report on progress.

Hearing Date: 1/31/11

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

Educational Attainment of Adults.

The Tipping Point study, conducted by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) in 2005 found that in order to have the best chance of earning a wage to support oneself and one's family, an individual needs at least one year of postsecondary education and a credential. In 2008, State Board analysis estimated that about 1.6 million adults in Washington had a high school degree or less as their highest level of educational attainment.

In order to meet degree attainment goals in the 2008 Strategic Master Plan, the Higher Education Coordinating Board recommends encouraging many more residents to attain postsecondary education and to focus not only on recent high school graduates, but also on adults.

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 2008 report of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), in partnership with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), provides similar recommendations for the United States in the report, *State Policies to Bring Adult Learning into Focus*. The recommendations include addressing accessibility to postsecondary education for adults by promoting the assessment of prior learning for college credit.

The Governor's Higher Education Task Force report of 2010 also recommends requiring universities to strengthen policies for awarding credit for prior learning experiences with demonstrated competencies through proficiency exams and to make information about proficiency exams to earn college credit consistent and widely available.

2010 Report to the Legislature on Credit for Prior Learning.

Legislation enacted in 2010 (SSB 6357) directed the State Board to consult with stakeholders and develop policies for "awarding academic credit for learning from work and military experience, military and law enforcement training, career college training, internships and externships, and apprenticeships... provide for consistent application by all institutions of higher education and a basis for accurate and complete academic counseling" and report back to the Legislature. The State Board submitted recommendations to the Legislature in December, 2010.

Higher education institution assessors who award credit for prior learning must take into account institutional and program accreditation, and transfer policies, among other considerations. When awarding credit for prior learning, Washington's higher education institutions are guided by entities that include the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Intercollegiate Relations Commission. The State Board found that there is a lack of clarity around policies and guidelines and a wide variance in institutional and individual assessor's practices.

The State Board recommends establishing an ongoing work group to facilitate the implementation of revisions to policy and practice, and to improve consistency in prior learning assessment (PLA) practices across the institutions of higher education as follows:

- increase transparency and consistency;
- improve clarity and consistency of fee structure;
- identify a single point of contact for PLA at each institution ;
- increase the number of PLA credits accepted in 2-year and 4-year institutions;
- develop a matrix of work-based and other common training in career clusters and possible credits to be awarded;
- develop a handbook for training faculty and staff;
- provide online and recorded training for those who will be advising students or assessing individual student's prior learning, to include training on existing policies and exemplary practices;
- develop a consistent method of tracking the number of students seeking credit, the number of assessments attempted, and the number of prior learning credits awarded;
- track number of students attempting and completing PLA, and the number of PLA credits being awarded, annually; and
- develop articulation agreements between institutions, where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified.

Summary of Bill:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Council of Presidents, and the institutions of higher education are required to collaborate to:

- increase the number of students who receive credit for prior learning and increase the types of credits for prior learning that are awarded;
- improve consistency in policies and practices for prior learning assessment among institutions;
- develop tools to share exemplary practices;
- develop agreements when common patterns for granting credit for prior learning are identified; and
- develop outcome measures and report progress to the Legislature annually.

An ongoing work group, staffed by the State Board, is established to support the collaborative effort. The Office of Financial Management must track the number of students receiving academic credit for prior learning and the type of credits awarded.

A definition for prior learning is established that includes education and training, work experience, military training, and education received in other states and countries.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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