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## Higher Education Committee

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### HB 2254

**Brief Description:** Enacting the educational success for youth and alumni of foster care act.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Carlyle, Kagi, Reykdal, Darneille, Maxwell, Jinkins, Pedersen, Seaquist, Roberts, Dickerson and Kenney.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes the Passport to College Promise program permanent.
- Adds a program purpose to the Passport to College Promise program to improve high school graduation outcomes of foster youth.
- Adds or replaces various requirements for the Department of Social and Health Services, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, higher education institutions, school districts and other partners related to coordination, data-sharing, communication, support services and educational outcomes for foster youth.
- Requires that foster children be automatically enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship program and extends the age limit for foster children to age 21.

**Hearing Date:** 1/18/12

**Staff:** Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

#### Background:

##### Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth

State and national studies indicate that educational outcomes for foster youth lag behind the general population. For example, foster youth graduate from high school at a lower rate than their non-foster-care peers. A Washington State Institute for Public Policy study found that only 59 percent of youth in foster care enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of 12th grade compared to 86 percent for non-foster youth. Former foster youth attend post-secondary education at a lower rate and, if they do attend, have much lower graduation rates.

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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.*

Former foster youth are also more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, and incarceration than youth who were never in foster care.

### **The Passport to College Promise Program**

Legislation enacted in 2007 created the Passport to College Promise program as a pilot program. The program provides: (1) outreach and information to foster youth regarding the opportunities available to them for post-secondary education, and (2) scholarships to eligible former foster youth to cover their full costs of resident undergraduate tuition, fees, and living expenses. The Higher Education Coordinating Board administers the program under contract with a non-profit organization and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) assists with identifying eligible students.

To be eligible for a scholarship, a student must have been emancipated from foster care after having spent at least one year in foster care since his or her sixteenth birthday. A student must also be a Washington resident enrolled at least half-time in a college in Washington, make satisfactory academic progress, not already have a bachelor's or professional degree, and not be pursuing a degree in theology. An eligible student may receive a scholarship for up to five years or until the student's twenty-sixth birthday, whichever occurs first.

### **College Bound Scholarship**

Legislation enacted in 2007 created the Washington College Bound Scholarship. Students are eligible if they qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch and are notified in 7th grade. Students must pledge during their 7th or 8th grade years, that they will: (1) graduate from high school; (2) graduate with a C average; and (3) not have any felony convictions. To receive the scholarship, the student must have kept the pledge, must have a family income at high school graduation below 65 percent of the state median, and must be a resident student.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction provides notification and the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) develops and distributes the pledge forms, tracks scholarship recipients, and distributes scholarship funds. The scholarship is equal to the difference between the cost of the student's tuition and fees at a public college or university, plus \$500 for books and materials minus the value of any other state financial aid received for those items. The HECB may purchase Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) units to award as part of the scholarship.

The first scholarships are awarded to students graduating in 2012. The award does not supplant other grants, scholarships, or tax programs. If the scholarship is not used within five years it reverts back to the account to be used for scholarships for other students.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The Passport to College Promise program (Passport program) is made permanent. An additional purpose of the Passport program is added related to improving high school graduation of foster youth through coordination, outreach, and intervention, and definitions are clarified.

Institutions of higher education are required to explain on registration materials that there may be financial and support services available for students formerly in foster care.

Provisions related to supplemental education transitional planning are replaced with a requirement for the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to contract with at least one nongovernmental entity that has demonstrated success in working with foster care youth in improving educational outcomes, to the extent that funds are appropriated for this purpose. The nongovernmental entity or entities must:

- administer a program of education coordination for foster youth in Washington from birth through the twelfth grade;
- engage in a public-private partnership with DSHS;
- raise a portion of the funds needed for service delivery, administration, and evaluation;
- provide services to support individual youth when referred by a social worker with DSHS or a nongovernmental agency with responsibility for education support services;
- be collocated in DSHS to provide timely consultation and in-service training; and
- report outcomes biannually to DSHS.

If funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must identify 6-10 school districts with the highest number of foster children in which to place certificated staff persons to be known as Navigators. Navigators are required to perform a variety of functions to promote linkages and cooperation between the school, school district, local welfare office, DSHS and various support services to improve outcomes for foster youth.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy is required to complete an evaluation of the effectiveness of the navigator program and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2014.

Foster children must be enrolled automatically in the College Bound Scholarship program with no action necessary by the student or his/her family. The DSHS is responsible for forwarding enrollment forms. Foster children eligibility for enrollment in the College Bound Scholarship is not limited to seventh and eighth grade but extends up to age 21.

In relation to education records, data and accountability, DSHS is permitted to share educational records that it receives from schools with those entities with which it has contracted, or with which it is formally collaborating, and that have responsibility for educational support services and outcomes of foster students. The DSHS is encouraged to create data-sharing agreements to assure accountability with respect to the disclosure of educational records.

The K-12 Data Governance Group is required to maintain a comprehensive needs requirement document detailing specific information, technical capacity, and changes to law that might be necessary in order to allow timely sharing of records.

The OSPI is required to report on the implementation status of the state's plan for cross-system collaboration to promote educational stability and improve educational outcomes of foster youth pursuant to the federal Fostering Connections Act, in consultation with DSHS and the Office of the Administrator for the Courts. The first report is due on December 1, 2012 and annually thereafter through 2015.

Reporting requirements with respect to educational experiences and progress of students in foster care are transferred from OSPI to the Education Research and Data Center at the Office of Financial Management.

Similar to the Interstate Compact on Military Children, school districts are required to waive specific courses if similar coursework has been completed or provide reasonable justification for denial. School districts are also required to work together to facilitate credit acquisition and on-time graduation.

It is recommended that entities with which DSHS contracts or collaborates to provide educational services to foster children explore models for harnessing technology to keep in constant touch with the students they serve and keep students engaged.

The Act is named the Educational Success for Youth and Alumni of Foster Care Act and there is an effective date of July 1, 2012.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 10, 2012.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect July 1, 2012.