

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5182

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, February 16, 2011

Title: An act relating to establishing the office of student financial assistance by eliminating the higher education coordinating board and transferring its functions to various entities.

Brief Description: Establishing the office of student financial assistance by eliminating the higher education coordinating board and transferring its functions to various entities.

Sponsors: Senators White, Tom, Hill, Zarelli, Murray, Ericksen, Prentice, Hobbs and Nelson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/26/11, 2/16/11 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5182 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Tom, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Kastama, Kilmer and White.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Baumgartner, Becker and Ericksen.

Staff: Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

Background: In 1969 the Legislature established the Council on Higher Education (CHE). During the six years of CHE's existence it took most of its cues from the Legislature. Though the Legislature only gave the board limited statutory authority, the board was widely viewed as one of the strongest in the country given its legislative backing.

The CHE became the Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE) in 1975 when federal legislation required states to establish or designate single state postsecondary education planning agency to qualify for federal planning and other funds. There were several changes: (1) the membership of the CPE was reorganized; (2) its administrative responsibilities with respect to such programs as financial aid increased; and (3) the board's capacity to consider and debate higher education matters was enhanced.

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.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) was established in 1985 and replaced the CPE. The stated purpose of the HECB is to provide planning, coordination, monitoring, and policy analysis for higher education in the state in cooperation and consultation with the institutions, autonomous governing boards and with all other segments of postsecondary education, including but not limited to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). It is a ten member board that is charged with representing the broad public interest above the interests of the individual colleges and universities.

Major functions of the HECB include: (1) developing a statewide strategic master plan for higher education; (2) recommending policies to enhance the availability, quality, efficiency, and accountability of public higher education in Washington; (3) administering student financial assistance programs; (4) serving as an advocate on behalf of students and the overall system of higher education; (5) coordinating with other governing boards and institutions to create a seamless system of public education for the citizens of Washington; and (6) helping families save for college.

Mandated HECB responsibilities include reviewing, evaluating, and making recommendations on operating and capital budget requests; recommending legislation affecting higher education; recommending tuition and fee levels, and policies; making recommendations on merging or closing institutions and developing criteria identifying the need for new baccalaureate institutions; and approving new degree programs. The HECB has a number of administrative functions and duties, most of which pertain to student financial assistance programs and various federal programs.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The HECB is eliminated. The Council for Performance and Accountability in Higher Education (Council) is created. Council membership includes the six four-year institution presidents, one private nonprofit president, the executive director of the SBCTC, and a community or technical college president, or their designees. The purpose of the council is to develop performance-based measures and goals for each state university, regional university, and the state college, linked to the role, mission, and strategic plan of the institution of higher education including (a) indicators and goals that measure outcomes concerning cost, quality, and timeliness of student progress toward degrees and certifications; (b) benchmarks and goals for long-term degree production, including discrete benchmarks and goals in particular fields of study; (c) the level of resources necessary to meet the performance outcomes, benchmarks, and goals, subject to legislative appropriation; (d) indicators and goals that measure outcomes concerning recruitment, retention, and success of students from diverse, underrepresented communities; and (e) a system of consequences for exceeding or for failing to achieve the goals or benchmarks.

The Council performs essential state governance functions previously assigned to the HECB, including approving new programs, mission changes, new colleges, and recognizing accreditation, and provides the interface to meet federal requirements. Every four years the Council assembles a disappearing workgroup to develop a ten-year projected master plan for higher education. Based on objective data analysis, the Council also develops and recommends statewide policies to enhance the availability, quality, efficiency, and accountability of public higher education in Washington State.

The current student financial aid functions performed by the HECB are all transferred to the newly created Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) that administers all state and federal financial aid and the advanced college tuition payment program. The Office is under the supervision of the Council.

Many HECB reporting requirements are eliminated, but current data gathering functions are maintained by the institutions or the Education Research and Data Center. The state performance agreement committee and process is eliminated.

Every two years, Office of Financial Management must produce an assessment of the number and type of academic and training credentials required to match employer demand. This is done jointly with the four-year institutions of higher education, the SBCTC, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): The Council for Performance and Accountability in Higher Education is created and is assigned the functions allocated to the Office of Financial Management in the original bill. Council membership is specified. The Council performs essential state governance functions, including approving new programs, mission changes, new colleges, and recognizing accreditation, and provides the interface to meet federal requirements. The Office of Student Financial Assistance is created to administer state and federal financial aid and the advanced college tuition payment program. The financial aid advisory group is eliminated. The Office reports to the Council. Every four years the Council assembles a disappearing workgroup to develop a ten-year projected master plan for higher education.

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 on Original Bill: PRO: The current budget crisis is forcing a hard look at how to improve higher education governance and make it more cost-effective. The Legislature has a responsibility to look for efficiencies. The HECB has been a key player and should be acknowledged for its good work, but the governance landscape is changing.

CON: The HECB is needed to provide a roadmap to constantly improving the system. Without the HECB, who will stand up for students, families, and citizens of this state. Losing the HECB will ensure continued disinvestment in our student's education. The HECB provides an efficient and cost-effective service to the state. The state would be making blind decisions with no ability to know if its dollars are being well spent. This would be a loss of voice for the citizens of the state.

OTHER: The bill fundamentally reorders higher education governance without prior careful consideration. Critical functions such as statewide planning and citizen input are eliminated. The idea will not save as much money as you might think. Financial aid is not just an administrative function, there are policy decisions made in awarding it. The HECB provides data-driven recommendations vetted by a citizen board. Citizen input is important. Current efforts to update the statewide strategic master plan would be halted. The institutions are willing to work with legislators to study governance and determine what is appropriate for Washington. This bill should be the start of the discussion, not the end. Career colleges have a great relationship with the HECB and are concerned about losing that point of contact.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator White, prime sponsor.

CON: Andrew Helm, WSU student; Sam Shaddox, HECB student member; Iris Maute-Gibson, WWU student.

OTHER: Ann Ryherd; Don Bennett, Executive Director, Roberta Greene, Member, Jesus Hernandez, Chairman, HECB; Steve Lindstrom, NW Career Colleges Federation; Ann Anderson, CWU.