

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6374

As of January 30, 2012

Title: An act relating to improving outcomes for youth in and alumni of foster care.

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

Sponsors: Senators Kilmer, Tom, Kastama, Frockt, Harper, Hatfield, Kohl-Welles and McAuliffe.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/25/12.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: Under current law, it is state policy that, wherever practical and in the best interests of the child, children placed into foster care must remain enrolled in the schools they were attending at the time they entered foster care. In order to maximize foster children's educational continuity and achievement, administrative regions of Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must develop protocols with school districts specifying strategies for communication, coordination, and collaboration regarding the status and progress of foster children. Additionally, in order to serve students who are the subject of child dependency cases, their educational records must be released to DSHS upon request.

Passport to College Promise Program: The Passport to College Promise Scholarship program was created in 2007 to help students from foster care attend and succeed in college. To be eligible for a scholarship under the program, a student must have been emancipated from foster care after having spent at least one year in foster care since turning 16. 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.

The amount of the scholarships will equal the difference between a student's financial need and the amount the student receives through public and private grants, scholarships, and waiver assistance, including a self-help amount. However, scholarships will not exceed the amount of resident undergraduate tuition and fees at the highest-priced public institution. An

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eligible student may receive a scholarship for up to five years or until the student turns 26, whichever occurs first. The program is authorized as a six-year pilot, and is in its fourth year of serving students in 2011-12.

College Bound Scholarship: The Washington College Bound Scholarship was created in 2007. Students are eligible if they qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch. To be awarded the scholarship an eligible student must pledge, during grade seven or eight, 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 (OSPI) notifies schools about the program, 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 maximum award is for four years. The first scholarships are awarded to students graduating in 2012.

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 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 grade 12;
- 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, OSPI must identify six to ten 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 must 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 the student's family. DSHS is responsible for forwarding enrollment forms. Foster children are not limited to enrolling in grades seven and eight, but are eligible 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. 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 must 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 Superintendent of Public Instruction must 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 Administrative Office of 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 the OSPI to the Education Research and Data Center at the Office of Financial Management.

School districts must waive specific courses if similar coursework has been completed or provide reasonable justification for denial. School districts must also 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 care 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 23, 2012.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We established the Passport program because foster youth are more likely to experience homelessness, lack of employment, and incarceration than other students. The bill is designed to build on success of the Passport program and not have it phase out. This program will make lives better and save money. Society has an obligation to foster youth. Nationally speaking, it's difficult to say how alumni of care are graduating. Lower graduation rates are contributed to multiple factors, including low high school graduation rates. Only 20 percent of those who do graduate pursue higher education. A majority of alumni of care do not stay in college when they get there. Passport alums look very different from outcomes at the national level. Retention rates are 60 percent from year-to-year. Washington is innovative. Passport provides a commitment of financial aid as well as wrap-around services. Identification in high school is what makes the difference for students. Improving information exchange makes a lot of sense. Students in foster care transfer a lot, making them credit deficient. This bill allows students to graduate on time by acknowledging work they've done elsewhere.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kilmer, prime sponsor; Senator Tom; Rachelle Sharpe, HECEB; Phoebe Anderson, Treehouse; Alexia Everett, Janice Cole, College Success Foundation.