
Higher Education Committee

HB 2694

Brief Description: Creating an informational program to increase applications from high-achieving low-income students to selective institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Hansen, Magendanz, Zeiger, Walsh, Hargrove, Ormsby, Haler, Tharinger and Freeman.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Recognizes that each year a large number of high-achieving students from low-income families do not apply to a selective college or university, even though they would have a good chance of acceptance.
- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to design and implement, by the fall of 2015, a program that provides information to high achieving, low income high school students through the mail with the purpose of increasing the number of applications from this group of students to selective four-year institutions of higher education and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the state.
- Requires the WSAC to partner with the a national entity that offers aptitude tests for the purpose of predicting college success, and consult with the public baccalaureate institutions and the independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, and work with a third party evaluator.
- Describes key elements of the packet to be mailed to students.

Hearing Date: 2/4/14

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

Several national studies have found that only a small portion of high-achieving, low-income students apply to selective colleges and universities compared to the number of high-achieving,

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high-income students that apply to selective institutions. This occurs despite the finding that high-achieving, low-income students who apply are also admitted, enroll, progress, and graduate at the same rates as high-income students with similar test scores and grades. Studies have also found that for high-achieving, low-income students, the net costs are often lower at selective institutions than at less selective institutions, because of financial aid options available at selective institutions. In addition, most application fees for selective institutions and national aptitude testing fees can be waived for low-income students.

Researchers from Stanford University and the University of Virginia designed an experiment, known as the Expanding College Opportunities project (ECO), to test whether high-achieving, low-income students would change their behavior if they knew more about colleges and also to test whether there was a cost-effective method to inform such students of their college opportunities. The ECO combined application guidance, customized information about the net cost of attending different colleges, and no-paperwork application fee waivers in a mailing to students that cost \$6 per student. The intervention was found to increase the number of applications and enrollments of low-income students to selective institutions.

Summary of Bill:

It is recognized that each year a large number of high-achieving students from low-income families do not apply to a selective college or university, even though they would have a good chance of acceptance. At the same time, high-achieving students from high-income families are very likely to apply to selective colleges and universities.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) must design and implement a program that provides information to high-achieving, low-income high school students through the mail, customized for each student, with the purpose of increasing the number of applications from this group of students to selective four-year institutions of higher education and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the state.

In order to design and implement the program, the WSAC is required to partner with a national entity that offers aptitude tests for the purpose of predicting college success, and consult with the public baccalaureate institutions and the independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

High-achieving students are identified according to aptitude test scores. Scores on Advanced Placement, Running Start, and other dual credit programs may also be considered if students do not take aptitude tests.

Low-income students are identified based on eligibility for free and reduced lunch.

A key element of the program is to mail a customized information packet to high-achieving, low-income students. The packet should include the following, at a minimum:

- materials to help students choose colleges;
- an application guidance booklet;
- nontransferable application fee waivers that allow the student to apply for up to eight selective colleges free of fees and with no paperwork required;

- information on college affordability and financial aid, outlining the net cost of attendance for each baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, and customized information on merit and need-based aid from federal, state, and institutional sources; and
- a personally addressed cover letter signed by the Governor and all the presidents of the state's public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

Each packet is to be mailed and students must be provided with a personal password to access to a website where the same information, customized to the student, can be accessed.

The WSAC is directed to:

- establish agreements with a national entity that offers aptitude tests for the purpose of predicting college success and work with higher education institutions in the state to share costs of producing and mailing the materials.;
- work with a third party evaluator to provide an evaluation of the program and recommendations for improvement; and
- implement the program no later than the fall of 2015 giving consideration to Spring mailings in order to capture early action decisions offered by baccalaureate institutions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 29, 2014.

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