

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 1276

As of March 22, 2013

Title: An act relating to dropout prevention through engaging youth in farming.

Brief Description: Creating the dropout prevention through farm engagement pilot project.

Sponsors: Representatives Reykdal, Hunt, Tharinger, Wylie, Pollet, Jinkins, Ryu, Roberts, Morrell and Bergquist.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/08/13, 89-8.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/22/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Eric Wolf (786-7405)

Background: Dropout Statistics. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) prepares an annual report regarding graduation and dropout statistics for schools and districts in Washington. The four-year graduation rate in Washington was 76.6 percent for the class of 2011. Certain student sub-groups, including special education, limited English, low-income, and migrant students have graduation rates lower than the rate for all students. The cumulative dropout rate, after four years, for students entering ninth grade in 2007-08 was 13.9 percent. There were 14,054 students in the 2010-11 class who dropped out before they finished high school.

Dropout Prevention. In 2011, a state workgroup provided a report to the Legislature and the Governor that recommended specific measures to address dropout prevention. Among the general recommendations, the report indicated that it was crucial to combine the best components of three approaches, including the following: quality school and community data to drive decision-making; district and school-wide reforms such as student support systems, and district and school improvement planning; and integrated school, family, community, and agency partnerships.

Summary of Bill: Two Dropout Prevention programs are created through Farm Engagement pilot projects for a three-year period beginning in the 2013-14 school year. OSPI selects the two projects from school districts who agree to partner with community-based organizations, food banks, and farms or gardens to establish an alternative high school program for at-risk youth.

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.

One of the pilot projects must be a currently operating program with a record of success in engaging low-income and disengaged youth. The second selected project must create a new program in a different community. One of the projects must be selected from east of the Cascade Mountains and one from west of the Cascade Mountains. The selected projects must operate near farm-related activities and may include farm-oriented student clubs and organizations

These programs would primarily target low-income and disengaged youth who dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of high school; provide youth with opportunities for community service such as building food gardens for low-income families and work-based learning and employment; provide youth with opportunities to earn core credits and elective credits toward high school graduation, including but not limited to science, health, and career and technical credits; offer youth development support and services including social-emotional learning, counseling, leadership training, and career and college guidance; and improve food security for participating youth and the community through the farm or garden program.

For each full-time equivalent student enrolled in the pilot project, including enrollment in the summer, the participating school district will receive a basic education allocation calculated for a skill center student. However, this allocation does not apply to student enrollment in courses that are not part of the pilot project. Allocations provided for the pilot project and school district levy funds may not be used for providing participating youth with stipends. Stipends that are provided to youth from other funds must be provided based on education.

The purpose of the pilot project is to measure the effectiveness and cost benefit of this model in improving outcomes. After two full years of operation, OSPI must conduct a rigorous evaluation, including analysis of a statistical comparison group of students who did not participate in the pilot. OSPI must submit the evaluation results to the education committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2015.

The outcomes to be measured in the pilot project include the following: student grade point, average overall and in science; the number of earned credits in core courses and elective courses; incidence of discipline issues; school attendance rates; high school graduation and General Educational Development attainment; student health and nutrition; acreage used for fresh produce; volume of produce produced and made available to students, families, school district food programs, and community food banks; and hours of community service activity by students.

The law expires on August 31, 2016.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Olympia School District operates a farm-partnered dropout prevention program called Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB). This program improves the work ethics of at-risk youth, and provides an intensive, half-day program for engaging those youth. The biggest issue with at-risk youth is engagement, and the farm program is an alternative method for sparking interest in education and skills training. The farm program benefits the community as well by producing food for charities. The farm program in Olympia also engages at-risk youth during the summer months. The farm program also teaches students where their food comes from. The stipend for working during the summer is critical for engaging at-risk youth year-round.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Reykdal, House prime sponsor; Blue Peetz, Matt Grant, Olympia High School; Dayquan Williams, Katie Gubbe, GRuB.