

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2694

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 27, 2014

Title: An act relating to an informational program to increase applications from high-achieving low-income high school students to selective institutions of higher education.

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Hansen, Magendanz, Zeiger, Walsh, Hargrove, Ormsby, Haler, Tharinger and Freeman).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/14/14, 81-15.

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/25/14, 2/27/14 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chair; Becker, Vice Chair; Kohl-Welles, Ranking Member; Baumgartner, Frockt, McAuliffe and Tom.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

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, 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.

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 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

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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: The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) must design and implement a program that provides information to high-achieving, low-income high school students. The information must be sent through the mail, and electronically if WSAC deems it appropriate. The purpose is to increase the number of applications from these students to public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate institutions of higher education in Washington.

In order to design and implement the program, WSAC must partner with a national entity that offers aptitude tests, and consult with the public and the independent, nonprofit baccalaureate institutions of higher education in Washington. WSAC must develop agreements and opportunities to share costs and resources with both the institutions and the entity that offers aptitude tests.

WSAC must identify high-achieving students from low-income families using methods including, but not limited to, scores on national aptitude and AP tests, and Running Start and other dual credit programs.

WSAC must identify low-income students using methods including eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, self-reported information, or participation in federal and state programs for low-income students.

The packet to be mailed to high-achieving, low-income students, must include at a minimum the following:

- materials to help students choose colleges;
- an application guidance booklet;
- application fee waivers, if available, that enable students to apply to public or independent, nonprofit baccalaureate institutions in Washington, without paying application fees;
- information on college affordability and financial aid, outlining the net cost of attendance for each baccalaureate institution, and 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 institutions.

WSAC must 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.

The act is null and void if specific funding for the purposes of the act is not provided in the Omnibus Appropriations Act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 18, 2014.

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: This bill helps low-income kids get into school. It helps students know what kind of aid is available so they do not get sticker shock. Letters will tell students that based on test scores they can go to selective schools. We want to ensure that every low-income kid gets a letter that tells them they have what it takes to succeed. This is not an expansion of WSAC's mission, but a different tool to use. This bill directly aligns with WSAC's Roadmap, the Ready, Set, Grad website, and statewide admissions campaigns with similar goals of providing college preparation information to low-income high school students. Additionally, WSAC would leverage existing programs such as College Bound and Gear Up.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Hansen, prime sponsor; Becca Kenna-Schenk, WSAC.