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**HOUSE BILL 1568**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Reykdal, Pike, Sawyer, Springer, Walkinshaw, Riccelli, Ryu, S. Hunt, Robinson, McBride, Stanford, Pettigrew, Fitzgibbon, Van De Wege, Ormsby, Kagi, and Santos

AN ACT Relating to dropout prevention through engaging youth in farming; adding a new section to chapter 28A.630 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that low-income youth are not only at higher risk of dropping out of school, they are also less likely to have dependable access to sufficient and nutritious food. There is sufficient evidence to find that innovative partnerships between community-based organizations, schools, food banks, and farms or gardens address both dropout prevention and food security for such youth. In these dropout prevention programs, low-income youth can earn credits toward high school graduation and receive youth development support and services, while enhancing health and nutrition in their surrounding communities. The legislature finds that engaging community partners in dropout prevention programs saves taxpayers money because the youth receive academic and career training at the same time as they are being productive members of society. These types of partnerships should be supported as pilot projects and carefully evaluated to assure that desired outcomes are met and to identify opportunities for expansion and replication in other parts of the state.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.630 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The dropout prevention through farm engagement pilot project is established for a three-year period beginning in the 2015-16 school year.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall select five pilot projects from school districts that agree to partner with community-based organizations, food banks, and farms or gardens to establish an alternative high school program targeted primarily to at-risk youth as provided in subsection (3) of this section. One of the selected projects must be a currently operating program with a record of success in engaging low-income and disengaged youth. One of the selected projects must be located east of the crest of the Cascade mountains and at least one must be located south of highway 12 and west of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

(3) Dropout prevention through farm engagement pilot projects must have the following characteristics:

(a) Primarily target low-income and disengaged youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of high school;

(b) Provide participating youth with opportunities for community service such as building food gardens for low-income families and work-based learning and employment during the school year and during the summer through a farm or garden program;

(c) Provide participating 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 education credits;

(d) Offer youth development support and services to participating youth including social emotional learning, counseling, leadership training, and career and college guidance; and

(e) Improve food security for participating youth and the community through the farm or garden program.

(4) For each annual average full-time equivalent student enrolled in the pilot project, including enrollment during the summer months, the participating school district shall receive a basic education allocation as calculated under RCW 28A.150.260 and the omnibus appropriations act for a skill center student. The allocation under this subsection does not apply to a student's enrollment in courses of study that are not part of the pilot project. The allocations provided for the pilot project may be used to supplement other district and community funds to operate the project and to provide summer employment stipends for participating youth.

(5) The purpose of the dropout prevention through farm engagement pilot project is to measure the effectiveness and cost-benefit of a particular alternative high school program on improving outcomes for at-risk youth. The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall conduct a rigorous evaluation after the pilot projects have been operating for two years, including analysis of a statistical comparison group of students who did not participate in the project. The office shall submit the evaluation results to the education committees of the legislature by December 1, 2017, including recommendations for whether the pilot projects should be continued or replicated in other parts of the state.

(6) Outcomes to be measured under the pilot project include:

(a) Student grade point average overall and in science;

(b) Number of earned credits in core courses and elective courses;

(c) Incidence of discipline issues;

(d) School attendance rates;

(e) High school graduation and attainment of a high school equivalency certificate as provided for in RCW 28B.50.536;

(f) Student health and nutrition;

(g) Acreage used for fresh produce;

(h) Volume of produce produced and made available to students, families, school district food programs, and community food banks; and

(i) Hours of community service activity by students.

(7) This section expires August 31, 2018.

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