

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1812

As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

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 high school students to selective institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Hansen, Magendanz, Hargrove, Haler, Zeiger, Carlyle, Tharinger and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/10/15, 2/13/15 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Student Achievement Council (Council) to design and implement a program that provides information to high-achieving, low-income high school students to increase applications from these students to public and independent, non-profit baccalaureate institutions in the state.
- Requires the Council to partner with a national entity that offers aptitude tests for the purpose of predicting college success, consult with public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, and work with a third-party evaluator.
- Describes elements of the packet to be mailed to the students.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Gregory, Hargrove, Holy, Reykdal, Stambaugh, Tarleton and Van Werven.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

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.

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. 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 can be waived for low-income students.

Researchers from Stanford University and the University of Virginia designed an experiment, the Expanding College Opportunities project (ECO), to test whether high-achieving, low-income students would change their behavior if they knew more about colleges. The experiment was 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 packet that was mailed 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 (Council) must design and implement a program that provides information to high-achieving, low-income high school students through the mail, or electronically if deemed appropriate, with the purpose of increasing the number of applications from this group of students to public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions in the state.

In order to design, develop, and implement the program, the Council must partner with a national entity that offers aptitude tests and consult with the public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. High-achieving students from low-income families must be identified by a method the Council deems appropriate, such as aptitude test scores, scores on Advance Placement tests, or Running Start. Low-income students must be identified based on methods the Council deems appropriate, including eligibility for free and reduced priced lunch or participation in federal and state programs for low-income students.

A customized information packet must be sent to high-achieving, low-income students. The packet must include, at a minimum:

- materials to help students choose colleges;
- an application guidance booklet;
- application fee waivers, if they are available, that allow the student to apply to public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions free of fees;

- information on college affordability and financial aid that includes the net cost of attendance for each public and nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institution;
- 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 public and independent, nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

The Council must implement the program no later than the fall of 2015, to give consideration to spring mailings in order to capture early action decisions offered by the public and nonprofit baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) If a student comes from an affluent family, he or she receives a lot of help in going to college. If the student comes from a low-income family, he or she may or may not receive the same help. The point of this bill is to let low-income, high-achieving students know that schools they thought were out of reach may not be. The bill is based on a program that was run out of a think-tank organization that sent mailers to low-income, high-achieving students to let them know about their college and financial aid options. Essentially, the letters say "please apply to college and stay in the state."

Often highly capable students from low-income families do not go to college or finish college. The College Board did a similar project where information was sent to students with application fee waivers. One of the results of the program was that students were "tweeting" about the information packet and mentioning that the College Board thought they were smart. This kind of program encourages students to apply to college.

The goal of the bill aligns well with the state's educational attainment goals. It can help solve state and local workforce needs and provide opportunities for all Washington residents. The bill complements existing state efforts, such as the College Bound Scholarship and the Compass to Campus mentoring program, and adds to the tool kit already available.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Hansen, prime sponsor; Rachelle Sharpe, Washington Student Achievement Council; Paul Francis, Council of Presidents; and Nancy Potter, The College Board.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.