
Higher Education Committee

HB 2593

Brief Description: Making community and technical colleges more affordable by eliminating the application fee for low-income students and reviewing placement testing fees.

Sponsors: Representatives Kilduff, Zeiger, Moscoso, Bergquist, Rossetti, McBride, Stanford, S. Hunt, Gregerson, Santos, Goodman, Pollet and Hickel.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) to implement a uniform statewide program to waive application fees for low-income students.
- Requires the State Board to assess the operation and impact of placement testing administered at the community and technical colleges.
- Requires the State Board to report to the Governor and Legislature by December 1, 2018, on the impact of the application fee waiver program and the assessment of the placement testing.

Hearing Date: 1/26/16

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

Application Fees.

The community and technical colleges (CTCs) have a uniform application for admission, although some more selective programs, such as nursing and dental, have their own applications for admissions. However, the CTCs do not have a uniform application fee. Twenty-two of the CTCs do not have an application fee, but for those that do, the application fee ranges from around \$15 to \$50. Some of the CTCs offer application waivers, particularly for low-income students who meet eligibility guidelines for federal free and reduced price meals.

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.

Placement Testing.

Most two-year and four-year institutions of higher education require students to take a placement test to find out if they are ready for college-level courses. Common pre-college tests used to determine placement include the ASSET, COMPASS, Accuplacer, and the SLEP. Colleges may also use SAT and ACT test scores to determine college-level readiness. In addition, due to a statewide agreement between all of Washington's public institutions of higher education, a student who takes the eleventh grade Smarter Balanced Assessment and scores a college ready score, does not need to take a placement test. If a student needs to take a placement test, there is usually a fee involved. Five of the CTCs do not charge a placement test fee, two include the placement test fee in the application fee, and the other placement test fees range from \$10 to \$25.

Summary of Bill:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) must coordinate with the CTCs to implement a uniform statewide program to waive the application fee for a resident student whose income at the time of application is at or below 70 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size. The uniform application fee waiver program (program) must be in effect at all CTCs by the time the CTCs begin to accept applications for admission for the fall 2017 term. "Application fee" means the processing fee the CTC requires an individual to pay when submitting an application for admission, and does not include placement testing fees.

The State Board must coordinate with the CTCs to determine the amount of forgone revenue each college experienced for the 2017-18 academic year due to the program. In addition, the State Board must review the operation and impact of placement testing administered at the CTCs to better assess the use, effectiveness, and costs of placement tests.

The State Board must submit a report to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2018. The report includes two elements: a review of the program and a review of placement testing. For the program, the report must provide:

- information on the fiscal impact for the 2017-18 academic year;
- an estimate of the annual revenue the colleges expect to forgo; and
- a recommendation on the feasibility of the CTCs to offset any reduction in revenue from the program by implementing a tiered application fee structure for students with incomes above seventy percent of the median family income, adjusted for family size.

For the placement testing portion of the report, the State Board must include:

- the number of placement tests taken by entering students;
- a description of how and to what extent the CTCs use placement tests in determining students' academic skill levels;
- the costs to the CTCs of administering and analyzing placement tests;
- the costs to students taking placement tests;
- the number and percentage of students who have graduated in the previous four years along with the number and percentage of students who have taken placement tests; and
- recommendations on how to eliminate or minimize the cost of placement tests to low-income students.

The report section of the bill expires August 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 01/18/16.

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