

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2593

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to making community and technical colleges more affordable by eliminating the application fee for low-income students and reviewing placement testing fees.

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 History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/26/16, 2/3/16 [DP].

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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Frame, Reykdal, Sells, Stambaugh, Tarleton and Van Werven.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hargrove and Holy.

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:

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. Around 20 of the CTCs do not have an application fee, but for those that do, the application fee ranges from around \$20 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.

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. Four 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 \$30.

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 70 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: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is a bill about college affordability, and while the Legislature decreased tuition last year, barriers to postsecondary education still exist. This focuses on those very first costs that students encounter when they enter a community or technical college. It eliminates that barrier by asking the community and technical colleges to establish uniform application fee waivers for low-income students.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Currently, 12 of the colleges have application fees and some of those have application fee waivers. The community and technical colleges are moving away from placement testing, and there will only be a couple of options moving forward. Many of the colleges have reciprocity agreements in place in which a student can take a placement exam at one college and have it count at a different college if they change their mind about where to attend. Another great example is Green River Community College, which works with the local feeder high schools to create a complex grid of courses. If a student scores a certain grade in those courses, Green River Community College waives the placement test. Also, there is the agreement with the Smarter Balanced Assessment in which a student who scores a 3 or 4 in their junior or senior year of high school does not need placement testing. In terms of traditional students, placement test options and alternatives are pretty well covered.

It is with the nontraditional, older adults who have been out of formal education for awhile that the placement tests are quite valuable. The tests indicate where skills need to be refreshed.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kilduff, prime sponsor.

(Other) Scott Copeland, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: