

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2769

As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

Title: An act relating to creating a pilot program for community and technical colleges to offer bachelor degrees.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot program for community and technical colleges to offer bachelor degrees.

Sponsors: Representatives Senn, Zeiger, Bergquist, Haler, Reykdal, Frame, Rossetti, Kilduff and Goodman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/2/16, 2/5/16 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a pilot program for the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) to select up to five community or technical colleges to offer bachelor degrees in high-demand fields of study.
- Requires the State Board to select applicants for the pilot program based on a college's ability to demonstrate resource capacity, appropriate faculty, demand from students and employers, and that the program fills a local or state workforce skill gap.
- Requires the State Board to approve a degree program developed by a pilot college before allowing the college to enroll students in upper-division courses.
- Allows the colleges offering bachelor degrees to charge tuition fees above the associate degree level, but below the rates at the regional universities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Frame, Hargrove, Reykdal, Sells and Tarleton.

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.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Pollet, Vice Chair; Holy, Stambaugh and Van Werven.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

In 2005 the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) was given authority to select four community or technical colleges to develop and offer programs of study leading to applied baccalaureate degrees on a pilot basis. An applied baccalaureate degree is a baccalaureate degree awarded by a community or technical college which expands on the curriculum from an associate of applied science degree, or its equivalent, and incorporates both theoretical and applied knowledge and skills in a specific technical field. In 2010 the pilot status and limitation on the number of colleges was removed. In order for a college to offer an applied baccalaureate degree, the college must receive approval from the State Board by demonstrating:

- resource capacity;
- that the college has the appropriate faculty;
- that there is student and employer demand; and
- that the program would fulfill a gap in options available for students because the program is not offered by a public four-year institution of higher education in the college's geographic area.

All programs must be approved by the State Board. The community and technical colleges do not have authority to offer bachelor degrees.

In 2014-15 there were 15 colleges offering applied baccalaureate degrees, and 1,037 students enrolled in applied baccalaureate degree programs in the community and technical college system.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The State Board must select up to five community or technical colleges to develop and offer programs of study leading to bachelor degrees in high-demand fields of study. Interested colleges must submit an application, and the State Board must review the applications and select the pilot colleges using the following criteria:

- demonstrates the capacity to make a long-term commitment of resources to build and sustain a high-quality program;
- has, or can readily engage, qualified faculty to develop and deliver high-quality curriculum at the bachelor degree level;
- can demonstrate demand for the proposed program from a sufficient number of students within the college's service area to make the program cost-effective and feasible to operate;
- can demonstrate employer demand for the level of technical training proposed within the program, making it cost-effective for students to seek the degree; and

- can demonstrate the proposed program fills a skills gap in the local area or in the state's workforce.

Colleges selected for the pilot program may develop the curriculum for and design and deliver courses leading to a bachelor degree. However, degree programs developed under the pilot program are subject to approval by the State Board before a college may enroll students in upper-division courses. A selected pilot college may not enroll students in upper division courses before fall 2017, unless the degree program has already received authorization and funding from the Legislature, in which case the program may enroll students in upper division courses once the program is approved by the State Board and accredited. This program will count as one of the five pilots.

The Student Achievement Council (Council), in collaboration with the State Board, must study the impacts of allowing community and technical colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees. The study must analyze baccalaureate degree demand compared to the populations served by current baccalaureate degree programs. The study must also discuss alternatives regarding pricing and cost models for tuition and state support, adequate student advising and support services, accreditation and academic quality, regional demand for additional baccalaureate degrees, and other factors deemed relevant. The Council must conduct the study within existing resources, but may contract with a third-party organization or request assistance from faculty and graduate research students from the public institutions for the research and analysis. A report on the study is due to the Legislature by November 1, 2018.

The colleges offering bachelor degree programs under the pilot program are authorized to charge tuition fees above the associate degree level, but not at rates that exceed the tuition fee rates at the regional universities. Also, the colleges selected are allowed to award baccalaureate degrees.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill allows a degree program that has already been authorized and funded by the Legislature to begin enrolling students in upper-division courses once the program is approved by the State Board and receives accreditation, rather than fall 2017. Such program will count towards one of the five pilot programs.

In addition, the study by the Council was added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Last year the Legislature's budget included a proviso to authorize Bellevue College to develop a bachelor's of science degree in computer science no later than fall 2016. The degree proposal is set to go before the State Board for approval in May. However, current authority only allows the State Board to authorize applied baccalaureate degrees. Washington is one of the only states that uses the term applied baccalaureate degrees for those awarded at community and technical colleges. In today's economy, applied baccalaureate degrees are not enough.

The demand in science, technology, engineering, and math and healthcare fields supports a need to increase bachelor degrees statewide. Community and technical colleges are ideal to fulfill the gap because they can fill local demand, are affordable, and the capacity is there. The degrees are aimed at place bound students, and this proposal can help the state achieve its educational achievement goals. The state should move ahead now because a study will push this back for years.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Educational opportunities, multiple pathways, and greater choice are all supported. This could be a viable way to achieve greater opportunity, but higher education is a system and should be considered as such. There are some policy considerations to think about. The proposal should be advanced in a way that does not hurt the four-year institutions. This bill represents a major change in public policy, and the state should be intentional about the design of the entire higher education system. The pilot should have some kind of evaluation and criteria to measure whether it is successful.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Marty Brown, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges; Steve Miller, Bellevue College Board of Trustees; David Rule, Bellevue College; and Paul Bell.

(Other) Tom Fitzsimmons, Independent Colleges of Washington; and Paul Francis, Council of Presidents.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.