

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1404

As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

Title: An act relating to conducting a workforce study of employment opportunities in the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors intended to provide educators with the information needed for informing students about employment opportunities in the studied fields.

Brief Description: Conducting a workforce study of employment opportunities in the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors intended to provide educators with the information needed for informing students about employment opportunities in the studied fields.

Sponsors: Representatives Tarleton, Wilcox, Sells, Chandler, Haler, Stambaugh, Van Werven, Santos and Stanford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/31/17, 2/8/17 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to conduct a workforce assessment to determine projected employment and hiring demands for skilled mid-level workers in the agriculture, natural resources, and environment sectors.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Minority Member; Van Werven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Orwall, Sells, Stambaugh and Tarleton.

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384).

Background:

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.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) is required to develop a comprehensive and ongoing assessment process to analyze the need for additional degrees and programs. As part of the needs assessment, the WSAC examines projections of student, employer, and community demand for education and degrees on a regional and statewide basis. The WSAC also examines data from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTB) on the supply and demand for workforce education and certificates and associate degrees. The WSAC collaborates with the WTB and the State Board in producing an assessment report every two years, which includes the number of forecasted net job openings at each level of higher education and training.

The WTB provides planning, coordination, evaluation, monitoring, and policy analysis for the state training system as a whole, and advice to the Governor and the Legislature concerning the state training system. The Agriculture Center of Excellence, located at Walla Walla Community College, is funded by the State Board and promotes agriculture and natural resource education and training.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the specific purpose, the WTB must conduct a workforce assessment for the agriculture, natural resources, and environment sectors. The purpose of the study is to assess the available data on current and projected employment and hiring demands for skilled mid-level workers in these sectors. The information is being collected to give educators better information as they develop programs for informing students about potential careers. The WTB may contract with a third party to conduct all or part of the study.

The study must, at a minimum, include an assessment of data from the Employment Security Department, the Workforce Development Councils, and the United States Census Bureau. The study must use a broad definition for mid-level skilled occupations. The study must identify five regions of the state based on the specific workforce characteristics of agriculture, natural resources, and environment employers. A sample of major employers from the sectors in each region must be identified and interviewed to assess employers' perspectives and expectations on employment in their industry.

The WTB must convene and consult with a steering committee to define the scope of mid-level skilled occupations considered, validate designation of specific regions to be analyzed, and assist in the design of information collection. The steering committee must include representatives of statewide business organizations, a delegate of the State Board, and a representative from the Agriculture Center of Excellence.

The WTB must submit a report to the Legislature by October 15, 2018. The report must include:

- recommendations on current sources that provide the most representative and useful information for educators and counselors;

- steps to improve the specificity, timeliness, and quality of information available on skilled workforce needs; and
- steps necessary to extend the work into entry level and advanced level occupations and to identify specific skills that are key to enabling workers to be productive in these sectors.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill: (1) requires the study to include an assessment of food and fiber processing jobs; and (2) requires that the steering committee include a representative from the State Board and the Agriculture Center of Excellence.

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) This bill is part of a much larger puzzle being assembled to understand Washington's economic resilience. This bill will provide more accurate information about what jobs are available in the agriculture sectors. These particular sectors will demand a new generation of scientists and the state needs to know if the way it has been developing the workforce in the past will meet the demand in the future. The community and technical colleges (CTCs) are responsible for preparing students for mid-level jobs. The State Board should participate in the steering committee. The CTCs are experts at looking at local communities and demands.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Tarleton, prime sponsor; Katherine Mahoney, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and Kathryn Kurtz, Pacific Education Institute.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.