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## Education Committee

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### HB 1542

**Brief Description:** Concerning dropout prevention through engaging youth in farming.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Doglio, Santos, Hudgins, Riccelli, Peterson, Stonier, Dolan, Kagi, Macri, Tharinger, Sawyer, Gregerson, Senn, Fitzgibbon and Lovick.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Dropout Prevention Through Farm Engagement Pilot Project for a three-year period beginning in the 2017-18 school year.
- Declares that the purpose of the project is to measure the effectiveness and cost-benefit of a particular alternative high school program on improving outcomes for at-risk youth.
- Provides that participating school districts be funded at the skills center rate for each student enrolled in the project.
- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the project and report project outcomes and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2019.

**Hearing Date:** 2/2/17

**Staff:** Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

#### Background:

Dropout and Graduation Statistics. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) prepares an annual report regarding graduation and dropout statistics for schools and districts in Washington. For the class of 2015, the four-year graduation rate was 78.1 percent. For comparison, the four-year graduation rate for the class of 2008 was 75.0 percent. Certain student sub-groups, including special education, bilingual, low-income, and migrant students, continue to graduate at lower rates than other students.

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*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 four-year dropout rate for the class of 2015 was nearly 12 percent, or 9,511 students. In comparison, the four-year dropout rate for the class of 2007 was 21 percent

Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Retrieval Efforts. The state has implemented a variety of dropout prevention, intervention and reengagement strategies over the years, some of the major, ongoing initiatives are listed below.

*Building Bridges.* Legislation enacted in 2007 established a workgroup of education and other state agencies that work with youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school. The workgroup was required to make recommendations to the Legislature for the reduction of fiscal, legal, and regulatory barriers that prevent coordination of program resources across agencies at the state and local level; develop and track performance measures and benchmarks for each partner agency or organization; and identify best practices regarding prevention, intervention, and retrieval programs.

The same legislation created the Building Bridges Program to award grants to local partnership of schools, families, and communities that provide all of the following programs or activities:

- a system that identifies individual students at risk of dropping out from middle through high school based on local predictive data, including state assessment data starting in the fourth grade, and provides timely interventions for such students and for dropouts, including a plan for educational success as already required by the student learning plan;
- coaches or mentors for students as necessary;
- staff responsible for coordination of community partners that provide a seamless continuum of academic and nonacademic support in schools and communities;
- retrieval or reentry activities; and
- alternative educational programming, including career and technical education exploratory and preparatory programs and online learning opportunities.

*Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE).* The OSPI created the GATE as a collaborative effort to share what is working across state, region, and local systems to increase graduation rates. The GATE partners with state agencies responsible for health, social services, early learning, and higher education. In 2016, GATE efforts focused on:

- shared communications strategy relative to chronic absenteeism;
- on-going support of the GATE Advisory Committee and webinar series; and
- aligning professional learning efforts system-wide on topics such as equity in student achievement.

*Open Doors Youth Reengagement System.* Legislation enacted in 2010 created a framework for a statewide dropout reengagement system to provide dropout reengagement services for students aged 16 to 21 who have dropped out of school or are so credit deficient that completion of high school before age 21 is not an expected outcome. Under the system, a school district, state-tribal compact school, or charter school may directly provide, or may enter into a contract with a public entity or a community-based organization to provide, a dropout reengagement program for eligible students in the district. A dropout reengagement program must provide academic instruction, college and work readiness preparation, case management, and resource and referral services.

*Jobs for Washington's Graduates (JWG).* The JWG assists young people in staying in school through graduation, as well as reconnecting those students who have prematurely exited the education system by providing them an opportunity to attend a regional high school or skill center, work toward graduation, and get a job. The Washington model fully implements the online curriculum provided by the JAG national program, to provide students with personal management skills and employability skills. It also connects students to career and technical education programs to give them technical skills leading to post-secondary education, apprenticeships and living wage careers.

*Graduation Equity Initiative.* The stated purpose of the Graduation Equity Initiative is to increase graduation rates and increase equity in key performance indicators, including graduation rates, chronic absenteeism, and ninth grade course failure. Using its newly created equity data analytics tool, the OSPI identified four school districts with above average graduation rates, a higher percentage of low income students graduating, and larger district enrollment. The OPSI worked with these districts to identify key practices and processes that can be shared with other districts.

*Community Truancy Boards (CTB).* Legislation enacted in 2016 added processes to lessen the instances of truancy, such as referring students to a CTB. A CTB, made up of community members, may identify barriers to school attendance, recommend methods for improving attendance such as connecting students and their families with community services, culturally appropriate promising practices, and evidence-based services, suggest to the school district that the child enroll in another school, an alternative education program, an education center, a skill center, a dropout prevention program, or another public or private educational program, or recommend to the juvenile court that a juvenile be referred to a HOPE center or crisis residential center.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The Dropout Prevention Through Farm Engagement Pilot Project (project) is established for a three-year period beginning in the 2017-18 school year. The purpose of the project is to measure the effectiveness and cost-benefit of a particular alternative high school program on improving outcomes for at-risk youth.

The OSPI must select five pilots from school districts that agree to partner with community-based organizations, food banks, and farms or gardens to establish an alternative high school program targeted primarily to at-risk youth. One of the pilots must be a currently operating program with a record of success in engaging low-income and disengaged youth, one must be located east of the crest of the Cascade mountains, and at least one must be located south of highway 12 and west of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

The pilots must have the following characteristics:

- primarily target low-income and disengaged youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of high school;
- provide participating youth with opportunities for community service such as building food gardens for low-income families and work-based learning and employment during the school year and during the summer through a farm or garden program;

- provide participating youth with opportunities to earn core credits and elective credits toward high school graduation;
- offer youth development support and services to participating youth including social emotional learning, counseling, leadership training, and career and college guidance; and
- improve food security for participating youth and the community through the farm or garden program.

The pilot school districts must be funded at the skills center rate for each annual average full-time equivalent student enrolled in the project, including enrollment during summer months. These allocations may be used to supplement other district and community funds to operate the pilot and to provide summer employment stipends for participating youth.

The OSPI must conduct a rigorous evaluation of the project after two years, including analysis of a statistical comparison group of students who did not participate in the project. By December 1, 2019, the OSPI must submit the evaluation results to the Legislature, including recommendations for whether the project should be continued or replicated in other parts of the state. The outcomes to be measured under the project include:

- student grade point average overall and in science;
- number of earned credits in core courses and elective courses;
- incidence of discipline issues;
- school attendance rates;
- high school graduation and attainment of a high school equivalency certificate;
- student health and nutrition;
- acreage used for fresh produce;
- volume of produce produced and made available to students, families, school district food programs, and community food banks; and
- hours of community service activity by students.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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