

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5663

As Passed Senate, March 4, 2025

Title: An act relating to entirely online course offerings at community and technical colleges.

Brief Description: Concerning entirely online course offerings at community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Slatter, Nobles, Frame, Lovick and Valdez).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/13/25, 2/17/25 [DPS, w/oRec].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 3/4/25, 48-1.

Brief Summary of Engrossed First Substitute Bill

- Allows for community and technical colleges to distribute information on their respective colleges outside of their district when it pertains to entirely online course offerings.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5663 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Slatter.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Warnick, Ranking Member; Boehnke.

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) advocates, coordinates and directs Washington State's system of 34 public community and technical colleges (CTCs). The SBCTC is led by a nine-member Governor-appointed board.

Prohibition of Distributing Course and Enrollment Information Outside of Community and Technical College District. By rule, CTCs may not promote their programs beyond their designated service districts.

California Virtual Campus. In 2017, the California Legislature passed AB 637 which created the California Virtual Campus (CVC). The CVC is a systemwide resource for the 116 California Community Colleges (CCC), which, among other things, allows students to cross-enroll through entirely online course offerings and matriculate from a home college. Cost of attendance is determined by the home college. Since 2013, California had been working on expanding the delivery of higher education courses online, with the Online-Exchange Initiative (OEI). The OEI Course Exchange provided students who were enrolled at a community college and could not find the courses they needed to complete their degree or transfer the opportunity to find and take that course at a different CCC through the OEI.

Summary of Engrossed First Substitute Bill: Community and Technical Colleges. CTCs may distribute information on their respective colleges outside of district when it pertains to entirely online course offerings.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: We are in the middle of a workforce and affordability crisis. Flexible, online, affordable options must be part of the solution. This initially would create a website to easily search entirely online course offerings. Students shouldn't have to navigate multiple websites to find this information. And by the 2028-29 academic year, a student could then cross enroll through the virtual campus. This will help students upskill or reskill. This meets students where they are. A virtual campus will allow everyone to learn from the comfort of their own home. A student shouldn't have to move or find transportation, to get an education. This will allow the Running Start Program students to access classes in other parts of the state. College in the high school should be a part of this.

I have seen firsthand how online education changes lives. Only 40 percent of high school

graduates obtain a credential. This bill will close the achievement gap. This will reduce enrollment barriers to help students get the classes they need towards their degree. California's virtual campus has been successful. If Washington can replicate what California did, it would increase enrollment and tuition dollars for our state.

We made this happen in California. We worked out transcript and data sharing between colleges, and made the investment into the technology. There is a community of states that are creating virtual campuses, such as Idaho and Maryland. Our colleges are steeped in bureaucratic processes. There was resistance in the beginning, because of the manual processes. We have several excellent vendors who have made these processes easier. Most of the fear from colleges, such as losing enrollment, has been unrealized.

OTHER: Students currently can cross enroll; this would better organize the option. This bill will require additional resources to develop the website and implement the technical side.

Washington Online was created in 1998 and allowed students to take several courses from different schools. It was sunsetted in 2016. We have the structure in place. The challenge is in course sharing. We request an amendment to remove WSAC's involvement in section 3.

Centralia ran Washington Online for almost 20 years. Most students can enroll simultaneously. There isn't a place where a student can look up all courses, that technology would need some time and resources to develop. There are technical and structural hurdles. We have been looking for a commercial tool offered by a vendor but cannot find anything. We can share transcript data, but there are concerns over privacy issues. This is incredibly uncertain time for our colleges, both at the federal policy level and state budget level. The colleges want to ensure time is given to build something like this out in this uncertain time.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Vandana Slatter, Prime Sponsor; Johnston Lai; Marina Aminy, California Virtual Campus; Kathryn Cox; Shreyansh Padhy.

OTHER: Dr. Amy Morrison, President, Lake Washington Institute of Technology; Dr. Bob Morbacher, President, Centralia College; Dr. Joyce Hammer, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.