

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Rep. Don Carlson, Republican Co-Chair; and
Rep. Phyllis Kenney, Democratic Co-Chair

BILL ANALYSIS « E2SSB 5598
HOUSE COMPANION BILL « HB 1693

Brief Description: Creating the Washington's promise scholarship program.

Background: Currently Washington State provides two merit-based scholarships to undergraduate higher education students. These scholarships include the Washington Award for Vocational Excellence (WAVE), and the Washington Scholars Program. Under these programs, awards are presented to up to three students per legislative district based on vocational merit in the case of the WAVE program, and upon academic merit for Washington Scholars.

Summary of Bill: The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) is required to design and implement a Washington's promise scholarship program, and must incorporate academic merit and financial need requirements into the eligibility criteria for recipients. In designing the program, the HECB is directed to give the highest priority to awarding scholarships to the maximum number of recipients who qualify, within available funds. The HECB is also directed to evaluate: (1) student debt burden; (2) state and institutional financial aid programs in light of federal tax policy; and (3) information on tax credit benefits and usage to the extent it is available from the April 1999 tax return data.

Beginning with the 2000-01 academic year, students in 10th grade who pass all parts of the Washington Assessment for Student Learning (WASL) on the first try meet the academic eligibility criteria. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is required to provide the names of tenth grade students who pass the Washington Assessment for Student Learning test on their first attempt to the HECB by July 15 of each summer following the administration of the test. The HECB must also determine criteria for academic eligibility for graduates of approved private high schools and home-based instruction participants.

To meet the financial eligibility requirements for the scholarship, students' family incomes must not exceed 135 percent of the state median family income (currently, this equals \$69,000 for a family of four).

Within available funds, for each student qualifying for a scholarship, the HECB will purchase tuition units from the advanced college tuition payment program (the Guaranteed Education Tuition, or GET, program) up to an amount equivalent to a year of resident tuition at a community college. There are three differences between the use of these scholarship GET units and the current GET program units: (1) the scholarship units can only be used to attend Washington State institutions; (2) the scholarship units may not be transferred and (3) the scholarship units may not be refunded to students.

The scholarship units may be used for college-related expenses including but not limited to tuition, room and board, books, materials, and transportation.

Office of Program Research
March 25, 1999