
Higher Education Committee

HB 1706

Brief Description: Changing the focus of the promise scholarship.

Sponsors: Representatives Mastin and Grant.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Makes students who have overcome barriers to their educational success the target population for the Promise Scholarship Program.
- Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board to oversee a process where school districts nominate students who meet the criteria.
- Requires that scholarship awards equal community college tuition plus a book allowance.

Hearing Date: 2/19/03

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The Promise Scholarship Program was first funded in 1999 and then created in statute in 2002. Its purpose is to strengthen the link between K-12 and postsecondary education by providing financial assistance to academically successful high school graduates from low and middle income families. The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) oversees administration of the program.

To be eligible for a Promise scholarship, students must:

- Graduate in the top 15 percent of their public or private high school class, or score at least 1,200 points on the SAT or 27 points on the ACT on the first attempt;
- Have a family income of no more than 135 percent of the state's median family income; and
- Enroll in an accredited college or university in Washington.

Students may receive a scholarship award for two consecutive years. Although the statute limits the amount of the award to full-time resident tuition at a community college, the actual award depends on legislative appropriation and the number of eligible students who elect to receive it. For the 2002-03 academic year, the maximum award was \$948, based on an appropriation of \$6.3 million and approximately 6,700 scholarship recipients.

Summary of Bill:

The purpose of the Promise Scholarship Program is to assist high school graduates who have overcome personal or financial barriers and show a promise to succeed if given the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education.

School districts nominate students who have demonstrated strength of character in overcoming physical, personal, cultural, or financial barriers to their educational success and demonstrate a desire and commitment to complete a postsecondary educational program. There is no financial eligibility criteria.

State-approved private high schools may also nominate students, and home-schooled individuals can nominate themselves for consideration. The HECB convenes a committee to review applications from private and home-school graduates.

To administer the program, the HECB estimates the number of scholarship nominations for each year within available funds. First the HECB reserves a number of nominations for private and home-school graduates that is proportional to the number of these graduates in the state. The HECB then apportions the remaining nominations among public school districts based on their number of graduates. Each school district has an opportunity to nominate at least one student. If fewer students are nominated than the number of available nominations, the HECB reapportions the remaining nominations to other school districts.

The amount of the Promise scholarship must equal community college tuition, plus the book allowance calculated by the HECB for the State Need Grant. The award amount cannot be reduced. Recipients are eligible to receive the award for: a) the time it takes to complete an associate degree or certificate; b) the time it takes to reach junior status; or c) three years, whichever is less.

Students who received a Promise scholarship for the 2002-03 academic year, who are eligible to receive a second award for 2003-04 under the existing program, are held harmless. They may receive their second award at the current grant amount.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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