

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1568

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to dropout prevention through engaging youth in farming.

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

Sponsors: Representatives Reykdal, Pike, Sawyer, Springer, Walkinshaw, Riccelli, Ryu, S. Hunt, Robinson, McBride, Stanford, Pettigrew, Fitzgibbon, Van De Wege, Ormsby, Kagi and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/10/15, 2/19/15 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that five Dropout Prevention through Farm Engagement pilot projects be selected by the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI).
- Establishes various selection criteria, including a requirement that projects be selected from school districts willing to partner with community-based organizations, food banks, and farms or gardens to establish an alternative high school program for at-risk youth.
- Requires the OSPI to submit an evaluation to the Legislature by December 1, 2017.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 20 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Ortiz-Self, Vice Chair; Reykdal, Vice Chair; Magendanz, Ranking Minority Member; Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stambaugh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Fagan, Gregory, Griffey, Hayes, S. Hunt, Kilduff, Klippert, Lytton, McCaslin, Orwall, Pollet and Springer.

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.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Hargrove.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Dropout 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 2014, the four-year graduation rate was 77.2 percent. Certain sub-groups, including special education, bilingual, low-income, and migrant students, had graduation rates lower than the rate for all students. The four-year dropout rate was 12.3 percent. There were 9,670 students who dropped out before finishing high school.

Dropout-Related Programs.

Building Bridges. Legislation enacted in 2007 established the Building Bridges Program to award grants to local partnerships of schools, families, and community-based organizations to develop dropout prevention and intervention systems based on community needs and resources. A state-level workgroup advises the OSPI about the Building Bridges Program, and coordinates services associated with dropout prevention.

Dropout Reengagement System. Legislation enacted in 2010 directed the OSPI to adopt rules and develop a model contract for school districts to use with community-based organizations, community or technical colleges, or Educational Service Districts (ESD) 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. A dropout reengagement program must provide academic instruction, college and work readiness preparation, case management, and resource and referral services. The OSPI rules require dropout reengagement programs to be approved before beginning operation. School districts are not required to enter a contract and may also operate their own programs. Enrolled students are funded through the regular state funding formulas.

Pay for Actual Student Success Program. Legislation enacted in 2011 created the Pay for Actual Success Program to provide awards to high schools based on improvement in their graduation rates. It also provides for funding to be allocated to three other dropout prevention programs in addition to the Building Bridges Program: Jobs for America's Graduates; the Opportunity Internship Program; and community mentoring and leadership development offered through the College Success Foundation.

Graduation Coaches. A graduation coach is defined as a staff person, working in consultation with counselors, who is assigned to identify and provide intervention services to students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school or of not graduating on time. A report published by the OSPI in 2013 describes a model policy that defines the skill sets and responsibilities of graduation coaches.

Summary of Bill:

The Dropout Prevention through Farm Engagement pilot project is established for a three year period beginning in the 2015-16 school year.

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

The pilot projects must:

- 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;
- provide participating youth with opportunities to earn core credits and elective credits toward high school graduation, including science, health, and career and technical education credits;
- offer youth development support and services, 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 participating school districts must receive a basic education allocation, as calculated for a skill center student, for each full-time equivalent student enrolled in the pilot project, including summer employment stipends. This allocation does not apply, however, to enrollment in courses that are not part of the pilot project.

The OSPI must evaluate the pilot project after two years of operation. The evaluation must include an analysis of a statistical comparison group of students who did not participate in the pilot project. The outcomes to be measured 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 high school equivalency certificate attainment;
- 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.

The OSPI must submit the evaluation, as well as recommendations for continuing or replicating the pilot projects, to the education committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2017.

An expiration date of August 31, 2018, is specified.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: 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 pilot program can require high standards, give core and elective credit, provide community service, get students to work on farms during the summer, and provide support for at-risk students. This is what Garden Raised Bounty (GRuB) does already. These programs provide hands on learning for students. The GRuB program works with the Olympia school district because it received a grant two years ago. The GRuB program has engaged 40 students at risk for dropping out. These student's grade point averages have gone up, their behavior and discipline issues have gone down, and they have made steps toward their academic and career goals. For each student that is not reengaged to complete their high school diploma, the student loses \$150,000 in lifetime earnings. This bill is an investment the state cannot afford not to make. This bill shows an investment in healthy food, too. The average age of a farmer is 59 years old, so it is important to invest in training new farmers.

The Eatonville school district may be gifted a farm and is looking for ways to engage at-risk students. About 84 students in the district are not on-time to graduate in high school and about 50 in middle school. The school district wants to replicate a GRuB-like program. Many students want to belong and be part of something bigger than themselves. Students like to give back to their communities. Some students who do not have access to fresh food really appreciate where their food comes from and enjoy participating in a program where they get to provide food for their community. The Franklin Pierce School District has a 10-acre farm. This district's career and technical education students work on the farm, and so do the skills center students. The food they grow is delivered to food banks or used in the school lunch programs. The students learn how to farm and learn where their food comes from. A majority of students in the district get both breakfast and lunch in the school, and it is great that they get fresh food. It would be great if the pilot could be expanded to more than five schools.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Reykdal, prime sponsor; Katie Rains, Garden Raised Bounty; Krestin Barn, Eatonville School District; and Charlie Brown, Franklin Pierce School.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.