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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5285**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson and Palumbo)

AN ACT Relating to conducting a workforce study of employment opportunities in the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors intended to provide educators with the information needed for informing students about employment opportunities in the studied fields; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors can offer rewarding career paths for students who are interested in the natural world and are excited by the idea of having a career with outdoor opportunities. Not only are these careers currently available to students, but the United States department of agriculture predicts, in their recent report on employment opportunities for college graduates in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and the environment, that employment opportunities in these fields are expected to increase.

(2) The legislature further finds that thousands of Washington students do not have access to the types of education that are necessary to guide them down the pathways leading to marketable job skills and productive careers in the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors. Long-term career success in these fields require the ability to identify, apply, and integrate concepts from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as they specifically relate to the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors and the sectors' related careers.

(3) The legislature further finds that students will have the information they need to consider careers in the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors if educators are provided with actual applications of how to put integrated learning into action and facilitating experiences that allow students to get outdoors and learn in real-world and community-connected environments.

(4) The legislature further finds that the economic opportunities available for students interested in agriculture, natural resources, or the environment can be more readily unlocked if educators are provided with information on worker demand and qualifications so that they are equipped to assist students to access the economic opportunity and help make connections between education and outdoor careers. The information needed by educators to make these connections can be accomplished through a statewide workforce study of potential jobs in these fields.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1)(a) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the workforce training and education coordinating board shall conduct a workforce assessment for the agriculture, natural resources, and environment sectors. The purpose of the study is to assess the available data on current and projected employment levels and hiring demand for skilled mid-level workers in the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors in the state. Ultimately, this information is being collected so that educators have better information available as they develop programs for informing students about potential careers.

(b) The study must use a broad definition for the mid-level skilled occupations included in the study and identify up to five regions of the state based on the specific workforce characteristics of agriculture, natural resources, and environment employers.

(2) The study required by this section must, at a minimum:

(a) Include assessment of:

(i) Data from the employment security department on the current and projected levels of employment and net job vacancies;

(ii) Data used by workforce development councils in identifying demand for workers in their areas;

(iii) Data from the United States census bureau; and

(iv) Data from the United States census bureau's longitudinal employer-household dynamics dataset.

(b) Identify and interview a sample of major employers from the agriculture, environment, and natural resources economic sectors in each region to assess employers' perspective and expectations on employment and hiring of skilled mid-level workers in their industry and area. The study must also include an assessment of food and fiber processing jobs in the state.

(3) In conducting any study pursuant to this section, the workforce training and education coordinating board must convene and consult with a steering committee to define the scope of mid-level skilled occupations considered**,** validate designation of specific regions to be analyzed**,** and assist in the design of information collection. The steering committee must include representatives of statewide business organizations and a delegate of the state board for community and technical colleges who will be staff.

(4)In implementing this section, the workforce training and education coordinating board may complete the work directly or, at its discretion, contract the assignment, or portions of the assignment, to a third party or parties chosen by the workforce training and education coordinating board. However, the final delivered product must be reported under the workforce training and education coordinating board**.**

(5)The report must include recommendations on current sources that provide the most representative and useful information for educators and counselors, further steps to improve the specificity, timeliness, and quality of information available on skilled workforce needs and issues in the areas of the state, and steps necessary to extend this work both into entry level and advanced level occupations, and into identification of specific skills that are key to enabling workers to be productive in this sector**.**

(6) Consistent with RCW 43.01.036, the study required by this section must be completed and the results reported to the legislature by October 15, 2018.

(7) This section expires June 30, 2019.

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