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**SENATE BILL 6223**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2018 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Carlyle, O'Ban, Walsh, Frockt, Darneille, Zeiger, Palumbo, Hunt, Kuderer, Wellman, and Liias

AN ACT Relating to equitable educational outcomes for foster children and youth from preschool to postsecondary education; creating new sections; and providing an effective date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1)(a) The legislature finds that children and youth impacted by the foster care system continue to experience worse educational outcomes compared to their peers who do not experience foster care. Trauma and loss, changes in homes and schools, and a lack of early childhood education cause them to lag behind their peers. Foster youth experience school changes twenty-eight percent more than children with no history in the foster care system, disrupting academic progress. Children and youth in foster care experience disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates and require special education services at four times the rate of their peers. As a result, only forty-three percent of Washington youth in foster care graduate from high school on time as compared to seventy-eight percent of their peers. Fewer than three percent of foster youth nationally earn a four-year college degree as compared to twenty-eight percent of their peers. Additionally, children and youth of color are disproportionately represented in foster care and achieve educational outcomes at significantly lower rates than their white peers. Foster care alumni who do not achieve these educational outcomes experience high rates of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and incarceration.

(b) The legislature further finds that students experiencing homelessness face similar challenges and negative educational outcomes as their peers in foster care. Homeless students may also be former foster youth, or foster youth may be formerly homeless students.

(c) Despite these odds, children and youth in foster care want to and deserve to have the opportunity to succeed in school. In response, the legislature intends to provide an equitable education to all foster children and youth regardless of setting, placement permanency, or current or potential involvement with the juvenile justice system.

(2) The legislature also finds that, over the past decade, it has focused on advancing educational outcomes of foster youth, leading to the development of an array of programs to improve educational outcomes. Washington has been a leader in addressing data sharing, coordinated service delivery, and the development of targeted financial aid and student support programs. Recent legislation in 2016 required coordinating certain services and programs to improve educational outcomes. On the federal level, the every student succeeds act of 2015 and the fostering connections act of 2008 require state child welfare and education agencies to collaborate to support educational outcomes, school stability, transportation, and mandatory data sharing and reporting.

(3) Therefore, the legislature intends with this act to powerfully leverage current collaboration and investments to align services, outcome measures, accountability, and resources to achieve educational equity for children and youth in foster care by 2027. The goal of this effort is that children and youth in foster care achieve educational outcomes at the same rate as their general student population peers throughout the educational continuum from preschool to postsecondary education. Where possible, this collaboration should include an analysis of where the foster care continuum could align with the homeless youth continuum.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) For the purposes of this section, "children and youth in foster care" means children and youth under the placement and care authority of the department of children, youth, and families, a federally recognized tribe, or another child-placing agency; and children and youth who have experienced foster care and have achieved permanency.

(2) The department of children, youth, and families, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, and the student achievement council must convene a work group with aligned nongovernmental agencies to create a plan for children and youth in foster care to facilitate educational equity with their general student population peers and to close the disparities between racial and ethnic groups by 2027. The work group must:

(a) Review the educational outcomes of children and youth in foster care, including:

(i) Kindergarten readiness, early grade reading, school stability, high school completion, postsecondary enrollment, and postsecondary completion; and

(ii) Disaggregated data by race and ethnicity;

(b) Consider the outcomes, needs, and services for children and youth in care, and the specific needs of children and youth of color and those with special education needs;

(c) Map current education support services, including eligibility, service levels, service providers, outcomes, service coordination, data sharing, and overall successes and challenges;

(d) Engage stakeholders in participating in the analysis and development of recommendations, including foster youth, foster parents and relative caregivers, birth parents, caseworkers, school districts and educators, early learning providers, and federally recognized tribes;

(e) Make recommendations for an optimal continuum of education support services to foster children and youth from preschool to postsecondary education that would provide for shared and sustainable accountability to reach the goal of educational parity, including recommendations to:

(i) Align indicators and outcomes across organizations and programs;

(ii) Improve racial equity in education outcomes;

(iii) Ensure access to consistent and accurate annual educational outcomes data;

(iv) Address system barriers such as data sharing;

(v) Detail options for governance and oversight to ensure educational services are continually available to foster children regardless of status;

(vi) Detail support structure that will ensure that educational records, educational needs, individualized education plans, credits, and other records will follow the children and youth when they transition from district to district or to another educational program or facility;

(vii) Explore the option of creating a specific statewide school district that supports the needs of and tracks the educational progress of children and youth in foster care; and

(viii) Identify where opportunities exist to align policy, practices, and supports for students experiencing homelessness and foster students; and

(f) Outline which recommendations can be implemented using existing resources and regulations and which require policy, administrative, and resource adjustments.

(3) The work group should seek to develop an optimal continuum of services using research-based program strategies and to provide for prevention, early intervention, and seamless transitions.

(4) The work group must provide a report on its analysis as described under this section, the recommended plan, and any legislative and administrative changes needed to facilitate educational equity for children and youth in foster care with their general student population peers by 2027 to the legislature by December 31, 2018.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act takes effect July 1, 2018.

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