

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5069

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Providing associate degree education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Walsh, Frockt, O'Ban, Zeiger, Chase, Hasegawa, Conway and Palumbo; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

Senate Committee on Law & Justice
House Committee on Higher Education
House Committee on Appropriations

Background: Under current law, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is required, to the extent possible and considering all available funds, to prioritize its resources to meet educational goals for inmates in the following order: (1) achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent certificate; (2) achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release; (3) additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan; and (4) any other appropriate vocational, work, or education programs that are not necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan.

DOC has historically been prohibited from paying for postsecondary education. Any inmate expressing interest in postsecondary courses was required to self-pay for the costs of a postsecondary education degree program or pay by receiving funding from a third party. The Legislature authorized inmates to participate in a state-funded postsecondary education degree program during the 2015-2017 fiscal biennium based on the following conditions:

- priority should be given to inmates within five years of release;
- the inmate does not already have a postsecondary degree;
- the inmate's individual re-entry plan includes participation in a postsecondary education degree program that is offered at the inmate's state correctional institutions and approved by DOC.

DOC contracts with community colleges to provide basic education and job training at each of the state's 12 adult prisons. According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the average Washington offender scores at an eighth-grade level or lower

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in basic literacy skills such as reading and math. Sixty percent are unemployed and seventy-five percent lack job skills and vocational training.

In 2014–15, there were 9194 offenders who participated in community college programs in Washington. These students earned:

- 240 GED certificates;
- 2043 vocational certificates; and
- 36 associate degrees—no state funding was used.

Community colleges offer a variety of associate degrees. Some degrees are specifically targeted to prepare a person for employment in a particular segment of the workforce. These degrees may have a variety of designations, including an associate of applied science, associate of technology, or associate of technical arts.

A 2015 update by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that for every dollar invested in correctional education programs, \$18.40 is saved from fewer crimes and incarcerations. The studies are not specific enough to separate out the effect on recidivism and cost effectiveness of postsecondary education on its own.

Summary: The college board may authorize any board of trustees to promote and conduct associate degree education and training of incarcerated adults through new or expanded partnerships between the community and technical colleges and DOC.

DOC is authorized to implement associate degree education programs at state correctional institutions to provide inmates with an associate workforce degree designed to prepare the inmate to enter the workforce. Inmates shall be selected to participate in the program based on priority criteria and the following conditions:

- priority should be given to inmates within five years of release;
- the inmate does not already have a postsecondary degree;
- the inmate's individual re-entry plan includes participation in an associate degree program that is offered at the inmate's state correctional institution, approved by DOC, and limited to an associate workforce degree.

Inmates not meeting the priority criteria shall be required to pay the costs for participation in a postsecondary education degree program. Inmates sentenced to life without the possibility of release, or sentenced to death may not participate in the state-funded associate degree education program.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	46	0
House	78	20

Effective: July 23, 2017