

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5593

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to addressing equity in access to dual credit opportunities.

Brief Description: Addressing equity in access to dual credit opportunities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Liias, Wilson, C., Das, Kuderer, Nguyen and Saldaña).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/18/19, 3/26/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires school districts, by the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, to provide documentation of Running Start students' low-income status to higher education institutions in which the students are enrolled.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the Washington Student Achievement Council, to develop a centralized process for school districts to meet the requirement described above, subject to state funding.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Steele, Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Callan, Corry, Kilduff, Kraft, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Stonier, Thai, Valdez and Ybarra.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

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.

Running Start. The Running Start program allows students in grades 11 and 12 to take courses at participating higher education institutions. Upon completion, Running Start students earn both high school and college credits.

Running Start students and their families do not pay tuition, but must pay certain fees, purchase textbooks and other materials, and provide their own transportation to and from the higher education institutions. The fees must be prorated based on each student's credit load, and may include technology fees, all other mandatory fees, and a fee of up to 10 percent of tuition, building and operating fees, and service and activities fees.

The higher education institutions must make available fee waivers for low-income Running Start students and must provide assistance on how to apply for the waivers. Every effort must be made to communicate to students and their families the benefits of the fee waivers.

Each higher education institution must establish a written policy for the determination of low-income Running Start students. A Running Start student must be considered low income and eligible for a fee waiver upon proof that the student is currently qualified to receive free or reduced-price lunch at the student's high school. Acceptable documentation of low-income status may also include documentation that a Running Start student has been deemed eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in the last five years, or other criteria established in the institution's policy. To qualify for free lunches, a high school student's family income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. High school students whose families have an income between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price lunches.

Washington Student Achievement Council. The Washington Student Achievement Council provides strategic planning, oversight, advocacy, and programs to support increased student success and higher levels of educational attainment in Washington. The agency's responsibilities include administration of student financial assistance programs and student outreach.

Summary of Bill:

By the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, school districts, upon knowledge of a low-income student's enrollment in Running Start, must provide documentation of the student's low-income status directly to higher education institutions.

Subject to state funding, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the Washington Student Achievement Council, must develop a centralized process for school districts to provide students' low-income status to higher education institutions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary 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) The Running Start Program allows students to earn college credits while in high school. Students who do this are more likely to enroll in college and go on to get a post-secondary credential that will help them break the cycle of poverty. Running Start students do not reflect the diversity of the communities that the higher education institutions exist in. Low-income students continue to access dual credit opportunities at lower rates than students who are not low-income. While the Running Start program provides an amazing opportunity for young people to earn college credits and fulfill high school graduation requirements, for many low-income and needy students that opportunity is not available. There are barriers to a diverse student population enrolling in the program. One of these barriers is that low-income students must ask for a fee waiver. More steps means that fewer low-income students ask for the fee waiver.

The higher education institutions continually work to make sure that all students who qualify for a fee waivers receive them, but many students either do not know that they would be eligible for the waivers or do not know how to get them. This bill takes the student out of having to be in charge of communicating their low-income status and requires the adults to communicate this information. This bill would require high schools and higher education institutions to work together to make sure that Running Start students who are eligible for free and reduced price-lunch and therefore eligible for existing low-income fee waivers get those waivers. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction could leverage existing reporting platforms to allow this. In future years, it would be good to discuss other structural barriers to participation in the Running Start program, including transportation costs and nutritional assistance.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Liias, prime sponsor; and Katherine Mahoney, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.