

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1909

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to creating a pilot project for competency-based transfer in higher education.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot project for competency-based transfer in higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Jarrett, Kenney, Cox, Fromhold, Chase, Berkey, Pearson, McCoy, Gombosky, Lantz, Clements, Talcott, Buck, Rockefeller, Pflug, Moeller, Priest, Edwards and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/25/03, 3/5/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a pilot project between a four-year higher education institution, at least two community or technical colleges, and one or more private career colleges to create standards and processes for transfer based on defined student competencies.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Priest, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Boldt, Buck, Chase, Clements, Condotta, Gombosky, Jarrett, Lantz, McCoy and Morrell.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Since the passage of Washington's education reform law in 1993, the K-12 education system has been working to define and measure student performance based on state-defined Basic Education goals and Essential Academic Learning Requirements. The

theory behind Washington's education reform (and that of other states) is that students should earn a high school diploma by demonstrating competency in meeting the state's education standards, rather than by completing a specified number of courses or credits.

Some work has been done in the state's higher education system to define desired educational outcomes on the basis of student competencies. For example, starting in 1995, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) began to develop a competency-based approach for college admission. The HECB has translated current minimum admissions standards into competencies for English, math, world languages, and science.

The community and technical colleges have been working for some time to develop skill standards for career-technical programs, based on the knowledge and skills demanded by employers and national standards in a given industry. Individual four-year institutions are incorporating learning objectives into course descriptions or syllabi; particular degree programs (such as teacher preparation) have defined expected performance in terms of what students should know and be able to do.

For the most part, however, transfer between two and four-year institutions of higher education remains governed by the courses and credits students accumulate toward their desired degree program.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The HECB, in consultation with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Council of Presidents, will recruit a four-year institution, at least two community or technical colleges, and at least one accredited private career college to participate in a pilot project to define transfer standards in selected academic disciplines on the basis of student competencies.

The participants, along with the HECB, will submit a work plan and time lines for the project to the higher education committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2004. The participants and the HECB must structure their work so that development costs for the project are absorbed within existing institution and agency budgets.

Under the project participants will develop standards, definitions, and quality assurance procedures. The Legislature's intent is that the transfer system in the project permits the four-year institution to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities students should possess in order to enter an upper division program in a particular academic discipline. The institutions providing lower division preparation are responsible for certifying that a student meets the standards, but have flexibility in determining how to assess student competencies.

The participants and the HECB report to the Legislature on their progress by December 1, 2005, including identifying any barriers encountered and making recommendations for the next steps in developing a competency-based transfer system. The pilot project expires on June 30, 2006.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Accredited private career colleges are added to the list of pilot project participants. The due dates for the work plan, report to the Legislature, and expiration of the pilot are each delayed by one year. Participants must structure their work so that development costs are absorbed within existing budgets.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: We need to simplify the multitude of articulation agreements and give community colleges freedom to innovate. The idea is that community colleges certify whether students meet the competencies, once they have been defined by the four-year schools. This represents an output rather than input-driven approach to education. Part of the reason to do this as a pilot is to test how it might be done. The concept presented in the bill is exciting, challenging, and very leading-edge. Some work is already being done, but the major challenge is having the four-year institutions define the desired competencies. Then the two-year institutions have to figure out how to assess. The community colleges have learned some things from their experience with skill standards that might help with this project.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Jarrett, prime sponsor; and Loretta Seppanen, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.