
Higher Education Committee

HB 2082

Brief Description: Establishing the field of dreams program.

Sponsors: Representatives Chandler, Wallace, Grant, Buri, Miloscia, Kretz and Newhouse.

<p>Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates the Field of Dreams program, providing college tuition in the form of GET units to students working for agricultural employers.

Hearing Date: 2/15/07

Staff: Jennifer Thornton (786-7111).

Background:

GET Program

Washington's Advanced College Tuition Payment Program—known as the GET Program—was created in 1998 as Washington's prepaid college tuition program. The GET Program allows purchasers to buy tuition units at current prices for use at a later date. These funds are invested by the State Investment Board and the purchaser is guaranteed that one year's worth of units purchased now will be worth one year's worth of public university tuition in the future. One hundred GET units are equal to one year of resident undergraduate tuition and state-mandated fees at the most expensive public university in Washington.

Agriculture Industry

Washington state is one of the dominant agricultural states in the United States. It continues to rank first in the production of a wide variety of agricultural products ranging from the well-known apples, pears, and sweet cherries, to the less commonly known products such as wrinkled seed peas and peppermint and spearmint oil. The state has a strong comparative advantage, both nationally and internationally, in the production of many agricultural products.

From December 1997 to December 2005, the seasonally adjusted Washington state labor force grew from 3,008,485 to 3,321,257 – a growth rate of 10.4 percent. In contrast, on a seasonally unadjusted basis, the Washington state agricultural labor force is estimated as growing from

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86,327 to 88,842 – about 2.7 percent. Over this same time period, the year-by-year average monthly seasonal employment fell from 37,474 workers to 29,842 workers – a drop of 20.4 percent. Average hourly wage rates for those who work exclusively in agriculture have fallen in constant dollar terms over the past five years from \$10.04 in 2001 to \$9.88 in 2005.

Summary of Bill:

The Field of Dreams program is established to provide college tuition in the form of GET units to students working for agricultural employers. To be eligible for the program, participants must: meet state residency criteria; be 15 through 21 years old; and be enrolled in high school, have graduated from high school, or hold a General Equivalency Diploma. To enroll in the Field of Dreams program, the student must register at WorkSource and work for a qualified employer in an agricultural job.

For each 250 hours worked for a qualified employer, a student will earn 10 GET units. Students may earn a maximum of 100 GET units. Students will obtain a certificate verifying units earned from the WorkSource office, and may use them at any accredited institution of higher education. The Employment Security Department, through WorkSource will provide information to potential students on the program, manage student enrollment, and track student hours worked for qualified employers.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) will administer GET units earned through the Field of Dreams program. They will purchase and hold GET units for the purpose of Field of Dreams awards. They will distribute award funds, in the form of GET units, to institutions of higher education on behalf of eligible recipients. The HECB will provide annual reports to the Legislature on the use of GET units, enrollment, and graduation information of GET Field of Dreams recipients.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 2007.

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