
Higher Education Committee

ESSB 6295

Brief Description: Creating workplace-based electronically distributed learning opportunities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Kilmer, Rockefeller, Hobbs, Shin, Franklin, Marr, Rasmussen, Kastama, Kauffman, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Hatfield, Berkey and Regala).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Creates a pilot program to evaluate workplace-based distance learning educational programs and creates a study to evaluate national private employer workplace-based distance learning programs.

Hearing Date: 2/21/08

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

In the fall term of 2006, almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course in the United States; a nearly 10 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. That growth rate exceeds the 1.5 percent growth rate of the overall higher education student population. Nationally, two-year, Associate degree granting institutions have the highest growth rates and account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years. Baccalaureate institutions began the period with the fewest online enrollments and have had the lowest rates of growth.

Since data started being collected in 2000 for Washington, enrollments in electronic learning (e-learning) courses have remained relatively flat at the public Baccalaureate institutions and have increased significantly in the community and technical college system. In the fall term of 2000, enrollments in Baccalaureate institutions accounted for two percent of the total Full Time Equivalent. In the community and technical colleges system, e-learning enrollments made up 3.5 percent of the total. In fall of 2006, e-learning enrollments comprised 2.4 percent of

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Baccalaureate enrollments, while the percentage had grown to 8.4 percent for the community and technical colleges.

The 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education recognizes that e-learning can play an important role in creating more career-friendly pathways for individuals who are unable to leave work to attend school. The Master Plan cites the need for more portable and flexible options for promoting and financing skill upgrades, training, and professional development. State and national surveys reinforce contentions in the Master Plan. Each year Washington employers report that they continue to face shortages of skilled workers and that limited access to a skilled workforce is the largest barrier to expansion; at the same time students report that work and family commitments are the issues that prevent them from returning to school.

Summary of Bill:

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) identifies and evaluates current national private employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components provided by higher education public institutions. The evaluation must include a literature review, direct surveys of programs, determination of feasibility, an overview of technological considerations, and cost factors. The results of the study are reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

The WTECB forms a task force to select up to eight institutions of higher education, including at least four community or technical colleges, to develop and offer pilot projects providing employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components.

Institutions apply to become pilot colleges and are selected based upon established criteria. By September 2008, the WTECB selects employers, using established criteria. They have the ability to offer employment and workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components in cooperation with selected higher education institutions. The pilot program evaluated by December 1, 2012; after which the pilot program expires.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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