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**SENATE BILL 6542**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Liias, Holy, Randall, Stanford, Carlyle, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Saldaña, and Wilson, C.

AN ACT Relating to adopting a uniform statewide automatic admissions policy at the four-year institutions of higher education; adding new sections to chapter 28B.77 RCW; creating a new section; and providing expiration dates.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that a postsecondary credential is essential to Washingtonians' ability to attain jobs with good salaries and advancement opportunities, and that meeting the increasing demand for credentialed workers to fill jobs in Washington is essential to the future health of the state's economy. The legislature also finds that public colleges and universities in Idaho have experienced growth in student enrollment following that state's adoption of a program under which eligible high school seniors are automatically admitted to public colleges and universities. The legislature finds that adoption of a comparable program in Washington could lead to similar gains in postsecondary student enrollment and an increase in credential attainment, benefiting students and the state as a whole. The legislature accordingly finds that the state should work to determine how best to help students navigate existing automatic admissions policies at individual public colleges and universities in Washington, and that it should study the feasibility of adopting a uniform statewide automatic admissions policy in Washington as well as the likely success of such a policy.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the next step pilot program is created. The purpose of the program is to provide information on automatic admissions policies and financial aid options to high school students and measure and assess its impact on college attendance rates. Information provided to students must include, but is not limited to, automatic admissions policies at four-year institutions of higher education and other postsecondary institutions, and the availability of federal and state financial aid.

(2) The council, with the office of the superintendent of public instruction, shall select one school district from each side of the crest of the Cascade mountain range to participate in the pilot program. Each school district selected to participate in the pilot program must agree to participate for at least four years. School district selections must occur prior to the 2020-21 school year.

(3) The council must assist participating schools in developing resources and materials on institutions of higher educations' automatic admissions policies and financial aid programs. The office of the superintendent of public instruction must provide the council pertinent student information for the purpose of measuring and assessing the impact of those resources and materials.

(4) Schools participating in the pilot program must collect data on the college attendance rate of students participating in the pilot program and provide it to the council annually.

(5) This section expires July 1, 2025.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The council, in consultation with the office of the superintendent of public instruction, shall convene the next step advisory committee to provide a recommendation to the legislature on a uniform statewide automatic admissions policy for first-time freshman undergraduate students at the four-year institutions of higher education.

(2) The advisory committee shall:

(a) Review automatic admissions laws and rules in other states, and relevant policies at four-year institutions of higher education in Washington state. To the maximum extent practicable, the review must consider available data and the impact of automatic admissions policies on college attendance on first-time freshmen students including the impact of the next step pilot program created in section 2 of this act;

(b) Consult with admissions professionals at the four-year institutions of higher education;

(c) Report advisory committee findings and recommendations annually to the appropriate higher education committees of the legislature by December 1st; and

(d) Develop a final report with the advisory committee's findings and recommendations, including draft legislation establishing a uniform statewide automatic admissions policy, and submit it to the appropriate higher education committees of the legislature by December 1, 2024.

(3) The advisory committee shall include, but not be limited to, the following members:

(a) A representative from each of the four-year institutions of higher education, selected by the presidents of those institutions;

(b) The superintendent of public instruction, or his or her designee;

(c) The director of the council, or his or her designee;

(d) The lieutenant governor, or his or her designee;

(e) The executive director of the state board for community and technical colleges, or his or her designee; and

(f) In consultation with the state board for community and technical colleges and the four-year institutions of higher education, the council shall appoint:

(i) One student representative, representing a four-year institution of higher education east of the crest of the Cascade mountains;

(ii) One student representative, representing a four-year institution of higher education west of the crest of the Cascade mountains; and

(iii) One representative of the business community.

(4)(a) For purposes of this section, "first-time freshman" means an undergraduate who will enter postsecondary education as a full-time first year student on or before the fall semester of the academic year that begins immediately following:

(i) The student's graduation from high school; or

(ii) The last day of the school year:

(A) That would have been the student's junior or senior year of high school; and

(B) In which the student completes the requirements for high school graduation and obtains a high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536 instead of receiving a diploma; and

(C) In which the student remains continuously enrolled as a full-time student.

(b) Any college credit earned through dual credit courses while enrolled in high school does not impact a student's status as a first-time freshman.

(5) This section expires December 1, 2025.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 2 and 3 of this act are each added to chapter 28B.77 RCW.

**--- END ---**