

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5401

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As of February 4, 2021

**Title:** An act relating to degrees in computer science.

**Brief Description:** Authorizing community and technical colleges to offer bachelor degrees in computer science.

**Sponsors:** Senators Nguyen, Rivers, Cleveland, Das, Dhingra, Gildon, Hasegawa, Holy, Keiser, Kuderer, Lias, Lovelett, Mullet, Saldaña, Stanford, Wellman and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/04/21.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Authorizes the state board to approve bachelor's degree programs in computer science at the community and technical colleges.
- Establishes requirements for authorization by the state board of new bachelor's degree programs in computer science.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

**Background:** In 2005, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) was given authority to select four community or technical colleges to develop and offer programs of study leading to applied baccalaureate degrees on a pilot basis.

An applied baccalaureate degree is a baccalaureate degree awarded by a community or technical college which expands on the curriculum from an associate of applied science degree, or its equivalent, and incorporates both theoretical and applied knowledge and skills

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in a specific technical field. In 2010, the pilot status and limitation on the number of colleges was removed. Before offering an applied baccalaureate degree, a college must receive approval from the SBCTC by demonstrating:

- resource capacity;
- the college has the appropriate faculty;
- there is student and employer demand; and
- the program would fulfill a gap in options available for students because the program is not offered by a public four-year institution of higher education in the college's geographic area.

All applied baccalaureate programs must be approved by the SBCTC. Under current law, Bellevue College is the only institution within the community and technical college system authorized to offer a bachelor's degree in computer science.

In 2020-21, there were 28 colleges offering applied baccalaureate degrees.

**Summary of Bill:** Subject to approval by the SBCTC, the community and technical colleges are authorized to offer bachelor's degrees in computer science.

The degree programs must be approved by the college board. Prior to approval, the college must submit a proposal for approval which includes:

- demonstrated demand from student populations that are low-income or people of color; and
- a plan demonstrating financial sustainability of the program using internal funds, investments from the workforce education investment act, or philanthropic funds.

The proposal must be submitted after December 1, 2021. The existing bachelor's degree in computer science at Bellevue College is exempt from the requirements in this bill.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 3, 2021.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Despite Washington being one of the greatest tech hubs in the world, I only know a handful of people from where I grew up in White Center who were able to get in the tech field. It is not for a lack of talent, its because of a lack of access and opportunity. I believe this bill and the intent to expand the technical degrees would solve a major problem and equip a generation of people to participate in this workforce. If you look at the current job openings, there are over 20,000 jobs in technology. Fundamentally this bill is about equal access everywhere in the state. Not

every person is able to move far from their communities to complete a degree. We expect more than 50,000 new computer related jobs in the state over the next decade and need to expand opportunity so Washington students can access them. Our state imports four times as many computer science graduates as it produces. Bellevue College has proven that it is possible for community colleges to help address the gap in bachelors degrees produced. This model has been successful at Bellevue College and can be successful throughout the state. Our experience has shown that with prioritized resources and quality faculty it is possible to produce high quality programs and high quality graduates. The community colleges do provide opportunities for more diverse groups of students and this will help our Washington companies diversify.

OTHER: Community and technical colleges have been chronically under-funded and this bill misses that context. Students are struggling with mental health and access to financial aid. When we strive to create new programs without funding core needs we are choosing to reallocate resources away from the greatest need areas. The independent colleges can be a key part of the solution in addressing the shortage in computer science programs. There are a number of approaches that can be used to leverage the seats available in our programs.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Joe Nguyen, Prime Sponsor; Charles Knutson, Amazon; Ed Lazowska, University of Washington; Samantha Kersul, TechNet; Paula Sardinas, Tabor 100; Michael Fong, City of Seattle; Jamilyn Penn, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Sheila Edwards Lange, Seattle Central College; Rob Viens, Bellevue College; Lynne Robinson, Mayor, City of Bellevue; Bish Paul, Washington STEM.

OTHER: Carolyn Brotherton, AFT Washington; Terri Standish-Kuon, Independent Colleges of Washington.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.