
Education Committee

ESSB 5850

Brief Description: Supporting students who are chronically absent and at risk for not graduating high school.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Braun, Wellman, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kuderer, Mullet, Randall, Torres, Valdez and Wilson, C.).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Requires each educational service district (ESD), subject to appropriation, to offer training and coaching for staff on the identification and reengagement of students who are chronically absent.
- Adds additional supports for chronically absent students to the Building Bridges Program.

Hearing Date: 2/19/24

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Building Bridges Programs.

Required Activities. A Building Bridges Program is a local partnership of schools, families, and communities that provides all of the following programs or activities: (1) a system that identifies individual students at risk of dropping out of school based on local data and provides timely interventions; (2) coaches or mentors for students as necessary; (3) staff responsible for coordination of community partners that provide academic and nonacademic supports; (4) retrieval or reentry activities; and (5) alternative educational programming.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Grant Program. Subject to appropriation, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) awards grants to local partnerships of schools, families, and communities for a statewide comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval system.

The OSPI is encouraged to consult with the Graduation: A Team Effort in performing the following duties:

1. identifying criteria for grants and evaluate proposals for funding in consultation with the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board;
2. developing and monitoring specified requirements for grant recipients, including identifying students who both fail the statewide student assessment and drop out of school; setting local goals for program outcomes; and coordinating an outreach campaign to bring organizations together and inform the community about the program;
3. identifying and disseminating successful practices;
4. developing requirements for grant recipients to collect and report data, including: the number of and demographics of students served; statewide student assessment scores; dropout rates; graduation rates; and absenteeism; and
5. contracting with a third party to evaluate the infrastructure and implementation of the partnership.

In selecting recipients for grant funds, the OSPI must use a streamlined and expedited application and review process for those programs that have already proven to be successful in dropout prevention. The OSPI must prioritize schools or districts with dropout rates above the statewide average and must attempt to award Building Bridges Program grants to different geographic regions of the state.

Eligible grant recipients must be one of the following entities acting as a lead agency for the local partnership: a school district; a tribal school; an area workforce development council; an educational service district; an accredited institution of higher education; a skills center, a federally recognized tribe; a community organization; or a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation. If the grant recipient is not a school district, at least one school district must be identified within the partnership.

The OSPI ensures that grants are distributed proportionately between school districts and other recipients. However, this requirement may be waived if the OSPI finds that the quality of the programs or applications from these entities does not warrant the awarding of the grants proportionately.

Dropout Reengagement Programs.

State statute establishes a framework for a statewide dropout reengagement system that is known as Open Doors Youth Reengagement. The system provides appropriate educational opportunities and access to services for students ages 16 to 21 who have dropped out of high school or are not accumulating sufficient credits to reasonably complete a high school diploma in a public school before age 21.

A dropout reengagement program must offer the following instruction and services: (1) academic instruction; (2) case management, academic and career counseling, and assistance with accessing services and resources that support at-risk youth and reduce barriers to educational success; and (3) if the program provider is a community or technical college, the opportunity for qualified students to enroll, at no charge, in college courses that lead to a postsecondary degree or certificate.

Summary of Bill:

Chronically Absent Student Definition.

"Students who are chronically absent" is defined to mean students who miss 10 percent or more of their school days for any reason including excused and unexcused absences and suspensions.

Regional Training and Coaching Supports.

Subject to appropriation, each educational service district must work in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop and maintain the capacity to offer training and coaching for educators and other school district staff, including those designated to address excessive absenteeism and truancy, on the development of robust early warning systems to identify and locate students who are chronically absent and connect them with the necessary supports to reengage them in academic learning. The training and coaching must include collecting, analyzing, and reporting early warning data, including attendance and other relevant data.

The necessary supports may include: (1) engagement with families; (2) academic, systemic, and economic supports; (3) connecting students to behavioral and physical health supports; and (4) incentives and celebrations of students' attendance and engagement in the classroom.

Building Bridges Programs.

When community-based organizations, tribes, and community and technical colleges are awarded Building Bridges Program grants to support students who are chronically absent, the grant funds may be used for the following strategies and supports, in addition to or instead of otherwise authorized grant fund uses: (1) proactive engagement with all families about the impact of attendance on student outcomes; (2) clear, supportive, and solution-oriented communication with families and caregivers of students who are chronically absent; (3) visits to families of students who are chronically absent; (4) academic, systemic, and economic supports for the families of students who are chronically absent, including removing barriers to students attending school as well as tutoring and mentoring students who are reengaging in the classroom; (5) connecting students to behavioral and physical health supports; and (6) incentives and celebrations of students' improved attendance and engagement in the classroom.

The OSPI may require the recipient of grant funding to report the impacts of the recipient's efforts in alignment with the measures of the Washington School Improvement Framework.

Dropout Reengagement Programs.

The following activities are added as examples of case management, academic and career counseling, and assistance with accessing services and resources that support at-risk youth and reduce barriers to educational success that may be provided to eligible students through a Dropout Reengagement Program: (1) academic related supports, such as covering test fees, calculators, and laboratory and other school supplies; (2) nonacademic supports, such as adequate and appropriate clothing; adequate and reliable access to food and nutrition; and transportation costs; and (3) connecting students to behavioral and physical health supports.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 16, 2024.

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