

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5850

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to supporting students who are chronically absent and at risk for not graduating high school.

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 History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/19/24, 2/20/24 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Requires each educational service district, subject to appropriation, to offer training and coaching on the identification and reengagement of students who are chronically absent.
- Adds additional supports for chronically absent students to the Building Bridges Program.
- Allows the parties to a dropout reengagement program model interlocal agreement or model contract to share the state per student reimbursement rate.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Santos,

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.

Chair; Shavers, Vice Chair; Rude, Ranking Minority Member; McEntire, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Eslick, Harris, McClintock, Nance, Ortiz-Self, Pollet, Steele, Stonier and Timmons.

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.

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.

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 is encouraged to consult with the Graduation: A Team Effort Partnership Advisory Committee in performing the following duties:

1. identifying criteria for grants and evaluating 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. 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.

State statute requires that the OSPI develop a model interlocal agreement and model contract for school districts to use to enter into agreements with educational service districts, community and technical colleges, other public entities, and community-based organizations to provide dropout reengagement programs. Among other things, the model interlocal agreement and model contract must allow for a uniform administrative fee to be retained by the district. A rule of the OSPI provides that school districts may retain up to 7 percent of the state reimbursement rate per full-time equivalent eligible student enrolled in a dropout reengagement program.

Summary of Amended 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.

The dropout reengagement program model interlocal agreement and model contract must allow the state reimbursement rate per full-time equivalent eligible student enrolled in a dropout reengagement program to be shared between the parties to the interlocal agreement or contract, as agreed upon by the parties.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill:

As compared to the engrossed substitute bill, the amended bill modifies the dropout

reengagement program model interlocal agreement and model contract requirements by allowing the reimbursement rate per full-time equivalent eligible student enrolled in a dropout reengagement program to be shared between the parties to the interlocal agreement or contract, as agreed upon by the parties, rather than providing for a uniform administrative fee to be retained by the school district.

Appropriation: None.

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

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Ninety-five percent of students are in class every day and 70 percent of students miss one or fewer days of school per month. A student who is chronically absent in any 2 years between grades 8 and 12 has a less than 50 percent chance of not finishing high school. Thousands of students leave high school early.

Chronic absenteeism means missing classes 10 percent or more of the time. Chronic absenteeism directly affects students' ability to succeed in school. If students are not reading by the end of third grade, they are less likely to do well in fourth grade. The consequences persist until graduation. Washington is one of the worst in the country for student absences and this has not changed since the pandemic ended.

This bill is built off a pilot that was established in Educational Service District (ESD) 112. The ESDs have experience and a good track record of supporting students who are chronically absent. Community and technical colleges work with schools to support students. Community organizations help provide barrier reduction funding and supply necessities. Staff help students, too, often out of personal funds. Because of the pandemic, the housing crisis, and other issues, the barriers are not being addressed fast enough. More organizations can be involved with helping kids get back into the classroom.

Many students want to go to school, but face transportation, food, mental health, or childcare barriers. Many students are at the edges of educational equity. All students bring value to their education. Efforts to engage students through academic and nonacademic supports will improve student academic outcomes. Barriers are different for different students. The costs of a student not earning a diploma causes ripple effects, not just for the student, but for the community in general and for future generations.

The Open Doors Programs serve predominantly low-income students, many of whom receive state care. Many Open Doors Program students need a different type of support

than other students. The bill provides the needed support and funding to eliminate the barriers that these students face.

Barrier reduction funding should be provided to help schools, case managers, and other organizations provide students with necessities and remove barriers to student completion of a diploma. This funding would help align student goals with the High School and Beyond Plan. This bill allows funds to be used for purposes that the schools are told they cannot help students with because it is a gift of public funds.

This bill addresses all the problems that communities have been trying to solve. This bill responds to student and staff needs. It recognizes that the needs of students must be addressed. This is an investment in the workforce and behavioral health.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator John Braun, prime sponsor; Troy Goracke, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Kevin Chase, Educational Service District 105; Venetia Holbrook, Clover Park School District; Gordon McHenry, United Way of King County; Paula Sardinias, Washington Build Back Black Alliance and FMS Global Strategies; and Mikhail Cherniske, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.