

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## ESSB 5850

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As Passed Senate, February 13, 2024

**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:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/11/24, 1/17/24 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 1/30/24, 2/05/24 [DPS].

**Floor Activity:** Passed Senate: 2/13/24, 49-0.

### Brief Summary of Engrossed First Substitute Bill

- Requires each educational service district (ESD) to develop and maintain the capacity to offer training and coaching for staff on early warning systems to identify and locate students who are chronically absent and connect them with the necessary supports, subject to appropriations.
- Adds supporting students who are chronically absent to the Building Bridges program through grants to community-based organizations, tribes, and community and technical colleges.
- Adds additional examples of the services and resources available through the statewide dropout reengagement system known as Open Doors Youth Reengagement.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

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*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.*

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair; Wilson, C., Vice Chair; Hawkins, Ranking Member; Dozier, Hunt and Mullet.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators McCune and Pedersen.

**Staff:** Ailey Kato (786-7434)

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5850 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Mullet, Vice Chair, Capital; Nguyen, Vice Chair, Operating; Wilson, L., Ranking Member, Operating; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Rivers, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Billig, Boehnke, Braun, Conway, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Muzzall, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Torres, Van De Wege, Wagoner and Wellman.

**Staff:** Trevor Press (786-7446)

**Background:** Staff Addressing Excessive Absenteeism and Truancy. State law requires school districts to designate and identify to the local juvenile court and to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) a person or persons to coordinate efforts to address excessive absenteeism and truancy, including tasks associated with:

- entering into a memorandum of understanding with the juvenile court and establishing protocols;
- coordinating trainings, outreach, and conferences;
- sharing evidence-based and culturally appropriate promising practices;
- identifying a person within every school to serve as a contact with respect to excessive absenteeism and truancy; and
- assisting in the recruitment of community engagement board members.

Building Bridges Program. Subject to appropriations, OSPI must create a grant program and award grants to local partnerships of schools, families, and communities for a statewide comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval system. A Building Bridges program means a local partnership of schools, families, and communities that either provides:

- a system that identifies individual students at risk of dropping based on local data;
- coaches or mentors for students as necessary;
- staff responsible for coordination of community partners that provides a continuum of academic and nonacademic supports;
- retrieval or reentry activities; and

- alternative educational programming.

Statewide Dropout Reengagement Program. State law provides a framework for a statewide dropout reengagement system to provide appropriate educational opportunities known as Open Doors Youth Reengagement. A dropout reengagement program means an educational program that offers at least the following instruction and services:

- academic instruction;
- 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
- the opportunity for qualified students to enroll in college courses that lead to a postsecondary degree or certification if the program provider is a community or technical college.

Eligible students are:

- at least 16 but less than 21;
- not accumulating sufficient credits toward a high school diploma to reasonably complete a diploma before age 21 or is recommended by case managers; and
- enrolled in a school district where they reside, enrolled in an institutional education program; or a nonresident school district.

OSPI must develop a model interlocal agreement and contract for the dropout reengagement system and school districts may enter into these agreement with an educational service district (ESD), community or technical college, or other public entity. The model agreement must include uniform financial reimbursement rates, per full-time equivalent eligible student enrolled in a dropout reengagement program, calculated using a certain formula.

**Summary of Engrossed First Substitute Bill: Chronically Absent Students.** Students who are chronically absent means students who miss 10 percent or more of their school days for any reason including excused and unexcused absences and suspensions.

Educational Service District Training and Coaching. Subject to appropriations, each ESD must work in collaboration with OSPI to develop and maintain the capacity to offer training and coaching for staff, including staff 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.

Building Bridges Program. This program is updated to include supporting students who are chronically absent. When community-based organizations, tribes, and community and technical colleges are awarded grants to support those who are chronically absent, grant funds may also be used for the following strategies and supports:

- proactive engagement with families;
- clear, supportive, and solution-oriented communication;
- visits to families of students who are chronically absent;
- academic, systemic, and economic supports;
- connecting students to behavioral and physical health supports; and
- incentives and celebrations of improved attendance and engagement.

OSPI may require grant funding recipients to report the impacts of their efforts in alignment with the measure of the Washington School Improvement Framework.

Requirement and reports with deadlines that have passed are removed, and language is updated to align with current state law.

Statewide Dropout Reengagement Program. Examples of case management, academic and career counseling, and assistance with accessing services and resources are added:

- academic related supports, such as covering test fees, calculators, and laboratory and other school supplies;
- nonacademic supports, such as adequate and appropriate clothing, adequate and reliable access to food and nutrition; and transportation, including bus passes, gas vouchers, and subsidized parking; and
- connecting students to behavioral and physical health supports.

**Appropriation:** The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**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 on Original Bill (Early Learning & K-12 Education):** PRO: This state and country has a chronic absenteeism problem, which means students miss school for any reason whether excused or unexcused. Students need to get back into the classroom to address learning loss from the pandemic. Schools need to engage and partner with community organizations to help remove barriers preventing students from getting to school. By working with community organizations, local needs can be better met. This bill would provide wrap-around support to help address barriers and basic needs. This concept has been piloted, and it has been successful. Students can become youth leaders in these programs. Mentors can help improve student's attendance and graduation rate, and they can be especially important in rural communities. Community colleges should be added to the bill to allow them to receive grant funds and barrier reduction funds. This bill makes and continues critical investments to help solve this issue.

**Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education):** PRO: Senator John Braun, Prime Sponsor; Beatrice Kiraguri, Testifying on behalf of African Young Dreamers Empowerment Program Intl; Jeff Engle, Big Brothers Big Sisters; Evelyn Aguilar-Clavel, Lopez Island Family Resource Center; Krissy Johnson, OSPI; Kevin Chase, ESD 105; Shaelin Henry; Colleen Lang, United Way King County; Paula Sardinias, WBBA/UWKC; Troy Goracke, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Pete Peterson, Kiona-Benton City School District.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Ways & Means):** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This bill provides for a local support structure. There was a decision package that requested funding for this work. Barrier reduction funding has been a successful approach. The state's existing support will go further if you add barrier reduction services. The impacts of a pandemic and homelessness have made this bill important. This primarily serves homeless children, children in foster care, children of color, and rural children.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Senator John Braun, Prime Sponsor; Troy Goracke, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Joy Sebe, United Way of King County; Anna Hernandez-French, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; CYNTHIA DAMPIER, NS Services LLC; Lauren Mendez, Washington School Counselor Association; Paula Sardinias, WBBA/FMSGs.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.