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## Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

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### HB 1572

**Brief Description:** Modifying higher education accreditation standards.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Pollet, Entenman, Reed and Nance.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies criteria for exemption from authorization for out-of-state institutions operating in Washington.
- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council to recognize certain accrediting agencies.

**Hearing Date:** 2/12/25

**Staff:** Saranda Ross (786-7068).

#### Background:

To operate in Washington, degree-granting institutions must obtain authorization from the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) or be deemed exempt from authorization. Washington's public institutions of higher education and certain religion institutions are exempt from authorization, while private and out-of-state institutions need authorization or exemption.

The WSAC defines "operate" as engaging in activities related to offering courses, granting degrees, maintaining a presence, or recruiting students in Washington. This includes providing academic credit or distance learning from within the state, granting degrees for credits earned inside or outside Washington, maintaining a Washington-based contact point, collecting prospective student data if the institution has a state presence, and specifically targeting

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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.*

Washington residents in recruitment efforts, except for multi-institutional fairs.

To receive authorization to operate in Washington, a degree-granting institution must: (1) be accredited; (2) have applied for accreditation and such application is pending before the accrediting agency; (3) have been granted a waiver by the WSAC waiving the requirement of accreditation; or (4) have been granted an exemption by the WSAC from the accreditation requirements.

To receive exemption from authorization, a degree-granting institution must be accredited by an accrediting association recognized by the WSAC and meet the WSAC's minimum exemption standards. An institution, branch, extension, or facility of an out-of-state institution wishing to operate in Washington must also be separately accredited by such an accrediting association.

Private organizations accredit institutions and their programs. Accreditation is a means of self-regulation and peer review by educational and professional communities. Accreditation is voluntary and may cover specific programs or an entire institution. The WSAC has discretion to determine which accrediting associations it recognizes and to establish minimum exemption standards. Exemptions and waivers are periodically reviewed by the WSAC.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The requirement that an institution, branch, extension, or facility of an out-of-state institution wishing to operate in Washington must be separately accredited is eliminated. Instead, to obtain exemption from authorization, such an institution, branch, extension, or facility must:

- have continuously offered degree programs in Washington for 10 years or more;
- have been continuously authorized to offer degree programs in its home state for 20 years or more;
- have been continuously accredited as a degree-granting institution for 10 years or more by an accrediting association recognized by the WSAC and the secretary of the US Department of Education, and maintain such accreditation status;
- maintain eligibility to participate in Title IV financial aid programs;
- be recognized for its extensive academic research and innovation, doctoral programs, and advanced facilities and resources; and
- maintain ongoing compliance with the requirements for authorization.

If such an institution fails to maintain compliance with the requirements for authorization, the WSAC may deny an application for exemption, or suspend or withdraw an existing exemption.

Beginning December 1, 2026, the WSAC must recognize accrediting agencies that maintain rigorous standards for institutional eligibility, including requirements related to institutional effectiveness, student learning, assessment, governance, academic independence, administrative and fiscal responsibility, and transparency. Recognition may be independent from the recognition or approval of accrediting agencies by other entities, including the US Department of Education and may not rely solely on reciprocity agreements between states that do not hold

similar minimum standards.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.