

Bills give lawmakers a range of options for crafting eventual tuition legislation

The Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee held hearings Wednesday on four widely differing tuition bills introduced so far during the legislative session.

"I'm encouraged by the discussion we're having today," HECB Executive Director Ann Daley told the committee. She added that the range of ideas reflected in the bills provides an opportunity for a broader discussion about tuition policy, rather than just tuition rates. "That's refreshing and encouraging," she said.

Rapid and unpredictable tuition increases impact college affordability and further hinder the state's long-term goals of expanded degree production and increased college access. At the same time, institutions argue for greater "tuition flexibility" to preserve academic quality in the face of cuts in state appropriations.

The bills now before legislators would offer public higher education institutions various levels of tuition-setting flexibility and accountability requirements. Bill sponsors, students, university presidents, business representatives and others all weighed in Wednesday to support or oppose various bill provisions.

The bills currently under review include:

- **SB 6276** - The bill would grant unlimited tuition-setting authority at the University of Washington to the UW Board of Regents.
- **SB 6509 (HB 2822 in the House)** - Supported by the HECB, this bill requires public baccalaureate and community and technical colleges to include proposed tuition changes when submitting budgets to the HECB for review.
- **SB 6562 (HB 2946 in the House)** - The bill continues the current practice of giving public baccalaureate institutions limited authority to raise resident undergraduate tuition up to a maximum amount set by the Legislature. The bill would limit those annual increases to 14 percent, or no more than 10 percent over a 15-year period. Increases also could not result in tuition levels exceeding the 75th percentile of tuition rates at similar institutions in Global Challenge States. Institutions would have to demonstrate progress in meeting performance agreements, and increase the amount of tuition revenue set aside for financial aid from 3.5 percent to 4.5 percent.
- **SB 6625** - Based on state median family income levels, the bill would waive up to 100 percent of full-time tuition for resident undergraduate students at state universities, regional universities or The Evergreen State College. Waivers would be reduced by the amount of any financial aid awards. Resident students who take more than 125 percent of the credits required at public baccalaureate institutions would pay the full cost of instruction. Some student categories would be exempt.

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Institutions express support for system design plan provisions

College and university representatives support the System Design Plan and will continue working with the HECB on legislation intended to implement the plan.

The System Design Plan was produced by the HECB with input from a broad spectrum of the higher education and business communities. The plan proposes short-term strategies for advancing the state's ambitious higher education goals during the current recession, and a process for making longer term decisions once the economy improves.

HB 2655 and its companion measure in the Senate, SB 6355, reflect recommendations in the System Design Plan.

Among other things, the bills would:

- Allow the HECB, higher education institutions, or other public and private entities to propose institutional "mission change," which occurs when an institution offers a new level of degree;
- Remove the "pilot" designation from applied baccalaureate degree programs offered by community and technical colleges (CTCs), and require the HECB and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to review and select applied degree programs based on previously established criteria;
- Require the HECB to review the need for proposed mission changes and make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

Speaking before the Legislature's higher education committees this week, CTC representatives said the House and Senate bills would promote degree production by enabling more students to earn applied baccalaureate degrees in career fields in which there is demand for bachelor's degrees, but few if any degree programs.

Action on the bills is expected Wednesday in both the House and Senate higher education committees.

Bill proposes student loan eligibility requirements

HB 2854 would move the state closer to providing low-cost student loans, conditional scholarships, or other financial-assistance options for low- and middle-income students.

The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) was established by the 2009 Legislature as part of E2SHB 2021. The HECB was put in charge of the program, but funding was not provided.

HB 2854 would move the HELP program closer to reality by expanding student eligibility requirements and creating a HELP account in the custody of the state Treasurer. Under the bill, students with adjusted annual family incomes no greater than 130 percent of Washington's median-family income would be eligible. Other eligibility requirements are contained in the bill.

A needs assessment would determine the specific mix of loans, conditional scholarships, emergency loans or loan repayments offered under HELP.

Rep. Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, D-Seattle, the bill's prime sponsor, said the program would help more middle-income students who might not be eligible for other financial assistance. "Phase three" of the effort to launch the HELP program will involve establishing a stable funding mechanism so the program can be ongoing and self-sustaining, Kenney said.

Next week's schedule:

- **Tuesday Jan. 26:** House Higher Education Committee. Public hearings: HB 2930, 1949, 2973, 2979. 10 a.m., House Hearing Room D
- **Wednesday Jan. 27:** House Higher Education Committee. Work session: student financial assistance programs. Public hearing: HB 2936. 1:30 p.m., House Hearing Room D
- **Wednesday Jan. 27:** Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee: Public hearings – SB 6594, 6409, 6358. 3:30 p.m., Senate Hearing Room 3
- **Friday Jan. 29:** Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee. Public hearings – SB 5827, 6467, 5237. 1:30 p.m., Senate Hearing Room 3

House higher education bills:

- [2SHB 1235](#) – Regarding tuition fees at institutions of higher education.
- [HB 1312](#) – Eliminating the exclusive authority of the University of Washington and Washington State University to offer certain engineering courses.
- [SHB 1914](#) – Regarding community and technical colleges' maintenance and operations funding.
- [HB 2118](#) – Convening an advisory committee on tuition policy.
- [E2SHB 2318](#) – Creating the Washington institute of aerospace technology and manufacturing studies.
- [HB 2479](#) – Exempting payment of fees at institutions of higher learning for children of certain law enforcement officers or firefighters.
- [HB 2580](#) – Concerning secondary career and technical education courses.
- [HB 2584](#) – Regarding the scope of collective bargaining for non-tenured faculty at community and technical colleges.
- [HB 2602](#) – Establishing continuing education requirements for engineers.
- [HB 2607](#) – Providing an exception to postretirement employment restrictions for retirees teaching in high-demand subjects.
- [HB 2617](#) – Eliminating certain boards and commissions.
- [HB 2621](#) – Designating resource programs for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics instruction in K-12 schools.
- [HB 2630](#) – Creating the opportunity to express program.
- [HB 2631](#) – Establishing a dropout prevention recognition program.
- [HB 2632](#) – Expanding the number of households living in the middle-income bracket.
- [HB 2634](#) – Promoting efficiencies including institutional coordination and partnerships in the community and technical college system.
- [HB 2638](#) – Regarding instructional materials provided in a specialized format.
- [HB 2655](#) – Expanding higher education system upon proven demand.
- [HB 2683](#) – Changing provisions of the economic development council.
- [HB 2684](#) – Establishing opportunity centers at community colleges.
- [HB 2694](#) – Regarding a bachelor of science in nursing program at the University Center.
- [HB 2743](#) – Addressing collective bargaining for certain employees of institutions of higher education and related boards.
- [HB 2822](#) – Modifying the budget recommendations developed by the higher education coordinating board to include recommendations on tuition and fees.
- [HB 2824](#) – Making 2010 operating supplemental appropriations.
- [HB 2836](#) – Concerning the capital budget.
- [HB 2852](#) – Concerning college-level online learning by high school students.
- [HB 2854](#) – Making changes to the state higher education loan program.
- [HB 2858](#) – Regarding the purchasing authority of institutions of higher education.
- [HB 2859](#) – Regarding administration at institutions of higher education.
- [HB 2915](#) – Regarding mathematics and science high school graduation requirements.
- [SHB 2921](#) – Capturing additional savings.
- [HB 2930](#) – Expanding the pool of qualified teachers.
- [HB 2936](#) – Changing the state student financial aid program.
- [HB 2946](#) – Regarding tuition-setting authority at institutions of higher education.
- [HB 2973](#) – Creating resident student classifications for certain members of the military and their spouses and dependents.
- [HB 2979](#) – Regarding higher education performance agreements.
- [HB 3002](#) – Authorizing tuition and fees waivers for K-12 classified staff.
- [HB 3025](#) – Establishing an alternative route to a high school diploma.
- [HB 3057](#) – Establishing the student financial assistance board by eliminating the higher education coordinating board and transferring its functions to various entities.
- [HB 3059](#) – Expanding options for educator preparation.
- [HCR 4403](#) – Providing for the 2008-2028 state comprehensive plan for workforce training.
- [HCR 4404](#) – Commending the higher education coordinating board for its initiative to develop a higher education system plan.

Senate higher education bills:

- [SSB 5007](#) – Allowing public technical colleges to offer degrees that prepare students to transfer to certain bachelor degree programs.
- [SSB 5048](#) – Providing for coordination of workforce and economic development.
- [2SSB 5176](#) – Creating a bi-state partnership for teachers of children with visual impairments.
- [SB 5316](#) – Changing the timeline for the state comprehensive plan for workforce training and education.
- [SSB 5317](#) – Clarifying terms for workforce and economic development.
- [SSB 5376](#) – Requiring the higher education coordinating board to develop a grant program to encourage training for students studying in the medical field to work with individuals with disabilities.
- [ESSB 5502](#) – Establishing the primary care physician conditional tuition loan program.
- [SSB 5553](#) – Promoting economic development through promoting innovation and the commercialization of technologies.
- [ESSB 5555](#) – Regarding lifelong learning accounts.
- [SSB 5600](#) – Making 2009-2011 operating appropriations.
- [E2SSB 5941](#) – Regarding a comprehensive education data improvement system.
- [SB 6156](#) – Providing economically responsible solutions for higher education funding and access.
- [SB 6276](#) – Granting the University of Washington tuition-setting authority.
- [SB 6290](#) – Concerning collective bargaining for certain employees of institutions of higher education and related boards.
- [SB 6325](#) – Regarding the institute of forest resources.
- [SB 6355](#) – Expanding the higher education system upon proven demand.
- [SB 6357](#) – Requiring policies for academic recognition of certain life and learning experiences.
- [SB 6358](#) – Regarding tuition surcharges for students who do not have timely completion of degrees.
- [SB 6359](#) – Promoting efficiencies including institutional coordination and partnerships in the community and technical college system.
- [SB 6364](#) – Concerning the capital budget.
- [SB 6409](#) – Creating the Washington investment in excellence account.
- [SB 6413](#) – Regarding the purchasing authority of institutions of higher education.
- [SB 6426](#) – Eliminating certain boards and commissions.
- [SB 6444](#) – Making 2010 operating supplemental appropriations.
- [SB 6467](#) – Authorizing honorary degrees for students who were ordered into internment camps.
- [SB 6503](#) – Closing state agencies on specified dates.
- [SB 6509](#) – Modifying the budget recommendations developed by the higher education coordinating board to include recommendations on tuition and fees.
- [SB 6533](#) – Granting high school credit for learning experiences.
- [SB 6553](#) – Regarding mathematics and science high school graduation requirements.
- [SB 6562](#) – Regarding tuition-setting authority at institutions of higher education.
- [SB 6579](#) – Improving the efficiency, accountability, and quality within state information systems.
- [SB 6594](#) – Regarding commercializing research at state universities.
- [SB 6596](#) – Authorizing innovation partnership schools.
- [SB 6597](#) – Making a completed application to a postsecondary education program a requirement for HS graduation.
- [SB 6625](#) – Changing higher education tuition and financial aid provisions.
- [SB 6655](#) – Regarding the running start program.
- [SB 6662](#) – Regarding developing a curriculum for a career track for home care aides.
- [SB 6678](#) – Concerning the creation of entities to address the long-range impact of opportunities and changes in the aerospace industry.
- [SB 6687](#) – Regarding student members on boards of trustees of community colleges and the state board for community and technical colleges.
- [SB 6696](#) – Regarding education reform.