



February 2012

## Legislative Update

The 2012 regular legislative session is scheduled to adjourn on March 8th. This year has seen fewer higher education policy bills than a typical year. Legislators are focusing on the state budget crisis and, in the higher education arena, working on a number of efficiency measures and trying to reach agreement on a successor agency to the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

After the first major cutoff date for bills to pass the house of origin, fewer than 20 policy bills being tracked by HECB (as described below) remain “alive” in the legislative process; however, any bill can be revived later in the session, particularly matters pertaining directly to budget or fiscal issues.

### Financial Aid

Introduced last year, **SHB 1650** would permit students enrolled in as few as three to five credits to be eligible for the State Need Grant (SNG). The bill was reintroduced this year, has passed the House, was heard by the Senate Higher Education committee, and is scheduled for executive session. Also before the Senate Higher Education committee are **HB 2292**, including Renton Technical College in the Aerospace Training Student Loan Program, and **SHB 2254**, the Educational Success for Foster Youth and Alumni of the Foster Care Act. Under 2254, the Passport to College program becomes permanent, and foster youth are automatically enrolled in the College Bound program through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**SSB 6121** requires the HECB’s successor agency to provide a website with financial aid and financial literacy information. The bill was reported out of the House Higher Education committee and awaits action by the full House. **SB 6597** provides partial funding for SNG from sales of works of art in the state art collection. The bill was not scheduled for hearing in Senate Ways and Means.

### Jobs, Economy, and Workforce Training

In addition to HB 2292, two other aerospace-related bills are being considered. **2SHB 2156** requires the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to facilitate coordination and alignment of aerospace training programs and to establish the Aerospace and Advanced Materials Manufacturing Pipeline Advisory Committee. **SSB 5982** creates the Joint Center for Aerospace Technology Innovation under the joint authority of the University of Washington and Washington State University.

The Career Pathways Act, **2SHB 2170**, aims to increase the percentage of Washington households living in the middle-income bracket by boosting secondary and postsecondary programs in high-demand fields. It requires career exploration materials and communications that focus on multiple career pathways, including non-baccalaureate pathways such as apprenticeship, workforce training programs, and community and technical colleges.

**ESB 6141** would establish a lifelong learning program housed at of the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to provide the opportunity for employees, with the support of their employers, to create an educational savings account that may be used for education and training.

### **Efficiency, Transparency, and Innovation**

To improve business practices and operational efficiency, **3SHB 2585** modifies existing rules about procurement and employment at institutions of higher education, particularly in regard to contracting. **SHB 2259** repeals campus safety reporting requirements that duplicate federal requirements.

Several bills aim to increase transparency at institutions. Among these, **SHB 2352** would require institutions of higher education to post services and activities fees expenditure information on their websites, and **SHB 2313** restates that institutional governing boards must follow procedures for meetings required under the state Open Public Meetings Act, including allowing time for public comment.

**EHB 2368** requires boards of trustees for all community college districts to include at least one member from business and one member from labor. This requirement is already in place for districts that include a technical college.

**E2SHB 2265** establishes “Washington Works Indicators,” metrics by which four-year institutions are measured and for which they would be subsequently rewarded. Indicators include increasing graduations, increasing graduations in fields addressing critical skill shortages, and narrowing the educational opportunity gap for disadvantaged students and minority students.

Under **2SHB 2717**, public four-year institutions of higher education are encouraged to design innovative approaches to increasing education attainment. Institutions would work with the HECB’s successor, the SBCTC, faculty, students, business, and other partners to increase the number of resident students receiving baccalaureate degrees or otherwise advancing their academic credentials. The bill requires a report on existing institutional innovations, as well as a plan for implementing further, system-wide innovations to rapidly and substantially increase baccalaureate-level educational attainment.

### **HECB Successor Agency – Student Achievement Council**

Two bills focused on the HECB’s successor agency are moving through the legislative process. **E2SSB 6232** passed the Senate and had a public hearing in the House Higher Education Committee. **SHB 2483** has not yet passed out of the House, but is considered “Necessary To Implement the Budget” (NTIB) and so can be taken up at any time. The House proposed budget released assumes passage of a proposed substitute to 2483 in making appropriations to the Student Achievement Council.

The two bills are relatively similar—comparing the current version of the Senate bill to the proposed substitute version of the House bill—in that both establish a Student Achievement Council (SAC) focused on increasing educational attainment, with a governing body made up of 9-10 diverse citizens and higher education stakeholders and oversight by a joint legislative committee. Both versions retain a level of statewide strategic planning for higher education, including some elements of system design. The bills also clarify that the Office of Student Financial Assistance, comprising the HECB’s current financial aid and GET functions, is housed within the SAC.

HECB staff have been working with legislators and legislative staff to retain important statewide planning functions and to make technical adjustments to smooth the transition for students, institutions, the agency, and other interested parties. Now, as legislative activity turns more exclusively toward budget planning, HECB staff will work to make sure administrative flexibility and adequate resources are provided to carry out the functions and duties for the new Council.