

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1706

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to changing the focus of the promise scholarship.

Brief Description: Changing the focus of the promise scholarship.

Sponsors: Representatives Mastin and Grant.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/19/03, 3/5/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a pilot process where principals may nominate students who have overcome barriers to their educational success to receive a Promise Scholarship.
- Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board, with a planning committee, to select five students in each legislative district from among those nominated.
- Provides that the pilot process is for the graduating classes of 2004 through 2006 and co-exists with the current Promise Scholarship Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Priest, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boldt, Buck, Chase, Clements, Condotta, Gombosky, Jarrett, Lantz, McCoy and Morrell.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Berkey.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The Promise Scholarship Program was first funded in 1999 and then created in statute in

2002. Its purpose is to strengthen the link between K-12 and postsecondary education by providing financial assistance to academically successful high school graduates from low and middle income families. The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) oversees administration of the program.

To be eligible for a Promise Scholarship, students must:

- Graduate in the top 15 percent of their public or private high school class, or score at least 1,200 points on the Scholastic Assessment Test or 27 points on the American College Test on the first attempt;
- Have a family income of no more than 135 percent of the state's median family income; and
- Enroll in an accredited college or university in Washington.

Students may receive a scholarship award for two consecutive years. Although the statute limits the amount of the award to full-time resident tuition at a community college, the actual award depends on legislative appropriation and the number of eligible students who elect to receive it. For the 2002-03 academic year, the maximum award was \$948, based on an appropriation of \$6.3 million and approximately 6,700 scholarship recipients.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A new category of students is made eligible, on a pilot basis, for a Washington Promise Scholarship along with those who are eligible under current law. Beginning with the graduating class of 2004 and ending with the class of 2006, each principal of a public or private high school can nominate students to receive a Promise Scholarship. Nominations are for students who have overcome physical, personal, cultural, or financial barriers to their educational success and give evidence of a desire and commitment to complete a postsecondary program. The financial and academic eligibility criteria of the existing Promise Scholarship Program do not apply to these students.

The HECB, with the assistance of a planning committee, selects five students from each legislative district from the nominated students. For ease of administration, the HECB can rely on the same planning committee and nomination procedures used in the Washington Scholars Program (where principals nominate students and there is selection of students based on legislative district).

The HECB conducts an evaluation of the new eligibility and reports to the Education and Higher Education Committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2006, with recommendations on whether to continue or revise the pilot program. The pilot program expires June 30, 2008.

Note: Bill has an expiration date of June 30, 2008.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill replaced the current Washington Promise Scholarship with a program where students who overcome barriers to their educational success could be nominated to receive a Promise Scholarship. The HECB would have estimated the number of scholarship nominations available within existing funds, based on an award not less than community college tuition plus a book allowance. The HECB would have apportioned the nominations to all school districts in the state and to private and home-school graduates. The substitute bill uses the same nominating criteria for students as the original bill (those who have overcome barriers), but limits the number of eligible students to five from each legislative district. The HECB will use a planning committee to select students from among those nominated. In the substitute bill, the new eligibility criteria apply to three graduating classes (2004 through 2006), and the current Promise Scholarship Program co-exists with the new criteria. The substitute bill does not address the amount of the scholarship award.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed with an expiration date of June 30, 2008.

Testimony For: All the information we have says that in today's society, individuals must have access to higher education in order to be successful. Our economy depends on it; individual's long-term financial prosperity depends on it. Yet we are using scarce public resources to help those who may be best able to help themselves, rather than those who have the promise to be successful if only they were given the chance. Grades are not necessarily the best indicator of potential. Students with good grades will always find a way. We need to create opportunities for students whose background, finances, or circumstances make access to a higher education more difficult.

Testimony Against: The current Promise Scholarship is working as intended and reaching needy and academically meritorious students. A recent evaluation shows it is an effective program. The program was placed into statute only last year, and it seems too soon to overhaul it completely. There may be a way, however, to create a process where a limited number of deserving students outside the top 15 percent of their graduating class could be made eligible through some sort of nomination by their school district.

Testified: (In support) Representative Mastin, prime sponsor.

(Opposed) Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board.