

Making Higher Education Attainable Interim Study Committee

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Committee Charge

The Making Higher Education Attainable Interim Study Committee was created pursuant to Interim Committee Request Letter 2019-09. The committee is charged with studying the following policy issues:

- the high costs of higher education;
- college tuition rate setting;
- roadblocks to obtaining postsecondary education; and
- risks and rewards of postsecondary education.

Committee Activities

During the 2019 interim, the committee held five meetings at the Capitol and went on one field trip. Briefings and presentations were made by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), Colorado School Counselor Association, Education Commission of the States, National Conference of State Legislatures, representatives from higher education institutions, and members of the public. The committee heard briefings on the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative, student loan debt, financial barriers to accessing postsecondary education, and the School Counselor Corps Grant Program. The following subsections discuss the committee's activities during the 2019 interim.

Financial barriers to postsecondary education. The committee heard briefings from the Education Commission of the States, Student Borrower Protection Council, Colorado School Counselor Association (CSCA), and student groups regarding financial barriers to obtaining a postsecondary credential or degree. Financial barriers are the number one reason students do not complete a postsecondary education. These may include unexpected medical costs, family issues, housing or food insecurity, emergency vehicle or home repairs, or other expenses, in addition to not qualifying for financial aid. Representatives from institutions of higher education discussed the ways in which they are assisting students who are facing financial barriers access or complete a degree or credential.

Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative. The committee was briefed by representatives from CDHE and institutions of higher education regarding the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI). COSI was created in 2014 and matches community dollars to fund student support organizations and scholarship programs across the state. This discussion resulted in Bill A.

School Counselor Corps Grant Program. The committee heard a presentation from CSCA on the School Counselor Corps Grant Program. The grant program awards funding to eligible schools and school districts to increase the number of counselors in high schools. The committee learned about ways in which the grant program can assist a wider range of students by providing services in middle schools in addition to high schools.

Alternative postsecondary pathways. The committee heard from representatives of Area Technical Colleges (ATCs) and community colleges about alternative postsecondary pathways. The committee learned about internship and apprenticeship programs offered by ATCs and community colleges, and heard from students who have participated in these types of programs. The students spoke about the positive impacts that would result from a program allowing work experience to count toward a postsecondary credential. This discussion resulted in Bill B.

Committee field trip. The committee visited Emily Griffith Technical College and the Auraria Higher Education Center, both located in Denver. The committee met with representatives from the state's three ATCs, Metropolitan State University of Denver, University of Colorado Denver, and Community College of Denver. The representatives focused on their school's unique programs and the ways in which they are offering more affordable and accessible postsecondary options to students.

The committee also heard presentations on the history of higher education funding and the funding formula, the return on investment of higher education, and student debt and loan repayment.

Committee Recommendations

As a result of committee discussions and deliberation, the Making Higher Education Interim Study Committee recommends the following three bills for consideration in the 2020 legislative session.

Bill A – Expand College Opportunity Fund Scholarship. The bill modifies aspects of the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) in the Department of Higher Education (DHE). Historically, COSI receives \$7.0 million in annual appropriations. For FY 2020-21, this bill appropriates an additional \$5.0 million General Fund to the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Fund.

Bill B – College Credit for Work. Under current law, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education convenes a council of representatives from institutions of higher education to recommend policies and procedures for credit transfers between institutions. The bill requires the Guaranteed Transfer Council to adopt and implement a plan for awarding credit for postsecondary education acquired through work-related experience.

Bill C – Innovation Pilot for Student Success. The bill creates the Improve Student Success Pilot Program in CHDE. The department is required to develop a process and facilitate collaboration among institutions of higher education to create programs that increase the number of students who successfully graduate. Collaborating institutions may submit a program proposal to CDHE for consideration and must include a research phase of up to one year.