

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5828

C 356 L 05

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Regarding digital or online learning.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Eide, McAuliffe and Kohl-Welles).

Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education
House Committee on Education

Background: Under current Washington rules, an alternative learning experience (ALE) is an individualized course of study that is primarily distinguished by off-campus instruction, that can be claimed by school districts as a course of study for full basic funding. The intent of this type of program is to give school district flexibility to serve a diverse student population, including students considered to be "at risk," non-traditional or self-directed learners, distant learners, and students who receive some of their instruction at home. Currently, there is no requirement for school districts to separately report to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) on the number or type of ALE programs they operate, or the number of students enrolled.

ALE programs are a creation of administrative rule rather than statute. The rules are considered fiscal rules and were promulgated by the OSPI as part of a series of rules on how to apportion state Basic Education funding. Statute requires that any revision to the current definition cannot take effect until approved by the House and the Senate fiscal committees. OSPI sought approval for its proposed rule changes in 2002, but the request was not acted upon.

A particular type of ALE is a program that focuses on online or digital curriculum. Digital or online learning programs can encompass a broad range of educational activities. Digital learning includes instruction and content delivered via various digital technologies, such as online or CD-ROM, or general learning experiences that involve the use of computers. The term on-line learning is more specific in that it generally refers to instruction and content that is delivered primarily via the internet. Schools that focus on this type of education may be referred to by such terms as internet, online, virtual, or cyber schools.

Summary: The OSPI will revise the definition of full-time equivalent student to include students taking classes through digital programs and adopt rules for the new definition. Under the rules, full-time and part-time students will be allowed to enroll in digital programs that are delivered and supervised by certificated staff. The students will have learning plans and weekly contact with certificated staff until the students complete requirements of the digital courses they are taking. Course syllabi may be used to meet the learning plan requirement. The weekly contact may be in person or through e-mail and other electronic means. The students will be evaluated monthly and assessed at least annually. Students enrolled in digital programs may not be counted as more than one full-time equivalent student.

School districts offering digital programs will adopt and annually review policies for the programs and accredit any school or program that is primarily digital. They will report annually to SPI on the types of digital programs, the courses offered, and the number of participating students. The districts will complete program self-evaluations, document the district where each student lives, and identify the student to staff ratio in the programs. The districts will also adopt methods to verify that each student is doing his or her own work and notify parents of any difference between the educational program selected by the student and home-schooling.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	48	0	
House	97	0	(House amended)
Senate	41	0	(Senate concurred)

Effective: July 24, 2005