

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1944

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Children's Services
Education Appropriations

Title: An act relating to developing and implementing a kindergarten assessment.

Brief Description: Regarding the development and implementation of a kindergarten assessment.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Walsh, Sullivan, Haigh, Carlyle, Quall, Kenney and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 2/12/09, 2/19/09 [DPS];

Education Appropriations: 2/25/09, 2/26/09 [DP2S(w/o sub ELCS)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Early Learning and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in collaboration with the Early Learning Advisory Council, to convene a workgroup for the development of a kindergarten assessment process to be field tested during the 2010-2011 school year and available for voluntary use statewide beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.
- Specifies during the pilot phase that more than one assessment option may be utilized.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Goodman and Seaquist.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120)

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In 2008 the Department of Early Learning (DEL), the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive) began general discussions relating to kindergarten assessments as part of their broader communications about early learning and transitions to kindergarten. In 2008 the Legislature directed the DEL to work with the OSPI, collaborate with Thrive, and consult with early learning experts, early learning and kindergarten teachers, and Washington Indian tribes, to develop recommendations for implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment. The DEL was directed to report by December 15, 2008, to the Legislature and the Governor, and to:

- identify a preferred kindergarten assessment that is based on research and is sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences influencing children's development;
- recommend a plan for piloting the assessment, allowing for voluntary use, and a date certain for mandatory use of the assessment;
- recommend a methodology for conducting kindergarten assessments, and a process for communicating the results to various audiences in a common format;
- identify costs of the assessment, including time needed to administer the assessments;
- recommend procedures to ensure the assessment is not used as a screening tool for children eligible for kindergarten; and
- analyze how the assessment can be used to improve instruction for individual students, and whether the assessment results can be used to improve the systems of early learning and K-12 education, including the transitions between systems.

In December 2008 the DEL submitted a report to the Governor and the Legislature with the following suggested implementation plan for a kindergarten assessment process:

Planning Phase (2009 - 2010)

Key tasks to be completed:

- gather input from stakeholders to ensure broad representation of perspectives reflecting the state's cultural and linguistic diversity;
- gather additional information from early learning programs and school districts about how the assessment process can compliment existing efforts and avoid duplication; and
- designate a task force or council to oversee development of a comprehensive plan for implementing the assessment process.

The Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) or another existing council with a wide array of stakeholder interests represented could serve as the oversight body to a key group of stakeholders focused specifically on the planning efforts. The following elements should be addressed by the stakeholder group during planning:

1. decide on the purposes and scope of the assessment;
2. select data collection tools, methods, and data sources;
3. identify funding sources and calculate implementation costs;
4. identify a training plan and methods of implementation;
5. identify data storage, analysis, and reporting methods; and
6. develop a plan for selecting schools and districts to pilot the assessment.

Pilot Phase (July 2010 - June 2011)

The OSPI, in collaboration with the DEL and Thrive, could hire a consultant or dedicate staff to oversee implementation. The pilot should be large enough to allow for reliable statements about the effectiveness with diverse student and school populations.

Key tasks to be completed:

- gather feedback from parents, teachers, and other key stakeholders regarding implementation and conduct a more detailed analysis of costs; and
- share a summary of results of the pilot phase with stakeholders and include recommendations for further refinement and a voluntary use phase.

Voluntary Use Phase (July 2011 - June 2013)

The OPSI, in collaboration with the DEL and Thrive could oversee technical support to districts implementing the assessment voluntarily. Information and results from the voluntary use phase should guide decisions about a date certain when districts must offer the assessment statewide.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The ELAC and the OSPI must collaboratively convene a workgroup to develop a statewide kindergarten assessment to be field tested in the 2010 - 2011 school year and available for statewide voluntary use beginning in the 2011 - 2012 school year.

The workgroup must include representatives from school districts, early learning providers, tribal councils, and organizations reflecting cultural and linguistic diversity. The workgroup must:

1. identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be assessed and determine the extent of desirable alignment with early learning benchmarks and standards;
2. define the assessment methodology, including how assessments will be approached for children from diverse cultures and children with special needs;
3. specify the data collection needs, tools, and procedures;
4. determine whether and how parents may opt out or forego the assessment process on behalf of a child;
5. identify a training plan and implementation strategy for use by districts and schools and select the sites for field training; and
6. examine results of the field test and make any necessary adjustments before statewide voluntary implementation.

The assessment must serve the following purposes:

- provide parents and teachers with information about a child's knowledge, skills, and abilities upon entering kindergarten in order to inform instruction for the child;
- facilitate communication with parents about what children are learning and to empower parents to assist their children; and
- provide feedback to early learning programs to enable continuous improvement, support transitions, and improve alignment between early learning programs and kindergarten classrooms.

The assessment must be uniform across the state and may not be used to screen or preclude children from entering kindergarten. The assessment process must be:

- developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically relevant;
- sufficiently flexible and adaptable to accommodate children with disabilities and special needs;
- cost-effective in order to maximize benefits to students, teachers, and parents, and minimize the use of resources that would otherwise be available for instruction; and
- designed to provide data and reporting using a single, easy-to-use web-based platform.

Beginning in the 2011 - 2012 school year, the OSPI shall encourage all school districts to implement the kindergarten assessment process. The OSPI may adopt rules for the voluntary implementation of the statewide kindergarten assessment process.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes the following changes to the original bill:

1. replaces the requirement for statewide implementation with a requirement for field testing followed by statewide availability for voluntary use by school districts; and
2. removes the requirement for mandatory statewide implementation and instead directs the OSPI to encourage school districts to implement the statewide assessment process beginning in the 2011 - 2012 school year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 20, 2009.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support of original bill) This bill reflects the need for a common tool and process to provide parents and teachers with a clear picture of a child's abilities and needs when the child enters kindergarten. There also is value in using the information to provide feedback to early learning programs. This is a critical step and will take a lot of conversation with a broad group of stakeholders. The OSPI appreciates the attention to a kindergarten assessment process. The only recommendations for improvement would be that the DEL and the OPSI work directly to convene the work group and that the field test period be followed by a voluntary use phase before implementation becomes mandatory.

(With concerns on original bill) Schools need to be assessed for their ability to be ready to receive children. We have serious concerns about any assessment and believe the bill will undo tribal efforts to revitalize native languages on the reservation. We also are concerned the bill is in conflict with the Head Start Reauthorization Act because that Act allows the tribes to set their own standards and curriculum for Tribal Head Start programs.

(Information only) Developing the recommendations on the kindergarten assessment process reflects a significant amount of stakeholder input which is important as we move forward. This bill represents an opportunity to look more closely at how to approach implementation of the assessment process.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Alan Burke and Mary Seaton, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Agda Burchard, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children.

(Concerns) Miguel Perez-Gibson and Karen Condon, Colville Tribes; and Jeanine Dengate, Tulalip Tribes.

(Information only) Sonali Patel, Department of Early Learning.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Early Learning & Children's Services. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Sullivan, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Cox, Haler, Hunter, Kagi, Probst, Quall, Rolfes and Wallace.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson.

Staff: Wendy Polzin (786-7137)

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Education Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Early Learning & Children's Services:

The Education Appropriations Committee adopted a striking amendment which included the following changes: clarifying that the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Department of Early Learning will jointly consult with the Early Learning Advisory Council to convene the work group responsible for the development and field testing of the kindergarten assessment process; adds parent groups to the representation on the work group; clarifies the nature of tribal representation on the work group; adds additional work group tasks; and allows for field testing of more than one assessment process.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Second Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Currently, kindergarten teachers all assess children in different ways. Among their main concerns are if a child can pay attention and has impulse control. The early learning community is supportive of this legislation. In the bill, leadership for the assessment process is given to the Department of Early Learning, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will be responsible for rolling out the pilot. There are three main goals with this bill: to provide information to parents and teachers; to provide feedback to the early learning community; and to allow ways to determine effectiveness of early learning programs.

(With concerns) Overall the bill is supported, but there is a concern over who the lead agency really is for this project. The OSPI would like to look at language to clarify who is in charge.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor.

(With concerns) Bob Butts and Mary Seaton, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.