

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6291

As Reported by House Committee On: Education

Title: An act relating to using weighted grade point averages for accelerated courses.

Brief Description: Authorizing the use of weighted grade point averages for accelerated courses.

Sponsors: Senators Braun, Becker, Angel, Rivers, Sheldon and Liias.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/22/16, 2/25/16 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill (As Amended by Committee)

- Establishes a Legislative task force on weighted grade point average systems that consists of four legislators and 10 nonvoting members representing specified education-related organizations.
- Delineates issues related to weighted grade point average systems for the task force to review, and requires the task force to produce preliminary recommendations by September 1, 2016, and final recommendations by December 1, 2016.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Ortiz-Self, Vice Chair; Reykdal, Vice Chair; Magendanz, Ranking Minority Member; Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stambaugh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Harris, Hayes, Kilduff, Kuderer, Orwall, Pollet, Rossetti and Springer.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Klippert and McCaslin.

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.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Griffey and Hargrove.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), in consultation with Washington's four-year public institutions of higher learning, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, is charged with developing a standardized high school transcript for use by all public school districts.

A weighted grade point average (GPA) factors in the difficulty of the coursework when determining the numeric point grade awarded for a course. Under an unweighted GPA system, the grading scale ranges from 0 to 4.0, so an earned "A" grade in a course translates into a 4.0 for the student. Under a weighted GPA system, a student earning an "A" grade in an accelerated level course may earn a 4.5 or a 5.0, and a student's cumulative high school GPA may exceed 4.0.

Although administrative rules adopted by the SPI to comply with the transcription requirement define "grade point average" and other transcript-related terms, neither the adopted rules nor Washington law include provisions for weighted GPAs.

Summary of Amended Bill:

A Legislative task force on weighted grade point average systems is established and charged with reviewing issues related to weighted GPA systems, including:

- the implementation of weighted GPA systems in other states, including how weighted GPA systems have affected college admissions practices and considerations, and how such systems might affect college admissions practices and considerations in Washington, both for in-state and out-of-state applicants;
- technical considerations associated with the implementation of a weighted GPA system, including:
 - the development of appropriate technical guidance for school districts;
 - the appropriate level of standardization for a weighted GPA system; and
 - a determination of what criteria to apply, and what level of local discretion to permit, when determining whether a course qualifies as an accelerated course under a weighted GPA system;
- how dual credit programs should be addressed in a weighted GPA system; and
- if recommended, whether the implementation of a weighted GPA system should be optional or mandatory.

The members of the task force include one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives, one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate, and legislatively appointed nonvoting members representing:

- the State Board of Education;

- the Washington State School Directors' Association;
- the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges;
- the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board;
- the Washington Student Achievement Council;
- the Washington Association of School Administrators;
- the Association of Washington School Principals;
- the Washington State Council of Presidents; and
- the Independent Colleges of Washington.

Additionally, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must cooperate with the task force and maintain a liaison representative as a nonvoting member.

Staff support for the task force must be provided by Senate Committee Services and the House of Representatives Office of Program Research.

The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the SPI, and the appropriate education committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Preliminary recommendations must be provided to recipients by September 1, 2016, with final recommendations, which may include minority recommendations, submitted by December 1, 2016.

Authorization for the task force expires August 1, 2017.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

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

- removes all provisions of the underlying bill;
- establishes a 14-member legislative task force on weighted GPA systems with two Representatives, two Senators, and 10 nonvoting members representing specific organizations;
- delineates issues related to weighted GPA systems for the task force to review;
- specifies that the first meeting of the task force must be on or before July 15, 2016;
- specifies that staff support for the task force must be provided by Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research of the House of Representatives;
- directs the task force to produce preliminary recommendations by September 1, 2016, and final recommendations by December 1, 2016;
- includes intent language; and
- expires the task force August 1, 2017.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended 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) This bill is supported by the school board, it eliminates an unnecessary state requirement and it has no cost. The bill will incentivize students to take challenging courses and will lead to better outcomes. Schools may take local actions to rank students, but those actions are not shown on the standard transcript. The bill will give school districts the option of using a weighted GPA system, but will ensure that weighted GPAs, if used, are used in a uniform statewide manner. Amendments related to running start and college in the high school programs, and amendments that clarify the bill, will be considered.

The bill is supported by Spokane Public Schools (SPS). The SPS have a strong interest in ensuring that students have access to highly rigorous coursework. The SPS wants to reduce disincentives to take less rigorous coursework, and this bill will help. The bill does not represent a new concept, as weighted GPAs have been implemented elsewhere. The OSPI already has designations on transcripts for advanced courses. The SPS is concerned about students electing not to take rigorous courses in their senior year because of concerns about college admissions implications. The SPS uses weighted transcripts internally, and this bill will align statewide transcript provisions with internal practices of the district and will eliminate confusion.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The term "accelerated coursework" is used in the bill, but it is unclear as to what the term means. While advanced placement courses may be easy to identify as accelerated courses, some would argue that jazz band and jazz choir are accelerated courses. The bill should be modified to clarify the term. Bellevue, Mercer Island, Seattle, and Walla Walla school districts have considered weighted GPA systems, but have decided not to use them, in part because some universities deconstruct weighted GPAs for admissions purposes.

The bill should be amended to include all dual credit programs. The programs cited in the intent section are high school courses, but actual college courses offered through college in the high school and running start programs should also be properly weighted. Colleges are accustomed to and rely on unweighted GPAs.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Braun, prime sponsor; and Shawn Lewis, Spokane Public Schools.

(Other) Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals; and Tim Stetter, University of Washington,

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.