

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5299

As Amended by House, April 5, 2021

Title: An act relating to the use of computer science credits for the purpose of graduation requirements.

Brief Description: Allowing the use of computer science credits for the purpose of graduation requirements.

Sponsors: Senators Wellman, Kuderer, Hunt, Mullet, Nguyen and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/03/21, 2/10/21 [DP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 3/3/21, 49-0.

Passed House: 4/5/21, 75-23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows a student, upon approval, to substitute an approved computer science course for a third-year math or science credit for graduation purposes.
- Requires that a substituted computer science course align with the student's High School and Beyond Plan.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Hawkins, Ranking Member; Dozier, Hunt, McCune, Mullet and Pedersen.

Staff: Benjamin Omdal (786-7442)

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

Background: High School Graduation Requirements. Washington State students must meet various requirements to graduate high school and receive a diploma. Students must:

- complete 24 credits in specified subject areas as determined by the State Board of Education;
- complete a High School and Beyond Plan;
- meet the requirements of at least one graduation pathway; and
- satisfy any local requirements.

Of the 24 credits, 17 credits are considered foundational. All students must take three credits each of both math and science.

Computer Science. Computer science generally refers to the science that entails the theory and methods of processing information in computers, as well as the design of computer hardware, software, and applications.

In 2019, the Legislature instituted a requirement that beginning no later than the 2022-23 school year, each school district that operates a high school must, at a minimum, provide an opportunity to access an elective computer science course that is available to all high school students. Districts may also award academic credit for computer science based on student completion of a competency examination that is aligned with state learning standards.

School districts are required to approve advanced placement (AP) computer science courses as equivalent to high school mathematics or science, and must denote on a student's transcript that AP computer science qualifies as a math-based quantitative course for students who take the course in their senior year.

High School and Beyond Plan. All high school students must have a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). Each HSBP must be initiated in seventh or eighth grade with a career interest and skills inventory. The plan must be updated to reflect high school assessment results, and must identify available interventions and academic support for students who have not met the high school graduation standard.

All plans must include, among other items, an identification of career and educational goals, identification of dual credit opportunities, and a four-year plan for course taking. Decisions on whether a student has met HSBP requirements are made at the local level.

Summary of Bill: Upon agreement of either a student's parent or guardian, or of a school counselor or principal, a student may substitute an approved computer science course for a third-year mathematics or science course for the purpose of graduation requirements.

A computer science course substituted by a student must be aligned with the student's High School and Beyond Plan.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: There are many students who will benefit by having an introduction to computer technology. With this incentive, students may find they thrive in computer courses. Even if students do not pursue a career in technology, taking computer science courses will provide students with digital literacy skills. Students need flexibility in their pathways and this bill will help students' course work to align with their interests. This legislation will help students who want to take a deeper dive into computer science the ability to do so. Computer science learning standards are already enabled to incorporate mathematics and science. This bill aligns with OSPI's priority to have meaningful HSBPs. Had this flexibility existed in the past, it could have helped many students, and should be allowed for students going forward. This bill would be one more tool in the toolkit to help students on their path to graduation and build upon the continued progress of computer science education in the state.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Lisa Wellman, Prime Sponsor; Roz Thompson, Association of Washington School Principals; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Preston Dwoskin; Jenny Plaja, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; Charlie Brown, Washington Skills Centers Directors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.

EFFECT OF HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

- Requires written notification of the consequences of the substitution of a computer science course for a third-year mathematics or science course for the purposes of graduation requirements.
- Requires agreement of the student, the parent or guardian, and the counselor or principal for substitution, rather than the parent or guardian or the counselor or principal.
- Specifies that the substitution may only be used once per student.
- Requires the computer science course be aligned to state computer science learning standards.
- Adds a cross reference to the substitution policy in the statute governing graduation requirements.