

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1068

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to elimination of mandatory norm-referenced student assessments.

Brief Description: Eliminating mandatory norm-referenced student assessments.

Sponsors: By Representatives Quall, McDermott and Haigh; by request of Governor Locke and Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/10/05, 2/24/05 [DP];

Appropriations: 3/3/05, 3/5/05 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/14/05, 78-19.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 4/6/05, 27-22.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- The requirement that students in the third, sixth, and ninth grades take a norm-referenced achievement test is repealed, but school districts may continue to use norm-referenced assessments at the districts' own expense.
- If funding is appropriated, the Superintendent will make diagnostic assessments available to school districts by September 1, 2006.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott and Santos.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunshee, Grant, Haigh, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDermott, McIntire, Miloscia and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Bailey, Buri, Clements, Hinkle, Pearson, Priest, Talcott and Walsh.

Staff: Denise Graham (786-7137).

Background:

Norm-referenced Tests

By law, public school students in the third, sixth, and ninth grades must take norm-referenced achievement tests that assess the students' basic skills in reading, language arts, and mathematics. The two assessments used are the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Iowa Test of Education Development (ITED). The scores are reported as percentile points, meaning students perform as well as or better than a certain percentage of other students in the nation. The national average score is 50, and is based upon a national sample selected from 1995.

The ITBS is a norm-referenced test given to third- and sixth-grade students in our state. Students demonstrate their grasp of foundational skills (reading, mathematics, and language arts) by responding to a series of multiple-choice questions. During the 2003-04 school year, on average, the state's third grade students scored in the 58th percentile in reading and the 67th percentile in math. Sixth grade students scored in the 55th percentile in reading and language arts and the 58th percentile in math on the ITBS.

The ITED has been given to Washington ninth-graders each spring since 2000. Through a series of multiple choice questions, the assessment measures a student's understanding of fundamental skills in reading, quantitative reasoning (mathematics), and expression (language arts). During the 2003-04 school year, on average, the state's ninth grade students scored in the 53rd percentile in reading, the 54th percentile in expression, and the 59th percentile in quantitative reasoning. The ninth grade scores have not increased over the five year period in which the ITED was administered in the state.

The ninth grade assessment also includes an inventory of a student's interests that can be used for counseling and high school planning. Schools may use the interest inventory with eighth grade students as well.

Other Required Assessments

By state and federal law, Washington assesses students in elementary, middle, and high school in reading, writing, math, and science. The assessments are "criterion-referenced" or designed to determine the extent to which students have met the state's standards in those content areas. Under the federal "No Child Left Behind" Act, by the end of the 2005-06

school year, the state must add additional criterion-referenced tests in reading and math in the third, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades.

Executive Request Legislation

Former Governor Locke and the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) have proposed the elimination of these required assessments. Former Governor Locke's budget proposal for the 2005-07 biennium assumed that no school district would continue offering these norm-referenced assessments. His budget assumed a savings of \$645,000 for each year of the biennium. The SPI's budget request made a different assumption, that one-fourth of the state's school districts would continue to offer the assessments. The SPI's budget assumed a savings of \$484,000 for each year of the biennium.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The requirement that each public school student in the third, sixth, and ninth grades take a norm-referenced achievement test is repealed. However, school districts may offer norm-referenced assessments at the districts' own expense.

Subject to available funds, by September 1, 2005, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will post on its website, a guide of diagnostic assessments for voluntary use by school districts. Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, requires the agency will make diagnostic assessments available to school districts by September 1, 2006.

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S):

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is encouraged to offer training in the interpretation of diagnostic assessments and in ways to use the information from those assessments to help improve student learning. The office is encouraged to offer the training during its state and regional meetings on staff development.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (Education) Although norm-referenced tests like the ITBS were valuable in the past, parents, schools and the state now have better measurement tools, including assessments that are aligned to this state's academic standards. Some norm-referenced assessments don't include higher level thinking skills, like the problem-solving skills included in the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. With the added reading and math tests now required in the third, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades under the No Child Left Behind Act, the testing burden on schools is growing. Keeping the current requirement would make schools administer two sets of standardized assessments to third and sixth grade students. The time required for the second assessment could better be spent in teaching students the skills

measured by the assessments. Eliminating the requirement would also relieve school districts of one state mandate. In addition, the state will be able to compare the achievement of its students with that of students in other states through the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Parents didn't object when the tests were discontinued in the fifth and eighth grades.

Testimony For: (Appropriations) (In support) Eliminating the norm referenced assessment requirements reduces the testing burden on students. These tests are a waste of time and money which can be much more productively spent preparing students to take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The National Assessment of Educational Progress is a better tool for comparing our students to others.

(With concerns) Teachers are conflicted over eliminating the ITBS. Although it would reduce workload, it would also eliminate a test that is a good diagnostic tool. The WASL is not useful as a diagnostic tool. It would be better to make the ITBS optional.

Testimony Against: (Education) The ITBS is valuable since it provides information that allows parents, schools, and communities to know how well their children are learning in comparison to children in other schools, districts, and states. The ninth grade assessment provides valuable information on student interests that is used by guidance counselors to help students plan their high school programs. It also provides good diagnostic information for teachers and parents.

Testimony Against: (Appropriations) None.

Persons Testifying: (Education) (In support) Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Judy Hartman, Governor's Policy Office; Greg Hall, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Ric Williams, Everett School District; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; and Tom Cone, Vancouver School District.

(With concerns) Wes Pruitt, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Gary King, Washington Education Association; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; and Don Rash, Association of Washington School Principals.

(Opposed) Nancy Vernon, citizen; and Sharon Hanek, citizen.

Persons Testifying: (Appropriations) (In support) Don Rash, Association of Washington School Principals; and Terry Bergeson, Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(With concerns) Gary King, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Education) None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Appropriations) None.