

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 1708

PARTIAL VETO

C 207 L 05

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Regarding dropout prevention.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Lovick, Quall, Dickerson, Cox, Haigh, Kenney, McDermott, O'Brien, Sells, B. Sullivan, Appleton, Simpson, Kagi, Darneille, Morrell, Green, P. Sullivan, Ormsby, McCoy, Chase and Moeller).

House Committee on Education

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

Background:

Dropout Definitions

Dropouts typically are defined as students who leave school before graduating from high school with a diploma, but there is no universally accepted definition for the term *dropout*. For purposes of state statistics, dropouts are defined as students who leave high school without a regular diploma and do not transfer to another school. Under this definition, high school students who continue beyond their senior year in order to complete graduation requirements are not dropouts.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), on-time graduation rates are used as an indicator of adequate yearly progress (AYP). Graduation rates under the NCLB, however, can reflect only the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years. Under this definition, students who continue beyond their senior year and earn a diploma before turning age 21 still are counted as dropouts.

Washington's Graduation Rate Goals

The Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission (A+ Commission) is authorized, but not required, to establish dropout reduction and graduation rate goals for students in grades seven through 12. Goals must be established by rule, and require legislative review prior to adoption.

The graduation rate goals established by the A+ Commission in 2003 apply only to schools serving 30 or more high school students. For each of the years 2004 through 2013, the graduation rate goal is the lesser of: (1) the statewide average graduation rate for the class of 2002 (approximately 66 percent); or (2) the school's own 2003 graduation rate plus one percentage point annually. In 2014, the graduation rate goal for all high schools is 85 percent, and this goal applies to all subgroups defined in the NCLB.

At its December 2004 meeting, the A+ Commission considered the establishment of dropout reduction goals for grades seven and eight, but elected to postpone action on this issue until it is determined whether the data reporting capabilities for seventh and eighth grade students are sufficiently in place. At its February 2005 meeting the Commission established proposed revisions to high school graduation rate goals and scheduled legislative review of proposed revisions.

School District Reporting and Graduation and Dropout Statistics

School districts are required to report annually to the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) regarding the number of high school students who drop out in each of the grades nine through 12, including the dropout rates of students according to ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability status. Districts also report regarding the causes and reasons attributed to dropping out as reported by students.

In the 2002-03 school year, an estimated 7 percent of all high school students dropped out of school. Of the 2003 graduating class cohort (those students who entered grade nine in 1999), approximately 24 percent dropped out before graduating, and another 10 percent were still enrolled at the end of 12th grade. The on-time graduation rate for Washington high school students in 2003 was approximately 66 percent.

Dropout Prevention Programs

The strategies for dropout prevention can be organized into two general categories: comprehensive school improvement and reform programs, and targeted programs focused at reaching students who are at risk of dropping out.

Compulsory School Attendance

State law regarding school attendance requires children ages eight to 17 years to attend public schools unless they:

- attend state-approved private schools;
- receive home-based instruction;
- attend a state-approved education center;
- are excused by the school district superintendent under certain circumstances; or
- are at least 16 years old and meet other specified criteria.

Children six and seven years old who are enrolled full-time in a public school also must attend school unless temporarily excused by the district superintendent. This attendance requirement does not apply to children under the age of eight years if a parent has not enrolled the child in school or if the parent formally removes the child from enrollment.

Unexcused Absences

A child's absence from school is unexcused if the child is absent for the majority of hours in an average school day and the reason for the absence fails to meet the school district's policy for excused absences. School districts must excuse children who are physically or mentally unable to attend school. Absences for other reasons at the request of a parent may be excused only if the absence does not create a serious adverse effect on the child's educational progress. School districts establish their own policies regarding excused and unexcused

absences and, by statute, are strongly encouraged to excuse up to five absences per school year for students participating in state-recognized search and rescue activities.

The Becca Bill and School District Duties

The Becca Bill was enacted by the Legislature in 1995 to address several areas of public policy affecting at-risk, runaway, and truant youth. The bill was named for a 13-year-old runaway girl from Spokane. Provisions of the law can be divided into three broad categories related to truancy petitions, at-risk youth petitions, and petitions for a child in need of services (CHINS petitions).

The truancy provisions of the Becca Bill require that, when a child who is required to attend a public school has unexcused absences, the school district take steps to eliminate or reduce the child's absences and:

- after one unexcused absence in a month, contact the child's parent by telephone or in writing;
- after two unexcused absences in a month, request a conference with the child's parent; and
- after seven unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in a school year, file a truancy petition in juvenile court requesting intervention and supervision.

An additional rule applies to children ages eight to 17 years who are required to attend school. After five unexcused absences in one month, the school district must either:

- enter into a school attendance agreement with the student and parent;
- refer the student to a community truancy board; or
- file a truancy petition requesting court intervention or supervision.

Parents of children ages eight to 17 years also may file a truancy petition if the school district does not file a petition after five unexcused absences in one month or after 10 unexcused absences in a school year.

Running Start and Northwest Indian College

Under the Running Start dual enrollment program, school districts and public institutions of higher education may partner and allow students in grades 11 and 12 to enroll in one or more college-level courses prior to high school graduation. A public tribal college, however, is not within the definition of the institutions eligible to participate in the program.

Northwest Indian College is the only public tribal college in the state and is funded primarily through federal appropriations. The college participates in Washington's Work First and Adult Basic Education programs, and students may use state financial aid at the college.

Summary:

The SPI is directed to review and evaluate the most promising dropout prevention programs and practices, including programs using non-punitive approaches to school discipline, and to report by December 2005 to the Legislature. The SPI will recommend the most promising comprehensive dropout prevention programs and practices, and the most promising targeted dropout prevention programs and practices. The SPI also is directed to recommend policy and

other changes to enhance the ability of career and technical education programs and skills centers to further contribute to dropout prevention.

The SPI must establish goals for dropout reduction and high school graduation rates for students in grades seven through 12. The goals must require annual incremental improvements for schools and districts starting in the 2005-06 school year and must meet or exceed the 2014 high school graduation rate goal of 85 percent. The setting of goals for dropout reduction and high school graduation rates is no longer under the authority of the A+ Commission.

School districts are required to include students in grades seven and eight in their annual reporting of student enrollments and dropout data to the SPI.

For the purpose of reducing the dropout rate of Native American students and encouraging their greater participation in higher education, accredited public tribal colleges are eligible to participate in the Running Start program.

To the extent funds are appropriated, the SPI, in conjunction with the Administrative Office of the Courts, must convene a work group to: (1) review the implementation of the Becca Bill and other school attendance measures for consistent application across the state and conformance with state law; and (2) evaluate the definitions of excused and unexcused absences, incentives for school districts to improve students attendance, and the data collection requirements for graduate rates, dropout, student transfer, and related issues.

The work group must include representation from the following groups:

- the SPI;
- the Legislature;
- the State Board of Education (SBE);
- the Office of the Attorney General;
- the Administrative Office of the Courts;
- school administrators, counselors, and teachers;
- truancy officers and truancy board members;
- judges and prosecuting attorneys;
- higher education institutions; and
- other interested education organizations.

The SPI must report the work group's findings by January 10, 2006, to the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	98	0	
Senate	48	0	(Senate amended)
House			(House refused to concur)
Senate	47	0	(Senate amended)
House			(House refused to concur)

Senate (Senate amended)
44-0
House 91 0 (House concurred)

Effective: July 24, 2005

Partial Veto Summary: The Governor vetoed the section requiring the SPI and the Administrative Office of the Courts to convene a work group to review implementation of the Becca Bill and evaluate the definitions of excused and unexcused absences.