

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 1068

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, March 30, 2005

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

Brief Description: Eliminating mandatory norm-referenced student assessments.

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

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

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 3/25/05, 3/30/05 [DPA, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair; Weinstein, Vice Chair; Berkey, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen, Rockefeller and Shin.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Carrell, Delvin and Mulliken.

Staff: Ingrid Mungia (786-7423)

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 grader students 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 Amended 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.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: Adds language encouraging the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to offer state-wide and regional staff development activities. The activities would assist practitioners in interpreting diagnostic assessments and applying instructional strategies based on diagnostic assessment data.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 17, 2005.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Ongoing research supports the validity of WASL scores. WASL is based on real learning, as opposed to teaching to the test. Norm referenced tests cover a wide range of grades, as opposed to diagnostic tests that focus on grade level content. Norm referenced tests are not aligned with the EALRs in Washington. Norm referenced tests take away from valuable instructional time. Current WASL and NAEP programs provide the information we need. The Governor's budget assumes eliminating ITBS assessments and directing OSPI to

review available diagnostic assessment. It would be helpful to have recommendations on how to implement a diagnostic system. Parents are concerned with over testing of students and the limited benefit of norm referenced tests does not warrant the expenditure. Norm referenced assessments are not aligned with our state testing standards. The WASL can currently provide good information on student achievement and intervention strategies. Districts are currently using diagnostic assessments to provide supplemental assistance to teachers and students. Funding needs to be appropriated for diagnostic tests.

Other: If we are going to repeal norm referenced tests, we need to replace it with what we have now, diagnostic tests. Results are available immediately under diagnostic tests, or within ten weeks under norm referenced tests. Don't abandon the only diagnostics we have, take out the language "subject to available funds." Concerned not all districts would be able to afford diagnostic assessments without the help of the state.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: Rep. Gigi Talcott, sponsor; Joe Willhoff, OSPI; Deborah Lane, teacher; Judy Hartman, Governors Executive Policy Office; Don Rash, AWSP; Mary Kinfield, PTA; Lucinda Young, WEA.