

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5496

As Passed Senate, March 7, 2013

Title: An act relating to authorizing approval of online school programs in private schools.

Brief Description: Authorizing approval of online school programs in private schools.

Sponsors: Senators Braun, Fain, Hatfield, Hargrove, Dammeier, Chase and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/18/13, 2/20/13 [DP].
Passed Senate: 3/07/13, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Litzow, Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; McAuliffe, Ranking Member; Rolfes, Assistant Ranking Member; Billig, Brown, Cleveland, Fain, Hill, Mullet and Rivers.

Staff: Eric Wolf (786-7405)

Background: Recognition of Private Schools. Current law provides that private schools should be subject only to those minimum state controls necessary to ensure the health and safety of all the students in the state and to ensure a sufficient basic education to meet usual graduation requirements. The state and its relevant agencies may not restrict or dictate any specific educational or other programs for private schools, except as provided for by statute.

Private School Advisory Committee. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must appoint a Private School Advisory Committee that is broadly representative of educators, legislators, and various private school groups in the state of Washington.

Online Learning Programs. Most of the requirements regarding Alternative Learning Experience programs are in administrative rules adopted by OSPI. However, online learning programs were first authorized in 2005 through legislation, so some of the requirements as they pertain to online programs appear in statute. In addition, legislation enacted in 2009 requires online learning programs offered to students from multiple school districts, either directly by a school district or under contract, to be approved by OSPI. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, all online learning programs must be approved by OSPI.

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.

Summary of Bill: Parameters of Private School Online Programs. If a private school approved by the State Board of Education seeks approval to offer and administer an online school program, including under contract with a third party, the requirements for minimum instructional hour offerings is met for the online school program. Residential dwellings of a parent, guardian, or custodial is deemed an adequate physical facility for students enrolled in the online school program. The online school program is not required to be offered for the same grade levels as the approved private school. No private school offering and administering an online program, third party that contracts with a private school to offer and administer the program, nor parent, guardian, or custodian providing an online program may receive state funding to provide the program.

Recommendations and Report. The Private School Advisory Committee must examine issues associated with state approval of online school programs offered by private schools and must consider whether criteria or procedures for approval in addition to those provided in the bill should be considered by the Legislature. The committee must submit a report, with recommendations if necessary, to the Legislature by January 10, 2014. In developing recommendations, the committee must be mindful of the Legislature's intent that private schools should be subject only to those minimum state controls necessary to ensure the health and safety of all the students in the state and to ensure a sufficient basic education to meet usual graduation requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is an easy fix that gives private schools the same ability to offer online school programs as public schools have. The bill has been drafted to prevent so-called diploma mills. This bill gives private schools the flexibility to use online programs as part of the way they reach students. Private schools in Washington are very eager to see the bill pass, and several are ready to begin offering online programs.

OTHER: This is a good bill and will be helpful to the 100,000 private or homeschooled students in Washington, and it will remove obstacles in front of private schools. Private schools may be able to lower tuition by offering online school programs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Braun, prime sponsor; Suzie Hanson, WA Federation of Independent Schools.

OTHER: Liv Finne, WA Policy Center.