

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5731

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Higher Education, February 16, 2017

**Title:** An act relating to acceptance of additional high school equivalency tests.

**Brief Description:** Requiring acceptance of additional high school equivalency tests.

**Sponsors:** Senators Chase and Frockt.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education: 2/14/17, 2/16/17 [DP, w/oRec].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to identify at least two High School Equivalency (HSE) tests that meet specific criteria.
- Requires the SBCTC to publicize the accepted test options to HSE test administrators, the Legislature, and the public.
- Changes HSE Certificate requirements to indicate that the holder has attained a score at or above the actual ability of current high school seniors.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Wilson, Chair; Bailey, Vice Chair; Baumgartner.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Palumbo, Ranking Minority Member; Frockt.

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

**Background:** High School Equivalency Test. By taking and passing a series of HSE tests, adults can demonstrate they have acquired the same level of knowledge as those who graduated from high school. A HSE certificate is issued jointly by the State Board for

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Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Washington's HSE test is the nationally administered General Education Development (GED) test. In 2014, the GED was updated to test the "skills and knowledge to succeed in the 21st century marketplace." The new GED test is provided on a computer at an approved testing center. The passing score is 150, on a scale of 100 to 200, for each of the four subjects. Test takers may earn honors if they score 170 or higher on any subject. The GED test costs \$30 per subject, with a discount for retakes.

High School Equivalency Certificate. A HSE Certificate is a certificate issued jointly by the SBCTC and the OSPI that indicates that the individual has attained standard scores at or above the minimum proficiency level prescribed by the SBCTC on a high school equivalency test. Each year more than 15,000 state residents earn their HSE Certificate.

**Summary of Bill:** High School Equivalency Certificate. A HSE Certificate is a certificate issued jointly by the SBCTC and OSPI that indicates that the holder has attained standard scores at or above the actual academic ability of current high school seniors.

High School Equivalency Test. The SBCTC must accept a HSE that is at least as rigorous as the 2013 GED in that 60 percent of high school seniors can pass the test. At least two test options must be identified, with at least one at a low cost to the student and at least one that does not require computer proficiency. At least one test must also be identified that is appropriate for students who have been in the workforce, need a high school diploma for employment, have been incarcerated, or were in the military.

The SBCTC must communicate the accepted test options to HSE test administrators. The SBCTC must also communicate to the public and the Legislature the number of students who have received a HSE Certificate during the previous month of each year by posting this information on a public page of its website.

The SBCTC must also post on a public page of its website a norming study for every HSE test confirming that the test is within the actual academic ability level of recent high school seniors. Any test vendor that fails to provide a norming study meeting specific criteria is not permitted to test students in Washington.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** *Testimony from 2017 Regular Session.* PRO: When the change was made to the GED test, there were some unfortunate results. Test participation declined by 62 percent and test completion declined by over 30 percent. The GED is tied to the common core standards, but this test needs to be reviewed.

CON: Current statute requires that the SBCTC use a test at least as rigorous as the GED. The current test meets all of the current criteria of this bill. At the beginning of 2015, there was a score change on the GED test. Washington has an 87 percent pass rate on the GED which is one of the highest rates in the state. The correctional pass rate is also currently over 80 percent. There will never be as many test takers of the GED as there were in 2012 and earlier, because there are now additional pathways for students to attain high school, high school equivalency, and college readiness standards.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator David Frockt, 46th Legislative District.

CON: Lou Sager, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

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