

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5260

As of February 4, 2009

Title: An act relating to motivating students through incentives to pursue postsecondary education by eliminating the use of statewide assessments as a high school graduation requirement.

Brief Description: Motivating students through incentives to pursue postsecondary education by eliminating statewide assessments as a high school graduation requirement.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Fraser, Pridemore, Hargrove, Sheldon, Kauffman, Hobbs, Hatfield, Fairley and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/04/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Starting with the class of 2008, high school students are required to meet the state standard on the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA). Students in special education who are not appropriately assessed using the WASL can earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA). The CAA or CIA were to be required for high school graduation starting with the class of 2008, but the 2007 Legislature enacted a temporary exception for students who do not meet the state standard in mathematics. Until 2013, these students can still graduate as long as they have met the state standard on the reading and writing WASL, take additional mathematics courses, and continue taking the test.

In 2013 the CAA and CIA will be required for high school graduation, and will also require students to have met the state standard on the science WASL. As of 2007-08, 23 states, including Washington, require students to pass some form of exit exam for graduation purposes. The types of tests and the required subjects vary.

Students have multiple opportunities to retake the high school WASL. In 2006 and 2007 the Legislature authorized several objective alternative assessments for students who are unsuccessful on the high school WASL after at least one attempt. In 2008 the Legislature

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directed that the high school mathematics WASL become a series of end-of-course tests. These tests will be used as the high school WASL in mathematics for purposes of graduation. The 2008 Legislature also directed the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to reduce the number of open-ended and extended response questions on the WASL in all subjects except writing and all grades except high school, effective with the 2010 administration of the test.

Summary of Bill: The high school graduation requirement that students must obtain a CAA by meeting the state standard on the high school WASL is repealed. Students in special education no longer have to earn a CIA. Laws are repealed pertaining to retaking the high school WASL, creating objective alternative assessments to the high school WASL, establishing a pilot program for students who complete other high school graduation requirements except meeting the standard on the WASL, requiring students who do not pass the high school WASL in mathematics to take additional mathematics courses until 2013, and requiring use of the end-of-course assessments in mathematics as the high school WASL for graduation purposes. All references to the CAA and CIA are eliminated.

The SPI must redesign the high school WASL by 2010 to reduce the number of short answer and extended response questions.

The SPI, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges must jointly review incentive programs in other states that are intended to increase the number of students meeting state standards and/or motivate students to pursue postsecondary education. A joint report to the Legislature is due by December 1, 2009, including recommendations for incentive programs to spend savings realized by eliminating the statewide assessment for graduation and consideration of creating a public-private partnership to implement the recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2009.

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 supports high standards but removes the requirement to pass a high stakes test in order to graduate from high school. We need to remove the barriers to student success. This bill will identify incentives for students to meet standards instead of using the current punitive and stressful approach of labeling students as failures and denying them a high school diploma when they do not pass one high stakes test. Such harsh requirements are likely to exasperate rather than close the achievement gap. Exit exams have not demonstrated that they motivate students or improve student achievement. Some students are not good paper and pencil test takers but are bright and capable of being successful. Accountability is not found in a test score. Instead of focusing on an assessment, we should focus on curriculum improvement to avoid dysfunctional side effects. We should trust the professionals in the classroom, celebrate the learning of students, and not focus on their deficits. Please add an emergency clause so students in the graduating class of 2009 do

not need to suffer taking the WASL to graduate. Clearly the EALRs are culturally biased, which makes the assessment used to assess the EALRS also culturally biased. Therefore, the requirement to pass the assessment to graduate from high school needs to be eliminated because it is unfair to our students of color. For our students to be successful it is important to have language and culture included so that they can fully understand. The tribes are using their own funds to provide additional help to our kids to pass the WASL but we still have too many who will not pass.

CON: We need to maintain high standards and have the measurement of those standards coupled with graduation because we must be able to ascertain that students have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful after high school. Too many of our students must pay for remediation at the college level. Our educational system has failed those students.

OTHER: The ethnic commissions should be allowed to appoint members to the study group that will look at incentives.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Wendy Rader-Konafalski, Washington Education Association; David Johnston, Capital High School Teacher; John Harlor, Reading Specialist; Cathy DeJong, Parent; Suzi Wright, Valda Gobin, Tulalip Tribe; Juanita Doyon, Parent Empowerment Network; Christy Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

CON: Allan Burke, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Brian Jefferies, Washington Roundtable; Lisa Macfarlane, League of Education Voters; Edie Harding, State Board of Education; and Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.

OTHER: Ben Kodama, Equitable Opportunity Caucus.