

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1686

As Passed House:
March 8, 2013

Title: An act relating to high school equivalency certificates.

Brief Description: Concerning high school equivalency certificates.

Sponsors: House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Seaquist, Haler, Roberts, Zeiger, Reykdal, Springer, Pettigrew, Pollet, Dahlquist, McCoy, Maxwell, Fagan, Morrell and Ryu; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/12/13, 2/19/13 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/8/13, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a high school equivalency certificate as a certificate issued jointly by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction that indicates that the holder attained scores at or above the minimum proficiency level on a high school equivalency test.
- Replaces the term General Educational Development test throughout statute with the term high school equivalency certificate.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Seaquist, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fagan, Hansen, Hargrove, Johnson, Magendanz, Pedersen, Reykdal, Riccelli, Sawyer, Scott, Sells, Smith, Tarleton, Walsh and Wylie.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

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.

Background:

General Educational Development test.

The General Educational Development (GED) test is a high school equivalency test recognized in all 50 states, and some Canadian provinces and territories. The GED was developed in the 1940s to help military personnel and veterans earn a high school credential and enter the workforce.

The GED Testing Service (Service) is a joint venture between Pearson and the American Council on Education. The Service reports that nearly 800,000 GED tests are taken each year, and, in 2010, more than 470,000 individuals were awarded their high school credential through the GED testing program.

The current GED test provided by the Service is the 2002 Series GED Test. The test is designed to cover academic areas of a high school education in five subjects, including language arts (reading), language arts (writing), mathematics, science, and social studies. This test is offered in both paper and computer formats.

A new assessment will be released on January 2, 2014, to replace the 2002 Series GED Test.

General Educational Development in Washington State.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) is authorized to adopt rules governing the certificate of educational competence, subject to rules adopted by the State Board of Education. This certificate of educational competence is issued by both the SBCTC and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) when an individual scores at or above the minimum proficiency level set by the SBCTC. This minimum proficiency level is defined as that set by the GED Testing Service. Currently, the minimum proficiency level is a standard score of at least 410 on each of the five portions on each of the five subject area tests and an average score of at least 450 on the entire test.

General Educational Development Alternatives.

Wisconsin awards students a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED). This is a combination of the GED and other tests and methods for demonstrating an individual's high school equivalent skills. Individuals can earn their HSED by taking the GED test as well as health, civic literacy, employability skills, and career awareness subject area tests. There are also four other options for earning a HSED, including taking certain postsecondary credits, obtaining a foreign high school or postsecondary diploma, or completing a competency program offered by a technical college or community based group that is approved by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction as a high school completion program.

California offers the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) to verify high school level skills. Those who pass the test receive a Certificate of Proficiency from the State Board of Education, which is recognized as the equivalent to a diploma. The test consists of two sections: a language arts section and a mathematics section.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

This bill removes the GED test from statute and replaces it with the term high school equivalency certificate. A high school equivalency certificate is issued jointly by the SBCTC and the OSPI. This certificate indicates that the holder has attained standard scores at or above the minimum proficiency level described by the SBCTC on a high school equivalency test. The SBCTC must identify and accept a high school equivalency test that is comparable in rigor to the GED, and must include testing in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies.

The terms GED, general equivalency degree, general educational development, general education development exam, general equivalency diploma, general educational development test, certificate of educational competence, official report of the equivalent acceptable scores of the general educational development test, and GED certificate, are replaced with the term high school equivalency certificate. These terms are replaced in 31 sections of law including licensure qualification requirements for optometrists, components of dropout reengagement programs, scholarship eligibility, and the definition of adult basic education, among others.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The famous GED is a proprietary test and the company who owns and operates the test has been bought by another company. The cost of the GED is going up and, in light of these dynamics, other testing companies are entering the market. This bill is disconnecting our law from the proprietary GED and allowing for another alternative test. This bill replaces the term GED with the term high school equivalency certificate. This change would open the door for the highest quality, cost-effective test available. The GED testing service has become a for-profit company and has trademarked the term GED. This means that there is now a trademarked vendor in our statutes. A statutory language change is needed to remove specific reference to the GED and replace it with the more generic term high school equivalency certificate. This change would allow the consideration of approved alternative tests, that in the future can better meet the needs of our students and the workforce, and at a lower cost to Washingtonians. A number of other states have moved or are moving to recognize other tests. These states are working with employers and the military to make sure that the alternative term is recognized as equivalent to a GED. Since the Pell grant now requires a diploma or equivalency test, if the only test that is recognized is the GED, we are requiring adults without a high school diploma to go back and take a test from a specific vendor. This state needs the flexibility to make companies compete so that the highest quality, most relevant test can be considered. It is also not appropriate to have a specific vendor in statute.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Jon Kerr, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.