

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6291

As Passed Senate, February 11, 2016

Title: An act relating to using weighted grade point averages for accelerated courses.

Brief Description: Authorizing the use of weighted grade point averages for accelerated courses.

Sponsors: Senators Braun, Becker, Angel, Rivers, Sheldon and Liias.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/21/16, 1/28/16 [DP].
Passed Senate: 2/11/16, 47-2.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

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

Staff: Alia Kennedy (786-7405)

Background: The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in consultation with institutions of higher education, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, is charged with developing a standardized high school transcript for use in all public schools. The rules regarding the standardized transcript require a common method of calculating a student's grade point average (GPA), as well as recording courses taken and credits earned.

A weighted GPA takes into account the difficulty of a course, rather than using the same GPA calculation for every class. For instance, under a weighted scale, an A in an honors course could equal a 5.0 weighted GPA, while an A in a non-accelerated course equals a 4.0 GPA. Washington public schools do not currently have an option to modify the GPA calculation for accelerated coursework, such as honors, advanced placement, or international baccalaureate courses. Some states have adopted state-level uniform grading policies that include a weighted GPA for certain advanced courses.

Summary of Bill: OSPI, in consultation with institutions of higher education, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Workforce Training and Education

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.

Coordinating Board, must develop an option for assigning additional weight to accelerated coursework for the purpose of calculating a student's GPA.

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 supported by the school boards and removes dubious state restrictions on the state standardized transcript. There is no cost. The bill could lead to better educational outcomes and encourage kids to push themselves to get more out of their education. The bill gives school boards the authority and option to use a weighted grade point average (GPA). Kids who want to take honors, advanced placement (AP), or international baccalaureate (IB) courses will no longer be dissuaded by the possibility of it negatively impacting their GPA. The state standardized transcript allows individual schools to tinker with their GPA reporting system locally, but it does not accurately reflect accelerated courses. The state reporting system should create an incentive for kids to take accelerated courses, not a disincentive. Many student in their senior year start thinking about post-secondary education and their GPA, rather than taking courses that challenge them and set them up to succeed in post-secondary school. This bill does not change anything about what courses can be offered at the local level.

OTHER: Some students try to deduct honors courses so that they can keep their 4.0 and be in the top ten. The challenge is defining what courses should be weighted differently. Limiting in the bill the definition of accelerated courses to honors, AP, or IB courses would be helpful at the local level. Otherwise, there will be argument over whether courses like jazz or choir, which are specialized, are considered select honors courses.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Braun (prime sponsor); Shawn Lewis, Spokane Public Schools.

OTHER: Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.

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