

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5859

As of January 21, 2026

Title: An act relating to expanding opportunities for competency-based assessments in graduation pathway options.

Brief Description: Expanding opportunities for competency-based assessments in graduation pathway options.

Sponsors: Senators Wellman, Cortes, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Slatter and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/22/26.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds language regarding competency-based assessment to certain graduation pathways.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

Background: Each student graduating from a public high school and earning a high school diploma must meet the requirements of at least one graduation pathway. Graduation pathways are intended to provide a student with multiple ways to demonstrate readiness for the student's goals for high school and beyond.

The graduation pathway options are:

- earn high school credit in a high school transition course in English language arts and mathematics. A high school transition course means an English language arts or mathematics course that satisfies core or elective graduation requirements and where successful completion ensures the student college-level placement at participating institutions of higher education;

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

- receive a qualifying grade in advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB), or Cambridge international courses in English language arts or mathematics, or earning a minimum score, on the corresponding exams, of:
 1. three—AP;
 2. four—IB; or
 3. E—Cambridge international;
- meet or exceed the graduation standard on the statewide high school assessments in English language arts and mathematics;
- complete and qualify for college credit in dual credit courses in English language arts and mathematics;
- meet or exceed qualifying scores on the mathematics and readings, English, or writing portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test or American College Testing;
- complete a performance-based learning experience demonstrating that the student meets or exceeds state learning standards in English or mathematics, such as a practicum, report, community service or cultural activity, performance, film, or exhibit;
- meet the standard in the armed services vocational aptitude battery; and
- complete a sequence of career and technical education courses that lead to a certificate or credential, allow students to earn dual credit, and meet the requirements of a Core Plus program.

School districts have discretion in determining which pathway options they will offer to students, and students may satisfy their mathematics and English language arts options in separate graduation pathways. The State Board of Education adopts rules related to the graduation pathways.

Summary of Bill: Competency based assessment is added to the definition of high school transition course, so that students may fulfill the requirements of that graduation pathway by completing a competency-based assessment offered in high school where successful completion by a high school student ensures the student college-level placement at participating institutions of higher education.

Competency based assessment is added to the AP, IB, and Cambridge international transition pathway, so that students may fulfill their graduation pathway requirement by earning high school credit, with a C+ grade or higher, in AP, IB, or Cambridge international courses, or competency-based assessments in English language arts and mathematics; or by earning statutorily proscribed scores on AP, IB, or Cambridge international exams.

The State Board of Education is directed to establish by rule the list of AP, IB, and Cambridge international courses, and competency-based assessments of which successful completion meets the statutory standard for English language arts and mathematics.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

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