

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5859

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As of January 22, 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.

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### 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;

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*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.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: This bill is part of the ongoing transition to Competency Based Education. Competency Based Education is a natural way to learn but now we have to fit it into our educational system. This is part of that process. Students are sometimes unable to follow their preferred graduation pathway because of their personal circumstances and competency-based assessment offers a resolution. This bill would allow Pearson EdExcel to be evaluated by the SBE and recognized alongside other pathways like AP, IB, or Cambridge.

OTHER: Students need flexibility in how they learn and these assessments focus on what students know and can do, but from a systems and resource perspective it makes more sense to implement changes to graduation requirements in a coordinated way with the State Board of Education's FutureReady Initiative to review high school graduation requirements. The FutureReady initiative is scheduled to make recommendations for the 2027 legislative session and is considering competency-based options as it evaluates graduation requirements.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Lisa Wellman, Prime Sponsor; Viet Cao Minh; Paul Kelly, Pearson; Duncan Hamshere, Pearson; Nora Palattao Burnes, Pearson.

OTHER: Randy Spaulding, WA State Board of Education; Roz Thompson, Association of Washington School Principals.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** PRO: Jonathan Wong.