

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2195

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to state academic standards.

Brief Description: Regarding state assessment standards.

Sponsors: Representatives McDermott, Talcott, Quall, Tom and Haigh.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/5/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a set of principles for state academic standards involving the Essential Academic Learning Requirements, grade level content expectations, and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).
- Makes the listening WASL optional.
- Requires Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to report on a series of issues related to state academic standards, including a report on the assessments that must be developed as a result of the federal "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001."

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; McDermott, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Tom, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, McMahan, Rockefeller and Santos.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Haigh and Hunter.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

Under current law, Washington has or is in the process of developing or refining essential academic learning requirements (EALRs) in reading, writing, communications (listening), mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and health and fitness. The state has developed assessments to see whether students have learned the EALRs in reading, writing, listening, mathematics and science. It is in the process of developing state assessments in social studies, the arts, and health and fitness. Together, these assessments comprise the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The WASL is administered to public school students in the fourth, seventh, and tenth grades. It is used as a measure to determine whether schools are teaching children the knowledge and skills required to meet the state's academic standards in the assessed subjects. Currently, students are not held accountable for the results of these assessments. However, beginning with the graduating class of 2008, public high school students will be required to successfully pass the high school WASL in reading, writing, mathematics and listening in order to graduate.

Beginning in 1998 the Legislature set improvement goals into law for student performance on the fourth grade reading WASL. In 1999 the Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission (A+ Commission) was created and given the authority to adopt or revise academic improvement goals for fourth and seventh grade and high school in reading, writing, mathematics and science, as measured by the WASL. In 2002 the law was revised to give the A+ Commission additional authority to adopt goals that eliminate the achievement gap and improve high school graduation rates. Although there are no consequences attached to the goals, school and school district progress toward the goals is reported to parents, the community and the state.

In late 2001 Congress passed the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001." The act requires every state to assess students in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades three through eight, and once in high school. It also requires schools and districts to get every child to state standards in those subjects by 2013-2014. The legislation describes a formula for getting children to the standards. The formula is called "adequate yearly progress" (AYP). The federal law describes consequences for schools that use federal Title I funds but fail over several years to meet AYP.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A set of principles is established for the EALRs, grade level content expectations and state assessments.

Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade Level Content Expectations

EALRs will:

1. Specify what children should know and be able to do through explicit, focused, and prioritized grade level content expectations;
2. Differentiate among the grade level content expectations that will be assessed through the WASL, expectations that will be assessed through locally administered assessments, and expectations that may not be assessed through formal means;
3. Be articulated over the grades as a sequence of topics and performances that are logical, build with depth, and reflect the sequential nature of the discipline involved; and
4. Be communicated in clear and straightforward formats that describe the expectations to be assessed on the WASL and the way those expectations might be assessed.

State and Local Assessments of the EALRs

The WASL will include reading, writing, math, science and civics.

State and, at the option of school districts, locally developed and administered performance-based assessments will be developed in social studies, the arts, and health and fitness. The assessments may include classroom and project-based assessments, end-of-course examinations and multiyear content tests.

The WASL will be aligned to the EALRs, assess higher-order thinking skills, involve multiple measures of achievement, and be valid and reliable.

The WASL results will be reported for each student by strand or grade level content expectation and in a way to allow parents and teachers to determine the amount of academic gain a student has acquired in that content area from one year to the next. It will also be reported with descriptive and coherent performance information that will allow parents and teachers to address the specific academic needs of students in that content area.

Listening becomes an optional assessment.

Reports Required

A series of reports on the EALRs and assessments are required of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The reports will be submitted to the Governor, the State Board of Education (SBE), and the House and Senate Education Committees. The OSPI will report as follows:

1. By January 12, 2004, on the steps, timelines and resources needed to ensure that any assessment required to meet the provisions of the federal "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" will be based on the assessment principles in this legislation;
2. By May 1, 2004, on its review, prioritization and identification of the EALRs to be assessed in reading, writing, math and science. It will also report on a technical review of the reading, writing, and science WASLs;
3. By November 30, 2004, on the feasibility of returning assessments in the same school year in which the assessments are administered; and
4. By August 28, 2006, on the feasibility of making available to districts instructional materials that use international strategies to help students meet state standards.

In addition, by November 30, 2006, the A+ Commission will report on its review and adjustment of cut scores for the WASL.

Additional Assessment Responsibilities of the OSPI

The OSPI will post on its website within six months of receipt, the reports on validity and reliability of the WASLs.

The OSPI will align state and federal reporting requirements for adequate yearly progress and will report on students who have been continuously enrolled from October 1 through the testing period.

Upon request, the OSPI will provide opportunities for the education committees to review the assessments and proposed modifications to the EALRs before the modifications are adopted.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Reporting dates are revised, a date is adopted for the requirement that state assessments allow teachers and parents to see the amount of academic gain a student has made in a year, a new civics assessment will not be required, an advisory committee will include legislators, language on reducing the number of EALRs is removed, and technical corrections are made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect on June 30, 2003. However, the

bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Testimony For: This legislation creates a set of principles to underpin the state's academic standards. It will provide students, parents, and educators with a better understanding of the state's assessment system. It will allow parents and teachers to see how much a student has learned in reading and math over the course of a year. It will also give educators more of the tools they need to raise children to state standards by making sure they know which EALRs and grade level content expectations will be assessed on the WASL. It will also make sure that teachers and parents are given more information on the areas where students performed well or poorly on the assessments. It promotes academic focus, emphasizes depth over breadth, requires an examination of the cut score for state assessments, and aligns state and federal reporting requirements. The legislation is a work in progress.

Testimony Against: Passage of this legislation may well lead to confusion among educators. It will cost money and may well send the wrong signal to educators about whether the state plans to "stay the course" on education reform. The OSPI promises to implement many of the elements of the legislation, but does not wish to see the elements included in law. Including some of the principles in law may have unintended consequences in future years. The state is making progress toward reform without this legislation, so it is unnecessary.

(With concerns) An existing law is included in the legislation that describes the timelines for state assessments; the inclusion of that section may raise concerns among teachers in subjects that are not yet assessed. Any change to state academic standards should be carefully considered using a deliberate pace and this bill was introduced very recently. The legislature needs to be very careful about the messages it sends on academic standards so that teachers are not confused about the legislature's commitment to education reform.

Testified: (In support) Representative McDermott, prime sponsor; and Joanne McCann, Citizens United for Responsible Education; and Ann Randall, Washington Education Association.

(With concerns) Steve Mullin, Washington Roundtable; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

(Opposed) Rainer Houser, Association of Washington School Principals; Bob Butts, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Judy Hartmann, Governor's Office.