

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2087

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to the Washington assessment of student learning.

Brief Description: Authorizing advisory committees to evaluate the developmental appropriateness of the various WASL tests.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, Talcott, Quall, Kenney and Schual-Berke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/21/01, 2/26/01 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creating committees to advise the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) on whether the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is developmentally appropriate for students.
- Teaching educators how to score and use the WASL to improve student achievement.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Democratic Co-Chair; Talcott, Republican Co-Chair; Anderson, Republican Vice Chair; Haigh, Democratic Vice Chair; Cox, Ericksen, Keiser, McDermott, Pearson, Rockefeller, Santos, D. Schmidt and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Schindler.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

By law, students in the fourth, seventh, and 10th grades are required to take the

Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in mathematics, reading, writing, and listening. They will also be required to take assessments in science, social studies, the arts, and health and fitness when the assessments are developed. The results of the WASL will be used with other criteria to determine whether a school or school district is successfully meeting its responsibilities to ensure that all children meet the state's essential academic learning requirements. Beginning with the graduation class of 2008, the assessment results for reading, writing, mathematics, and listening will also be used as one criterion to determine whether high school students have earned a high school diploma. At some point in the future, high school students will also be required to pass the high school WASL in other subjects.

The Legislature, parents, teachers, and representatives of other educational constituencies have questioned whether some of the WASLs contain questions and material that are developmentally inappropriate for students. At the request of the Legislature, OSPI studied the fourth grade mathematics WASL to ascertain whether its questions were developmentally appropriate for fourth grade students. The study found that most, but not all, of the questions were developmentally appropriate and that some questions were vague and confusing. The study also found that the way the test was given was not appropriate; the test needed to be given in shorter increments over more days. A number of critics did not agree with the report. They continue to assert that the mathematics WASL is not developmentally appropriate for fourth grade students.

Summary of Bill:

The OSPI will create a separate advisory committee for each WASL in reading, writing, mathematics, and, when available, science. Each advisory committee will review its assessment to determine whether it is developmentally appropriate for students at the relevant grade level. The committee will report to the OSPI on any revisions necessary to ensure that well-taught students who have devoted enough time on task are able to meet the state academic standards that are measured by the assessment. The committees will include parents, teachers, other educators, experts in child development, and other interested parties. The committees will periodically report to the OSPI. The OSPI will share those reports, with any resulting assessment changes, with the Governor, legislative committees, the State Board of Education, and other interested parties.

The OSPI will use a portion of its summer institutes and other professional development opportunities to help teachers learn to score the WASL. School districts are encouraged to provide ample opportunities for teachers and other educators to learn to use and understand the scoring rubrics used for the assessment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 21, 2001.

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

Testimony For: The WASL is an essential tool for the state's system of education reform but it is a measurement tool that is not well understood by students, parents or teachers. This lack of understanding has led to mounting frustration and resentment, feelings that teachers and parents are expressing freely to legislators and other policymakers. Teachers don't know how to use the assessment as a teaching tool since they don't understand how the results are evaluated. This legislation is the Sunshine Bill; it sheds light on the assessment in two areas in which teachers and parents have expressed the greatest frustration. First, it brings educators and experts together to evaluate whether the questions for each grade level are developmentally appropriate. Second, it helps teachers learn how to evaluate the results of the test. These measures should expand public confidence in the test.

(Concerns) The Legislature may wish to clarify the number of subcommittees and whether parents are included in the scoring conferences.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Santos, prime sponsor; Bob Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Karen Davis, Washington Education Association; and Carol Taylor Cann, Washington State PTA.