

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1708

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to dropout prevention.

Brief Description: Regarding dropout prevention.

Sponsors: Representatives Lovick, Quall, Dickerson, Cox, Haigh, Kenney, McDermott, O'Brien, Sells, B. Sullivan, Appleton, Simpson, Kagi, Darneille, Morrell, Green, P. Sullivan, Ormsby, McCoy, Chase and Moeller.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/14/05, 2/15/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to review, evaluate, and report to the Legislature regarding dropout prevention programs.
- Requires the SPI to establish dropout reduction and high school graduation rate goals for students in grades seven through 12.
- Removes the authority granted to the Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission (A+ Commission) to adopt dropout reduction and high school graduation rate goals.
- Expands the grade range for which school districts must report dropout data by including grades seven and eight with grades nine through 12.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

Dropout Definitions

Dropouts typically are defined as students who leave school before graduating from high school with a diploma, but there is no universally accepted definition for the term *dropout*. For purposes of state statistics, dropouts are defined as students who leave high school without a regular diploma and do not transfer to another school. Under this definition, students who continue beyond their senior year in order to complete graduation requirements are not dropouts. Likewise, students who participate in GED preparation courses also are not dropouts if they re-enter school to complete graduation requirements before turning 21 years of age.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), on-time graduation rates are an additional indicator of adequate yearly progress (AYP). Graduation rates under the NCLB, however, can reflect only the "percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years." Under this definition, students who continue beyond their senior year and earn a diploma before turning age 21 still are counted as dropouts.

Washington's Graduation Rate Goals

The A+ Commission is authorized, but not required, to establish dropout reduction and graduation rate goals for students in grades seven through 12. Goals must be established by rule, and require legislative review prior to adoption.

The current graduation rate goals established by the A+ Commission were adopted in 2003 and apply only to schools serving 30 or more high school students. For each of the years 2004 through 2013, the graduation rate goal is the lesser of: (a) the statewide average graduation rate for the class of 2002 (approximately 66 percent); or (b) the school's own 2003 graduation rate plus one percentage point annually. In 2014, the graduation rate goal for all schools is 85 percent, and this goal applies to all subgroups defined in the NCLB.

At its December 2004 meeting, the A+ Commission considered the establishment of dropout reduction goals for grades seven and eight, but elected to postpone action on this issue until it can be determined whether the data reporting capabilities for seventh and eighth grade students are sufficiently in place. At its February 2005 meeting the Commission established proposed revisions to high school graduation rate goals, and recently requested to schedule legislative review of those proposed revisions.

School District Reporting and Graduation and Dropout Statistics

School districts are required to report annually to the SPI regarding the number of high school students who drop out in each of the grades nine through 12, including the dropout rates of students according to ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability status. Districts also report regarding the causes and reasons attributed to dropping out as reported by students.

In the 2002-03 school year, an estimated 7 percent of all high school students dropped out of school. Of the 2003 graduating class cohort (those students who entered grade nine in 1999), approximately 24 percent dropped out before graduating, and another 10 percent still were

enrolled at the end of 12th grade. The on-time graduation rate for Washington high school students in 2003 was approximately 66 percent.

Dropout Prevention Programs

The strategies for dropout prevention can be organized into two general categories: comprehensive school improvement and reform programs, and targeted programs focused at reaching students who are at risk of dropping out.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The SPI is directed to review and evaluate the most promising dropout prevention programs and practices, including programs using non-punitive approaches to school discipline, and to report by December 2005, to the Legislature. The SPI will recommend the most promising comprehensive dropout prevention programs and practices, and the most promising targeted dropout prevention programs and practices. The SPI also is directed to recommend policy and other changes to enhance the ability of career and technical education programs and skills centers to further contribute to dropout prevention.

The SPI must establish goals for dropout reduction and high school graduation rates for students in grades seven through twelve. The goals must require annual incremental improvements for schools and districts starting in the 2005-06 school year and must meet or exceed the 2014 high school graduation rate goal of 85 percent. The setting of goals for dropout reduction and high school graduation rates is no longer under the authority of the A+ Commission.

School districts are required to include students in grades seven and eight in their annual reporting of student enrollments and dropout data to the SPI.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill directs the SPI to report back to the Legislature regarding the most promising programs and practices for comprehensive dropout prevention and targeted dropout prevention instead of just the two most promising programs of each type. The substitute also includes a request for the SPI to recommend policy and other changes to enhance the ability of skills centers and career and technical education programs to further contribute to dropout prevention efforts. The requirement for high school graduation rate goals to include annual uniform incremental growth is replaced with a requirement for annual incremental growth. Changes also are made to reflect the current data reporting and collection practices of school districts and the SPI.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The Legislature needs to do something to address the dropout problem in Washington. Currently we keep track of students for dropout purposes when they enter high school, but studies indicate kids actually begin the mental process of dropping out as early as fifth or sixth grade. When students dropout before enrolling in high school, they aren't even on the radar screen. This bill is designed to help us recognize and address potential dropouts sooner so that we can meet their needs as soon as possible.

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board supports adding the seventh and eighth grades and the incremental improvements. Minority commissions have provided anecdotal evidence that some minority students are never enrolling in high school because they have dropped out in earlier grades. The key is that goals need to be set, prevention programs put in place, and the investments made to get the job done.

(With concerns) Adding seventh and eighth grades to the dropout reporting grades would require some technology updates. When students leave junior high, but don't request their transcripts, it could look like a dropout, but it might be that the student has left the state.

The SPI would like to be able to recommend more than just the two most promising programs, because there are several programs that are already working. The challenge is to get the information about best practices out to our schools and districts. This could be done through professional organizations providing in-service opportunities to school building leaders.

(Neutral) The A+ Commission currently is considering revised graduation rate goals that would require more rigorous targeted growth from districts already at the statewide average. These rates would apply to the subgroups as well. The chair of the A+ Commission wanted to underline that goals should be in place, and that there should be tracking of progress and consequences for meeting and not meeting the goals. The focus should be on the students and driving toward improvement. The work a district will have to do will depend on how far from their goal they are. Even though the slope is steep for some districts, we still need to encourage districts to reach the goals.

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Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Lovick, prime sponsor; Wes Pruitt, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; Kathleen Lopp, Washington Association for Career and Technical Education; and Gary King, Washington Education Association.

(With concerns) Robert Butts and Pete Bylsma, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Don Rash, Association of Washington School Principals.

(Neutral) Chris Thompson, A+ Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.