

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2414

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, February 24, 2006

Title: An act relating to local control of student assessments in grades three, five, six, and eight to meet federal requirements for Washington's academic assessment system.

Brief Description: Regarding local control and flexibility in the state assessment system.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Haler, Talcott and McCune).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/09/06, 97-1.

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 2/23/06, 2/24/06 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Higher Education; Weinstein, Vice Chair, Early Learning & K-12; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Berkey, Carrell, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Pflug, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Staff: Ingrid Mungia (786-7423)

Background: Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, in order to receive federal funds under Title I, each state must annually submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) that details the state's system of academic standards, assessments, and accountability. By the 2005-06 school year, the state's assessment system must include yearly assessments of students in each of grades three through eight in reading and mathematics, plus at least one assessment of these subjects for high school students. By 2007-08, assessments in science must be administered in at least one elementary, middle, and high school grade.

Under state law, Washington's assessment system includes the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics at grades four, seven, and ten, as well as a science assessment in grades five, eight, and ten. Therefore, the additional testing requirement to comply with NCLB will be reading and mathematics assessments administered in grades three, five, six, and eight.

The NCLB also requires a state assessment system to have certain characteristics, including:

- Assessments must be aligned with state academic content and achievement standards;
- The system must include measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding of challenging content;

- Assessments must be valid and reliable to use in measuring annual improvement in student achievement (adequate yearly progress); and
- The system must be of adequate technical quality, supported by evidence from test publishers and other sources.

Under DOE rules, a state's system can be based on a uniform set of statewide assessments or a combination of state and local assessments. However, if local assessments are included, the state must assure that they meet the same characteristics as a state assessment and the results can be aggregated and compared across the state. The state must also demonstrate that its overall system has a rational and coherent design.

Under Washington's NCLB plan, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has proposed and is implementing a uniform set of statewide assessments, using the WASL in reading and mathematics at each grade level required to be assessed under NCLB.

Summary of Bill: Before the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, OSPI must request flexibility under the NCLB to conduct a pilot project with no more than six school districts using an assessment other than the WASL in grades three, five, six, and eight in mathematics and reading. OSPI must work with local school directors, administrators, teachers, and parents in developing the request and selecting the assessment. The districts in the pilot project must be of varying sizes and geographic locations, including urban, suburban, and rural areas. They also must enroll ethnically and economically diverse student populations.

If the request for flexibility is granted, OSPI must revise the state accountability plan to incorporate the pilot project. School districts in the pilot project are not required to administer the WASL in reading and mathematics in grades three, five, six, and eight during the pilot. OSPI must evaluate whether the piloted assessment can be used on a statewide basis and forward its findings and recommendations to the Legislature and the DOE.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: There are better assessment tools available besides the WASL. Other assessments are able to return the results sooner than the WASL. The No Child Left Behind Act is not so rigid that we can't use other assessment tools. There is a concern about checks and balances. There needs to be a cost benefit analysis for doing these assessments.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Rep. Haler, prime sponsor; Sharon Hanek, parent organization.