

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2706

As of February 21, 2006

Title: An act relating to requiring a more rigorous curriculum for high school graduation.

Brief Description: Regarding a more rigorous curriculum for high school graduation.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Hunter, Sommers, Tom, Anderson, Talcott, Quall, McIntire, Dunn, Green, Kenney and Lantz).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/06, 96-2.

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 2/20/06.

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

Staff: Stephanie Yurcisin (786-7438)

Background: The State Board of Education (SBE) is charged with adopting statewide high school graduation requirements. The current SBE rules require a student to accumulate 19 credits in the following course content areas:

- English - 3 credits
- Math - 2 credits
- Science - 2 credits, including 1 credit of laboratory science
- Social Studies - 2.5 credits
- Health and Fitness - 2 credits
- Arts (visual or performing) - 1 credit
- Occupational Education - 1 credit
- Electives - 5.5 credits

Local school districts can adopt additional courses or other requirements.

A number of national organizations, including the American Diploma Project (ADP) and the National Governor's Association, have recommended that states encourage higher standards for high school graduation. The ADP recommends that all students be required to take a college and workplace readiness curriculum that is defined by specific, challenging core content.

Summary of Bill: Beginning with the class of students entering ninth grade in 2008-09, state graduation requirements adopted by the SBE must include three years of mathematics including at least Algebra I and Geometry.

Beginning with the class of students entering ninth grade in 2012-13, state graduation requirements must include four years of mathematics including at least Algebra II, Geometry, and a higher-level mathematics course designed to prepare students for postsecondary study without remediation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Every expert who comes to testify in committee talks about the need for increased rigor. Four years of rigorous, focused math is one of the strongest indicators of success afterwards, regardless of career or employment track. Most apprenticeship prerequisites include Algebra II. We need time to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of qualified teachers to meet these requirements. It would be good if the State Board made this determination on their own, but after waiting for a very long time for a change like this to occur, it is time to ensure that rigor is increased. The WASL is an eighth-grade measurement and should not be the maximum achievement that we expect from our students. This legislation furthers the goals of higher education in the state. Math is vital for the knowledge-based economy of today. Our economy is slipping further and further behind other countries, and math is now important for many occupations that didn't used to involve mathematics. Being able to skip math during the last two years of high school does not serve our students well.

Testimony Against: The intent of the bill is appreciated but the conclusion that more seat time is the answer to our math deficiencies is not correct. There is no evidence that increased seat time will lead to less remediation during post-secondary education. There are already numerous programs in place to work on increasing math skills and understanding; we should follow through on these before trying another quick fix. Now is not the time to make this change, especially given the concerns about the capacity within the system. The State Board of Education should be the entity addressing this issue. If we are going to demand more of the students, we need to give them more resources to work with.

Testimony Other: Math is very important for our students, but doubling the requirement could possibly squeeze out other content areas including the arts. Creativity is extremely important for the coming century, including language that the extra math requirements won't supplant. Other curricula would be beneficial. Equivalency crediting needs to be enacted before this would occur so that career and technical courses that have math equivalencies are not credited as electives.

Who Testified: PRO: Representative Hunter, prime sponsor; Chris Thompson, Higher Education Coordinating Board.

CON: Wes Pruitt, Workforce Board; Leslie Goldstein, OSPI; Gary King, WEA.

OTHER: Gretchen Johnston, Washington State Arts Alliance; Kathleen Lopp, Washington Association for Career and Technical Education.