

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6461

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As of January 21, 2006

**Title:** An act relating to a multiple measures approach to graduation requirements.

**Brief Description:** Adopting a weighted multiple measures approach to graduation requirements.

**Sponsors:** Senators McAuliffe and Schmidt.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 1/19/06.

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

**Staff:** Susan Mielke (786-7422)

**Background:** Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, all Washington high school graduates must fulfill the following requirements:

Meet the nineteen credits requirement established by the State Board of Education (SBE). Currently, students must acquire 3 credits in English; 2 credits in mathematics; 2 credits in science (including one lab); 2.5 credits in social studies; 2 credits in health and fitness; 1 credit in art (visual or performance); 1 credit occupational education; and 5.5 credits electives;

Meet any additional credit requirements established by the local school district;

Earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) by meeting the state standard on the 10th-grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing and math. (Science will be added in 2010.) Special education students who are not appropriately assessed by the 10th-grade WASL, even with accommodations, must earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA) through an alternative assessment system, if the student's individualized education program provides for earning the CIA;

Complete a culminating project. The process and assessment criteria to implement this requirement is defined by the school district; and

Craft a high school and beyond plan that details the student's plan for meeting the high school graduation requirements and what the student expects to do the year after graduation. Current law specifically provides that the determination of whether the student successfully meets this requirements is made at the local level.

Currently, a high school student's transcript must include the highest scale score and level achieved on the 10th grade WASL. Additionally, once alternative assessments are available for students to use to demonstrate that the student meets the state standards then student

transcripts must note whether the CAA was acquired by means of the WASL or by an alternative assessment.

**Summary of Bill:** A weighted multiple measures model is created to determine whether a high school student can obtain a high school diploma and qualify for high school graduation.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, to earn a high school diploma a student must:

Receive a passing grade in all state and locally-required courses;  
Score at least in level one on each of the required sections of the 10th-grade WASL; and  
Obtain an average minimum threshold value of sixty-five percent on five weighted components:

1. The student's average grade point for those courses required for graduation by the SBE;
2. The student's average grade point for those additional courses required for graduation by the school district;
3. The student's score on the 10th-grade WASL;
4. The culminating project; and
5. The high school and beyond plan.

The SBE is directed to establish guidelines for schools on the point values to be assigned to each of the five weighted components. Each of the weighted components, except for the WASL, must be evaluated using a four-point grading system. The WASL is not limited to using a four-point grading system. The SBE must create a weighted model where higher achievement on one component can offset a lower achievement on another. The scores on the five weighted components must add up to 100 percent of the student's score, with a student's grade point averages receiving 70 percent weight and each of the other components receiving ten percent weight each.

The graduation requirement that students must obtain a CAA or CIA is removed. The requirement that a student's transcript must show whether the student achieved the CAA by means of the WASL or by an alternative assessment is removed. The requirement that a student's transcript shows the highest scale score and level achieved in each WASL content area is removed.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 17, 2006.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** High stakes testing and high standards are not the same. High stakes testing is often at cross purposes with high standards. We need to hold the standards but broaden the tools used to measure the standards. One test is only a snapshot of a student's school experience but multiple measures provides the whole scrapbook. A multiple measures system is more valid than a single test score, especially for special education students and English language learners. Potentially thousands of students may be denied high school diplomas because we haven't provided a full assessment system that uses a variety of indicators. No one

test should determine a child's educational opportunities and life chances. National organizations that deal with testing issues do not support one test as a graduation requirement. There are a growing number of educators who oppose the use of the WASL for graduation but also a growing number who support it as one of multiple measures. Multiple measures is not a retreat from high standards but it is a more balanced approach. The curriculum is narrowing because of the WASL. This is causing the math achievement gap to grow and schools to limit class options. We should permit students to continue to explore areas of interest, such as career and technical education and the arts, instead of sitting in WASL remediation classes. There is growing evidence that a single test system produces higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates. We should include the GPA in multiple measures -- it is still the best predictor on how students will perform at a college or university.

**Testimony Against:** We urge you to stay the course and have faith in our educators and students. The WASL gets a lot of attention because it serves as an indicator of how well the system is teaching all our students. Without the accountability of the WASL, we would not have the improvement in teaching that we are experiencing. It has helped us to identify where we were failing. It has changed the focus in our schools from teaching to learning. It is no longer enough for the teacher to stand up and teach a lesson and hope the student learns it. They must ensure that the students are learning. We should not go back on this effort. High expectations for all students has been a key part of education reform. It is important that we maintain that level of expectation and continue to improve an outdated system of education that has been slow to improve. The WASL is a valid, reliable, and fair exam. There has been state-wide polls that show strong support for the graduation test. Our children are not getting the quality education that they should. The standards that are tested in the WASL are the skills that students need to compete in the real world. We must give students the tools for success. It is a matter of social justice. Reading, writing, and math skills are the minimum requirements necessary for whatever students want to do with their future. Employers need at least this solid foundation on which to build. People imply that vocational education standards are lower than the traditional academic standards but the reality is they are as high or higher than the traditional academic standards. Lowering standards with multiple measures and making the schools less accountable for teaching students the skills that they need for their future is not doing anyone any favors. The Legislature has made course adjustments along the way to address the different needs of students by providing accommodations and exemptions for special education students and the alternative assessments that are under development. The current design of the WASL is causing the achievement gap to increase.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Miebeth Bustillo-Booth, WEA; Charles Hasse, WEA; Linda Hannon, PTA; Scott Allen, PTA; Stacey Valentin, WEA; Kate Enslein, Student; Mary Kenfield, PTA; Rachel Debell, Parent.

CON: Thelma Jackson, Foresight Consultants; Paula Quinn, Principal, Lydia Hawk Elementary; Colleen Nelson, Principal, Northwood Middle School; Arcella Hall Principal, Grandview High School; Amanda Pesetzner, Student; Mykela Paddock, Student; Dan Steele, Washington State School Directors Association; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Rosemary Brester, Hobart Machined Products; Mellani Hughes McAleen, Association of Washington Business; Marc Frazer, Washington Roundtable; Nancy Atwood, AeA; Alton McDonald, National Action Network; Nancy Vernon, Parent/researcher; George Scarola, League of Education Voters.