
Education Committee

ESSB 6023

Brief Description: Concerning the Washington assessment of student learning.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe and Rasmussen).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Allows students in the classes of 2008 and 2009 to graduate under certain conditions without a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) as a result of not passing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in mathematics.
- Delays the requirement that students must pass the science WASL to 2011.
- Creates four new alternative assessments and removes the requirement that students take the WASL twice before accessing an alternative.
- Creates a regional appeals process for students to demonstrate they meet learning standards.
- Expands the requirements of Student Learning Plans for students not successful on the WASL and renames them Student Success Plans.
- Directs the State Board of Education to select end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, Geometry, and Biology and implement them first as alternative assessments and later as the high school WASL in mathematics and science.

Hearing Date: 3/23/07

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and High School Graduation. Beginning with the class of 2008, most students will be required to meet the state standard on the tenth grade WASL in reading, writing, and mathematics to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA). A CAA will be required for high school graduation. Students in special education who are not appropriately assessed using the WASL can earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA), which is also required for graduation in 2008. Beginning in 2010, students will also have to pass the science WASL for a CAA.

Alternative Assessments and Appeals. In 2006, the Legislature authorized several alternative assessments for students who are unsuccessful on the high school WASL. One alternative is a comparison of a student's grade point average to that of other students in the same courses who passed the WASL. Another alternative allows students to submit a collection of work samples as evidence that they meet the state learning standards. Students can also submit scores on the PSAT, SAT, or ACT as an alternative for the mathematics portion of the WASL. To access an alternative, a student must take the WASL twice. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) has also established a process for students to appeal a WASL score they believe is incorrect.

Student Learning Plans. For all students in fifth grade and grades 8 through 12 who did not pass the WASL the prior year, school districts are required to prepare a student learning plan (SLP) that includes courses, competencies, and other steps needed for the student to meet state learning standards. Parents must be notified, preferably through a parent conference, of the content of the student's plan, and progress on the plan must be reported annually and updated as needed.

English Language Learners (ELL). Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), all ELL students must participate in WASL tests scheduled for their grade. The only exception is students who are in their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools who are not required to participate in reading or writing tests, but must take the mathematics exam. ELL students must also take the Washington Language Proficiency Test in reading, writing, speaking, and listening each year until they exit the bilingual program.

End-of-Course Assessments. There are 24 states in addition to Washington that plan to or currently require students to pass statewide assessments for high school graduation. Seven of these states use a series of "end-of-course" assessments, where students take the test after completing a course that covers the core content to be assessed by the test. In most of these states, the mathematics end-of-course assessment for high school graduation is Algebra. The science end-of-course assessments tend to be Biology.

Summary of Bill:

WASL and High School Graduation. Students in the graduating classes of 2008 and 2009 can graduate without a CAA or CIA as a result of not passing the mathematics WASL or alternative assessment. Instead, they must pass the reading and writing WASL and meet other graduation requirements; annually take and earn at least a C grade in high school mathematics or career and technical courses that are designed to increase their proficiency toward meeting standard on the WASL; with their parents, meet with mathematics instructors to determine the appropriate courses; and continue taking the WASL or alternative assessment.

The requirement to pass the science WASL to earn a CAA for graduation is moved to the class of 2011.

Alternative Assessments and Appeals. The requirement that students must take the WASL twice before accessing an alternative is removed. Four additional types of alternatives are authorized:

1. Reading, English, and writing scores on the PSAT, SAT, and ACT, with the required scores established by the State Board of Education (SBE);
2. A score of three on specified Advanced Placement exams;
3. Scores on tenth-grade level standardized norm-referenced tests from a list of three such tests approved by the SBE, also with the required scores established by the SBE; and
4. End-of-course assessments in Algebra I, Geometry, and Biology.

A new appeals process is created that is separate from the score appeal. Each Educational Service District (ESD) establishes panels of educators in the relevant content areas to review and decide appeals for students to demonstrate they have the level of understanding in the content area, but due to certain circumstances were unable to demonstrate it on the WASL or an alternative assessment. The SBE establishes criteria for panels to make determinations. Students are eligible for the appeal if they have taken the WASL twice or attempted an alternative assessment. The ESDs submit an annual report on the number and type of appeals received and approved.

Student Success Plans. The SLPs are expanded and renamed Student Success Plans (SSP). For students in grades 8 through 12, the SSP must require the district to offer and the student to take a required class or sequence of classes in the area where the student did not pass WASL. An SSP may require the district to offer and the student to take extended learning and a test preparation class. The SSPs include semi-annual academic growth benchmarks, and progress on the benchmarks is reported to parents semi-annually.

Schools are required to develop a more intensive SSP for students who don't meet the semi-annual benchmarks in consecutive periods. If 10 percent of the students in a district do not meet the benchmarks, the SBE develops a tiered intervention plan with a series of increasingly intensive intervention strategies for the district and its schools. Progress on an SSP for students in grades 5 and 6 who did not pass the WASL must also be reported semi-annually.

English Language Learners. Any ELL students scoring at Intermediate 2 on the Washington Language Proficiency Test are not required to take the WASL except as required by federal law. These students must still meet high school graduation requirements, including earning a CAA. School districts must prepare an SSP for these students.

End-of-Course Assessments. The SBE selects end-of-course assessments for high school mathematics and science that cover Algebra I, Geometry, and Biology. The assessments can be multiple choice and administered online. They must be externally scored, except that multiple choice questions can be scored at the school district level. The SBE and SPI are prohibited from developing the assessments.

The mathematics assessments are implemented in the 2008-09 school year as an alternative assessment to the WASL. The science assessment is implemented as an alternative in the 2009-10 school year.

The assessment for Algebra I becomes the mathematics WASL required for students to earn a CAA for high school graduation beginning with the class of 2013. Beginning with the class of 2014, both the Algebra I and Geometry assessment are the mathematics WASL for graduation.

The Biology assessment becomes the science WASL required for graduation beginning with the class of 2013.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 14, 2007.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except that Section 2 pertaining to the regional appeals process and Section 5 pertaining to the Student Success Plans are each null and void unless individually funded in the operating budget.