

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6540

As of January 23, 2008

Title: An act relating to the reading and writing content areas of the Washington assessment of student learning.

Brief Description: Delaying requiring the reading and writing content areas of the WASL for high school graduation.

Sponsors: Senators Rasmussen, Swecker, Pridemore, McAuliffe, Jacobsen, Hargrove and Fairley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/21/08.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, students have two ways to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) and graduate from high school: (1) meet the state standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics; or (2) meet the state standard on a legislatively approved alternative assessment. Alternative assessments are required to be comparable in rigor to the skills and knowledge that the student must demonstrate on the WASL for each content area.

Students must take the WASL at least once prior to taking an approved alternative assessment. Three alternative assessments have received legislative approval:

- The Grade Point Average (GPA)/WASL Cohort Comparison: A student's grades in math or English/language arts classes are compared with the grades of students with the same classes and who passed the WASL. This option is only available to students in 12th grade with an overall cumulative GPA of at least 3.2 on a 4.0 grading scale.
- The Collection of Evidence (COE): A student compiles classroom work samples developed under a teacher's supervision. Each student collection is scored at the state level by a panel of educators selected and trained by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI).
- The PSAT/SAT/ACT/Advance Placement Exams: A student earns scores at or above a state-designated level on specified PSAT, SAT, ACT, and Advance Placement exams.

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.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, students in special education who are not appropriately assessed by the WASL, even with accommodations, may earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA) by passing a WASL at a level 2 or by submitting a portfolio of their work.

Summary of Bill: The requirement to meet the standard on the WASL as a requirement for graduation does not go into effect until 2013, with the graduating class of 2012. Students who do not meet the mathematics standards on the WASL still need to continue to earn two additional mathematics courses.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2008.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Testing is important. But to deny a child a diploma because they did not pass one particular test, is wrong. This is about opportunity and equality for all of our children, not just those that we think will succeed. Some students blossom later than others. We are turning kids away who are not a success on the WASL but they have different strengths. We should not pigeon-hole our children. The effect of this bill is to provide a temporary delink of the WASL from graduation requirements. The WASL as a graduation requirement punishes students who, for whatever reason, are unable to take the WASL. Too much time is wasted to teach to the WASL and to take the WASL. Testing is not education. Our struggling students are extremely fragile and it is difficult to ask them to continue to try and still miss the standard on the WASL. The dropout rate has not gone down it has gone up since the WASL was put in place. Need to fix the system and not spend our education funding on tests, unless they are diagnostics. We have been asking for this delay for years while we fix the system. There are still inequities in the system and it is not fair to hold students accountable for system failures.

CON: We adamantly oppose the delay. This will send the wrong message to the system. These students have the ability to be successful. Because of the WASL requirement the system is making great improvements and we are closing the gap in student achievement. Instead of delaying you should put your efforts in systemic changes. There needs to be strategies to address those students that are behind. It is unfair to those students who are working so hard toward a goal and now you are yanking that goal away from them. The impact of a delay removes the motivation for students; it would change the focus of staff; and would make the assessment less reliable because of those things. Lowering the standard does not help students because once they get their diploma they will have to start paying for the education they should have received in high school. A delay will give citizens a chance to ignore what is going on in schools for another decade. It benefits Washington businesses to have a well-trained workforce, which makes Washington more competitive and provides a stronger tax base. But the ultimate benefit is to our kids. They will be able to have meaningful, high-paying jobs. Washington employers want to have Washington students fill our jobs in our businesses. But we are concerned about the skills that students are bringing to the workplace. Research shows that clear, consistent standards make a difference. We urge you

to uphold the WASL requirements and provide a meaningful diploma. Please maintain high expectations and fund them.

OTHER: Schools are trying hard to get students to standard but we are just not seeing the results like we should. Something is missing. While we concentrate on the academics we are limiting where kids can go. Delinking the WASL from the graduation requirements would not be a bad idea, although we need the WASL for accountability. However, this test doesn't measure the heart of a kid.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marilyn Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Diana Cambroner, community college student; Samuel Fields, teacher, Bethel Junior High; Tom Carver, Bethel Education Association; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; Rachel DeBellis, Parent Empowerment Network; Suzi Wright, Tulalip Tribes.

CON: Thelma Jackson, Mona H. Bailey, Black Education Strategy Roundtable; Marc Frazer, Washington Roundtable; Craig Dawson, President, Retail Lockbox; Lew McMurrin, Washington Software Alliance; Mary Alice Heuschel, Superintendent, Renton School District; Mike Bernard, Donna Steward, Association of Washington Business; Arcella Hall, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.

OTHER: Dennis Wallace, Washington Association for Career & Technical Education.