
Early Learning & Children's Services Committee

HB 1944

Brief Description: Regarding the development and implementation of a kindergarten assessment.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Walsh, Sullivan, Haigh, Carlyle, Quall, Kenney and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Early Learning Advisory Council and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to collaborate and convene a workgroup for the development of a kindergarten assessment to be administered in pilot sites during the 2010-2011 school year and implemented statewide beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

Hearing Date: 2/12/09

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120)

Background:

The Department of Early Learning (DEL), the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive), in 2008, began general discussions relating to kindergarten assessments as part of their broader communications about early learning and transitions to kindergarten. In 2008 the Legislature directed the DEL to work with the OSPI, collaborate with Thrive, and consult with early learning experts, early learning and kindergarten teachers, and Washington Indian tribes, to develop recommendations for implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment. The DEL was directed to report by December 15, 2008, to the Legislature and the Governor, and to:

- identify a preferred kindergarten assessment that is based on research and is sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences influencing children's development;
- recommend a plan for piloting the assessment, allowing for voluntary use, and a date certain for mandatory use of the assessment;

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- recommend a methodology for conducting kindergarten assessments, and a process for communicating the results to various audiences in a common format;
- identify costs of the assessment, including time needed to administer the assessments;
- recommend procedures to ensure the assessment is not used as a screening tool for children eligible for kindergarten; and
- analyze how the assessment can be used to improve instruction for individual students, and whether the assessment results can be used to improve the systems of early learning and K-12 education, including the transitions between systems.

In December 2008 the DEL submitted a report to the Governor and the Legislature with the following suggested implementation plan for a kindergarten assessment process:

Planning Phase (2009-2010)

Key tasks to be completed:

- gather input from stakeholders to ensure broad representation of perspectives reflecting the state's cultural and linguistic diversity;
- gather additional information from early learning programs and school districts about how the assessment process can compliment existing efforts and avoid duplication; and
- designate a task force or council to oversee development of a comprehensive plan for implementing the assessment process.

The Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) or another existing council with a wide array of stakeholder interests represented could serve as the oversight body to a key group of stakeholders focused specifically on the planning efforts. The following elements should be addressed by the stakeholder group during planning:

1. decide the purposes and scope of the assessment;
2. select data collection tools, methods, and data sources;
3. identify funding sources and calculate implementation costs;
4. identify a training plan and methods of implementation;
5. identify data storage, analysis, and reporting methods; and
6. develop a plan for selecting schools and districts to pilot the assessment.

Pilot Phase (July 2010 - June 2011)

The OSPI, in collaboration with the DEL and Thrive could hire a consultant or dedicate staff to oversee implementation. The pilot should be large enough to allow for reliable statements about the effectiveness with diverse student and school populations.

Key tasks to be completed:

- gather feedback from parents, teachers, and other key stakeholders regarding implementation and conduct a more detailed analysis of costs; and
- share a summary of results of the pilot phase with stakeholders and include recommendations for further refinement and a voluntary use phase.

Voluntary Use Phase (July 2011 - June 2013)

The OPSI, in collaboration with the DEL and Thrive could oversee technical support to districts implementing the assessment voluntarily. Information and results from the voluntary use phase should guide decisions about a date certain when districts must offer the assessment statewide.

Summary of Bill:

The ELAC and the OSPI must collaboratively convene a workgroup to develop a statewide kindergarten assessment to be piloted in the 2010-2011 school year and implemented statewide beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

The workgroup must include representatives from school districts, early learning providers, tribal councils, and organizations reflecting cultural and linguistic diversity. The workgroup must:

1. identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be assessed and determine the extent of desirable alignment with early learning benchmarks and standards;
2. define the assessment methodology, including how assessments will be approached for children from diverse cultures and children with special needs;
3. specify the data collection needs, tools, and procedures;
4. determine whether and how parents may opt out or forego the assessment process on behalf of a child;
5. identify a training plan and implementation strategy for use by districts and schools and select the pilot sites; and
6. examine results of the pilot and make any necessary adjustments before statewide implementation.

The assessment must serve the following purposes:

- provide parents and teachers with information about a child's knowledge, skills, and abilities upon entering kindergarten in order to inform instruction for the child;
- facilitate communication with parents about what children are learning and to empower parents to assist their children; and
- provide feedback to early learning programs to enable continuous improvement, support transitions, and improve alignment between early learning programs and kindergarten classrooms.

The assessment must be uniform across the state and may not be used to screen or preclude children from entering kindergarten. The assessment process must be:

- developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically relevant;
- sufficiently flexible and adaptable to accommodate children with disabilities and special needs;
- cost-effective in order to maximize benefits to students, teachers, and parents, and minimize the use of resources that would otherwise be available for instruction; and
- designed to provide data and reporting using a single, easy-to-use web-based platform.

The OSPI is authorized to adopt rules for the statewide implementation of the kindergarten assessment beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 5, 2009.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.