
Education Committee

HB 2209

Brief Description: Addressing issues of accountability and funding for alternative learning experience programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Haigh, Dammeier, Santos, Dahlquist, Probst, Maxwell and Kenney.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Defines a contract-based learning Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) program as one where high school students receive at least five hours per week of classroom-based instruction, and exempts these programs from funding reductions for ALE programs in the 2012-13 school year.
- Requires instruction and activities in a student learning plan for high school ALE students to generate credits toward graduation, and for ALE students in kindergarten through eighth grade to be directly related to specified core academic subjects.
- Provides that part-time students in ALE programs are not exempt from participating in state assessments in the same manner as full-time students.

Hearing Date: 1/24/12

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Alternative Learning Experience Programs. Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs provide a way for students to be enrolled in public education without being required to meet the in-class seat-time requirements for regular instruction. There are three primary types of ALE programs identified in statute: online programs; parent partnership programs that include significant participation by parents in the design and implementation of the student's learning; and contract-based learning. However, these broad definitions are illustrative rather than exclusive, and in practice school districts have designed a wide array of ALE programs with varying amounts of classroom-based instruction offered in combination with individualized learning outside the classroom.

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.

For the 2011-12 school year through December, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reports the following full-time equivalent enrollment in the ALE programs:

- Online programs: 8,590
- Parent partnership programs: 11,971
- Contract-based learning: 8,368

Student Learning Plans. Educational progress of students enrolled in the ALE programs is monitored through an individualized student learning plan (SLP). Rules adopted by the OSPI specify the content of an SLP, which must include direct personal contact with a teacher at least once a week; estimated hours per week of learning activities by the student; and a description of each course and whether the course meets the state learning standards or high school graduation requirements.

Funding for ALE Programs. Legislation enacted in 2011 directed the OSPI to reduce funding for the ALE programs by an average of 15 percent during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. The OSPI was further directed to give consideration to the various types of programs and a number of different criteria, and ensure that no program received more than a 20 percent reduction or less than a 10 percent reduction. Under the OSPI implementation scheme, full-time students who receive at least one hour per week of face-to-face, in-person instructional contact time are funded at the 10 percent reduction level. For online programs, this contact may be digital and synchronous. All other ALE students are funded at the 20 percent reduction level. The 2011-13 operating budget assumed a biennial savings of \$41 million from these reductions.

Student Assessment. School districts are required to administer state assessments to students according to policies adopted by the OSPI. There is not a process for exempting students from participating in state assessments, and under federal accountability, schools are expected to assure that all students are appropriately assessed for federally-required assessments.

In the 2009-10 annual report on online learning, the OSPI reported that online ALE programs had low student participation rates in state assessments. For example, participation for 10th grade students ranged from 48 to 60 percent depending on the subject, compared to more than 90 percent participation statewide. The 2010-11 annual report indicated some improvement as a result of efforts by the OSPI and the online ALE programs to increase participation. The law pertaining to online ALE programs states that part-time ALE students who are also receiving home-based instruction or are enrolled in private school are not required to participate in state assessments.

Summary of Bill:

Contract Based Learning. A contract-based learning ALE program is defined as a program that serves students in grades nine through 12, where students receive an average of at least five hours of classroom-based instruction per week. The Running Start program does not fall under this definition. The funding reductions for the ALE programs directed for the 2012-13 school year do not apply to students enrolled in contract-based learning programs.

Student Learning Plans. For students in grades kindergarten through eight, all instruction and activities in the SLP must be directly related to one or more of the following core academic

subjects: English, reading and language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography.

For students in grades nine through 12, all instruction and activities in the SLP must generate credits that meet state or local high school graduation requirements.

Student Assessment. Part-time students who are enrolled in ALE programs are not exempt from participating in the state assessment system in the same manner as full-time students. Participation must be based on a student's completion of the course material that is the subject of the assessment. Nonresident students in ALE programs may participate in the assessments in their resident district subject to that district's planned testing schedule.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 12, 2012.

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