

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5501

As of February 19, 2013

Title: An act relating to reducing certain requirements affecting school districts.

Brief Description: Reducing certain requirements affecting school districts.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, McAuliffe, Litzow and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/11/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: High School Graduation Requirements. The State Board of Education (SBE) establishes the state's minimum high school graduation requirements within limits provided in statute. Local school districts may establish additional local requirements. Currently the state-level requirements to graduate from high school are that the student must:

- earn 20 course credits;
- pass the required state high school assessments or an approved alternative assessment in reading, writing, and mathematics;
- complete a culminating project; and
- complete a high school and beyond plan.

SBE established the culminating project as a graduation requirement in 2000 to provide students an opportunity to demonstrate in a variety of ways their learning competencies related to learning goals three – problem solving, and four – understanding the importance of work and finance. SBE rules provide that each district must adopt a written policy to implement the culminating project as a graduation requirement, including assessment criteria.

Career and College Planning and Readiness Programs. Opportunities to access career and college planning and readiness programs in Washington include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *Navigation 101.* The state currently funds Navigation 101, which provides an online interactive curriculum available to all middle and high schools that includes technical support and professional development for the advisor-educators. Students can learn about colleges and majors, financial aid options, the military, career and technical

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certification programs, workforce options, and more. Advisor-educators provide individual planning and portfolio development for student-led conferences that are connected to the school's student-driven scheduling process. According to data reported by The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), 420 schools and over 250,000 students currently access the Navigation 101 curriculum.

- *Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)*. AVID is a college preparatory program that provides academic and social support for under-achieving students in grades K through 16. AVID includes elective classes in secondary schools and an academic course in postsecondary institutions to develop students' skills and reduce barriers that limit academic achievement. AVID provides professional development to prepare teachers, school leaders, and staff to implement the system. According to data reported by OSPI, in the 2011-12 school year, AVID was used at 232 schools in 72 school districts and served 11,243 secondary students.

Dual Credit Programs. Dual credit programs provide opportunities for students to obtain high school credits and begin earning college credits and postsecondary career and technical certificates while still in high school. Opportunities for dual credit coursework in Washington include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *Running Start*. This program permits students in grades 11 and 12 to take college courses at Washington's community and technical colleges, and at Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Washington State University, and Northwest Indian College, and receive both high school and college credit for the classes. Running Start students and their families do not pay tuition, but they do pay college fees, and buy their own books, as well as provide their own transportation. Fifteen percent of Running Start students receive waivers from the colleges from fees, indicating low income. According to OSPI, during the 2011–12 school year, 17,505 students were enrolled in Running Start coursework; and in the 2010–11 school year, more than 1,401 students completed an associate's degree at the same time as they graduated from high school.
- *Running Start for the Trades*. This program is for 11th and 12th grade students to prepare for state and federal apprenticeship programs. Students take courses that prepare them for full-time apprenticeships following graduation, or for a two-year college program that leads directly to an apprenticeship. According to data reported by OSPI, in the 2010-11 school year seven state-funded incentive grants were provided to help schools negotiate and implement articulation agreements with local apprenticeship programs. Five state-funded pilot grants were provided to help with secondary pre-apprenticeship program development.
- *International Baccalaureate (IB)*. The IB Diploma Programme is a two-year course of study for high school students that leads to external examinations that will provide students with high school and college credit. According to data reported by OSPI, during the 2011–12 school year, 5696 students were enrolled in IB.
- *Advanced Placement (AP)*. Students may earn college credit and/or advanced placement into upper-level college courses by taking AP exams. The current national fee per examination is \$87. There is federal funding available for reduction of fees for qualifying low-income students. According to data reported by OSPI, 301 Washington high schools participated in the AP program and 47,565 students were enrolled in AP courses in the 2011-12 school year.

- *Cambridge.* The Cambridge Program offers an pre-university curriculum and examination system to earn postsecondary credits. Students may enroll in up to 13 distinct college-level courses within the program's three curriculum groups: (1) mathematics and science, (2) languages, and (3) arts and humanities. According to data reported by OSPI, the program is offered in two schools in Washington and enrolled 1138 students in the 2011-12 school year.

Learning Assistance Program (LAP). LAP provides remedial academic instruction to students in kindergarten through grade 12 who score below grade level in reading, writing, and mathematics on statewide or school district assessments. The Legislature appropriated \$255 million in state funds for LAP in the 2011-13 biennium. School districts must submit a plan for using LAP funds to OSPI. The school district plan must include many specified elements, including how accelerated learning plans are developed and implemented for participating students.

School District Audits. State law requires the Office of the State Auditor to examine the financial affairs of all local governments at least once in every three-year period.

Summary of Bill: High School Graduation Requirements. A student is not required to complete a culminating project to graduate from high school if the student has completed at least one of the following:

- a Running Start program and is leaving high school with an associate degree;
- a high school Navigation 101, AVID, or similar program focused on career planning and skill development in preparation for a targeted career;
- a career and technical education program resulting in a skill certificate;
- a year of college-level coursework;
- an IB certificate program; or
- at least four courses in or among any of the following programs: AP, engineering or biological sciences, IB, or Cambridge with college credit equivalency exams.

LAP. The school district plan for using LAP funds is not required to include how accelerated learning plans are developed and implemented for participating students.

School District Audits. Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, the state Auditor is limited to conducting school district fiscal and performance audits no more than once every three years when no findings of impropriety were found for the three-year period immediately preceding the audit period. The state Auditor is not prohibited from conducting audits to address suspected fraud or irregular conduct, audits requested by the school board of directors, or audits required by federal law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Thank you for trying to reduce the unfunded and the underfunded mandates. We support the eliminating the LAP and audit requirements in this bill. We want to keep the culminating project as it currently exists. We support the change to the culminating project because it provides some relief to those students who are on track for receiving college credit. We support removing both the culminating project and the high school and beyond plan requirement.

CON: We are concerned about the change to the frequency of school district audits. The State Auditor's office does consider costs and frequency when the audit schedule is set. Last year the Auditor's office audited 210 school districts because of the federal requirements for the federal funds that the school districts received. The Auditor's office did an evaluation of all the school districts because of a similar bill last session and the result of the evaluation was that the office proposed to do less frequent audits. Forty-nine school districts advised the office that they preferred to stay on the more frequent audit schedule. The office would prefer that audit frequency be decided as an agency decision as opposed to addressing it through legislation. The culminating project was established to assess goals three – problem solving, and four – work and finance, which are not addressed by the statewide assessments that assess the level of knowledge of the academic subject areas. It is not clear how the alternatives would fully address goals three and four.

OTHER: We have concerns with section three, the audits. A school district audit is an unfunded mandate because the state does not fund it. But it does provide transparency of the financial affairs of school districts. We are concerned with the negative perception that authorizing fewer audits may create. Authorizing alternatives to the culminating project may require more tracking by school districts so this may actually increase the burden on school districts instead of lessening them. If you want to do something to reduce unfunded mandates then we encourage you to do something about the *Becca* bill and its requirements for truancy and to not pass any new unfunded mandates this year.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Wendy Rader-Konofalski, WA Education Assn.; Patti Ensor, Davenport School District.

CON: Linda Drake, SBE; Chuck Pfeil, Matt Miller, State Auditor's Office.

OTHER: Nancy Moffatt, WA Assn. of School Business Officials; Marie Sullivan, WA Assn. of School Directors.