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**SENATE BILL 6560**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2016 Regular Session**

**By** Senator Chase

AN ACT Relating to acceptance of additional high school equivalency tests; amending RCW 28B.50.536; creating new sections; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that there are many reasons that adults who did not receive a high school diploma on the traditional timeline now seek to earn one, including to gain better employment and to continue their education. These adults dropped out of high school for many reasons, such as becoming incarcerated or joining the military, and now want a second chance at a diploma.

The legislature finds that before 2014, the high school proficiency test was geared both toward those who might want to transfer to college and those who might want to improve their employment situation, and was normed so that sixty percent of high school seniors could pass the test.

The legislature finds that a newly designed test, called the Pearson general education (GED) test, was designed to align with the rigorous common core standards rather than being a high school equivalency test. It is not normed so that sixty percent of high school seniors can pass it and therefore not appropriate for returning adults who are not planning to go to college nor who need highly rigorous academic training to achieve their employment goals. In addition, the test is more expensive, requires an internet-connected computer, and has fewer retest options.

The legislature finds that the significant decline in test takers will likely have a significant impact on our state's human services programs and criminal justice system.

Therefore, the legislature intends to ensure that adults who want to earn a high school equivalency certificate have access to a test option that is appropriate, low cost, and flexible. An increase in the number of test takers will help achieve the state's goal that all adults in Washington between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four have a high school diploma or equivalent by 2023.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.50.536 and 2013 c 39 s 9 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Subject to rules adopted by the state board of education under RCW 28A.305.190, the state board for community and technical colleges shall adopt rules governing the eligibility of persons sixteen years of age and older to take a test to earn a high school equivalency certificate, rules governing the administration of the test, and rules governing the issuance of a high school equivalency certificate to persons who successfully complete the test.

(2)(a) A high school equivalency certificate is a certificate issued jointly by the college board and the office of the superintendent of public instruction that indicates that the holder has attained standard scores at or above the ((~~minimum proficiency level prescribed by the college board on a high school equivalency test~~)) actual academic ability of current high school seniors.

(b) The college board must identify and accept ((~~a~~)) high school equivalency tests that ((~~is~~)) are at least as rigorous as the 2013 general educational development test in that sixty percent of high school seniors can pass the test. The high school equivalency test identified by the college board must cover reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies subject areas.

(c) The college board must identify at least two test options, at least one of which is low cost to the student and at least one test option that does not require computer proficiency and is fairly normed to the actual academic ability of current high school seniors such that at least sixty percent of high school seniors can pass the high school equivalency test. The college board must identify at least one test option that is appropriate for students who have been in the workforce, need a high school diploma for employment reasons, have been incarcerated, or were in the military.

(3) High school equivalency certificates issued under this section shall be issued in such form and substance as agreed upon by the state board for community and technical colleges and superintendent of public instruction.

(4) The college board must communicate the menu of accepted test options under subsection (2) of this section to public and private administrators of the high school equivalency tests.

(5) The college board must communicate to the legislature and the public the number of students who have received a high school equivalency certificate during the prior month of each year by posting this information on a public page on its web site in order to allow the legislature and the public to assess the fairness of the process.

(6) The college board must also post on a public page on its web site a norming study for every high school equivalency test confirming that the test is within the actual academic ability level of recent high school seniors. This norming study must be similar in scope and methods to the norming studies of the 2002 and 2007 GED tests. If a test vendor fails to provide such a norming study, that vendor shall not be permitted to test students in Washington.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act may be known and cited as the GED fairness act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately.

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