

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1715

As Passed House:
January 27, 2020

Title: An act relating to removing the ability of school districts to withhold grades and transcripts of pupils.

Brief Description: Removing school districts' ability to withhold pupils' grades and transcripts.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Entenman, Boehnke, Jinkins, Ortiz-Self, Bergquist and Pollet; by request of State Board for Community and Technical Colleges).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/14/19, 2/19/19 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/6/19, 66-30.

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 1/27/20, 65-32.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Limits the ability of a school district to withhold the grades and transcript of a student who is responsible for damaging specified property types to five years after the student exits the school districts.
- Requires that, when informing either the student or the student's parent or guardian that the student's grades, diploma, or transcripts are being withheld, a school district must provide specified information about the statutory provisions.
- Directs each school district that has an Associated Student Body to publish information on its website related to the number and characteristics of people whose grades, diplomas, or transcripts are being withheld.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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.

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Bergquist, Calder, Callan, Harris, Kilduff, Ortiz-Self, Stonier, Thai and Valdez.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Steele, Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Kraft, Rude and Ybarra.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Withholding of Grades, Diploma, and Transcript. If school property, or property belonging to a contractor of the district, an employee, or another student, has been lost or willfully cut, defaced, or injured, the school district may withhold the grades, diploma, and transcript of the student responsible for the damage or loss until the student or the student's parent or guardian has paid for the damages. When the student and the student's parent or guardian are unable to pay for the damages, the school district must provide a program of voluntary work for the student in lieu of the payment of monetary damages. Upon completion of voluntary work the grades, diploma, and transcripts of the student must be released. The student's parent or guardian is liable for damages as otherwise provided by law.

Associated Student Body. An associated student body (ASB) is a formal student organization at a school. An ASB is approved of and regulated by the school board. School districts with one or more ASB programs must publish certain information about each ASB fund on the school or school district website each year.

Free and Reduced Price Meals. In order for students to qualify for free school meals, their family's income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Students whose families have an income between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Limitation on Withholding. A school district must release the grades and transcripts of students responsible for damaging school property, or property belonging to a contractor of the district, an employee, or another student, five years after the student exits the district.

Notice. When informing either the student or the student's parent or guardian that the student's grades, diploma, or transcripts are being withheld, a school district must provide information about the statutory provisions, that is: (a) the school district may waive the payment of the monetary damage in part or in full; (b) the student may make the payment of monetary damages; (c) the student may participate in a program of community service opportunities for the student instead of the payment of monetary damages; and (d) the school district must release the student's grades and transcript five years after the student exits the district. When the student has already exited the district, the school district must inform the student of the date on which the school district is obligated to release the student's grades and transcript.

Report. Each school district that has an Associated Student Body must publish the following information on its website: how many former students who were enrolled in the district within the previous five years are subject to the withholding of their grades, diplomas, or transcripts; and how many of these former students were eligible for the Free or Reduced Price Meals Program in their last year of enrollment in the school district.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) When a student has been deemed to have done something wrong there should be consequences, but to withhold their transcript and prevent them from moving on from that episode in their life is unfair. Students should have the opportunity to make better choices in the future.

The change proposed in this bill would have a minor fiscal impact on school districts, because few of these fines and fees are collected. However, this change will open up great educational and future career opportunities by allow students to access their official high school transcripts. Students with a secondary credential will be able to use their high school course taking as part of admissions and placement into college and career pathways, essential to earn a living wage.

Fines and fees disproportionately impact underrepresented and lower socioeconomic status populations. Even if unintentional, this creates inequity for Washington's residents. Finally, denying students access to their educational records is a violation of the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.

The High School 21 program opens the door to education to those who did not complete high school and introduces them to college and career pathways. When people learn that high school credits from the past can be applied to earning a high school diploma now, they are surprised and relieved that they do not have to start over. This relief turns to frustration if they learn that their grades or transcripts are withheld because they owe a fine or fee that they are unable to pay. This fee or fine creates a barrier to these people starting in the High School 21 program and may even stall or prevent them from coming back to school at all.

The change proposed in the bill is consistent with recent state laws enacted around student discipline.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Entenman, prime sponsor; Troy Goracke, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Angela Holly, South Puget Sound Community College; and Josh Lynch, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.