
Education Committee

2SSB 5265

Brief Description: Creating a bridge year pilot program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Hunt, Das, Nguyen, Wellman and Wilson, C.).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Establishes a temporary bridge year pilot program (pilot program) administered by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction that allows students at participating high schools in the graduating classes of 2021 and 2022 who have met all graduation requirements to defer graduation for one bridge year.
- Establishes student eligibility and other requirements for the pilot program, including obligating students participating in the pilot program to take a specified number and type of credits for two academic terms.
- Makes students participating in the pilot program eligible for dual credit programs and high school sports and other extracurricular activities.

Hearing Date: 3/19/21

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Graduation Requirements—Overview.

To qualify for graduation from a public high school in Washington, general education students must satisfy course and credit requirements established by the State Board of Education (SBE), meet any locally established requirements, complete a high school and beyond plan, and meet the requirements of at least one graduation pathway option.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Credits Required for Graduation.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2019, students must complete 24 credits in specified subject areas as determined by the SBE. Graduating students in the class of 2021 and subsequent classes must earn 17 core academic credits, four elective credits, and three locally-determined personalized pathway credits.

COVID-19—Emergency Waivers.

Legislation adopted in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic directed the SBE to establish and administer a new and temporary waiver program for public and private schools impacted by the pandemic. Engrossed House Bill 2965 (enacted as chapter 7, Laws of 2020), authorized school districts, charter schools, and tribal compact schools to apply to the SBE for a waiver of high school graduation requirements or equivalencies for students in the graduating class of 2020 or earlier who were unable to meet the statewide minimum credit and subject area graduation requirements due to school closures related to COVID-19.

The legislation also authorized the SBE to waive provisions relating to the number of instructional hours, the number of school days, credit-based graduation requirements, and other provisions for the 2019-20 school year for private schools that closed due to COVID-19.

The emergency waiver authority of the SBE established in 2020 has expired, but legislation adopted in 2021, Engrossed House Bill 1121, authorizes the SBE to permit public and private schools to grant individual student emergency waivers from certain graduation requirements because of a significant disruption resulting from a local, state, or national emergency.

Dual Credit Programs.

College in the High School (CHS) programs provide college level courses in high schools or high school environments to qualified students who are in or are eligible for enrollment in grades 10, 11, and 12. The CHS programs may include both academic and career and technical education courses, and students who participate in a CHS program are able to earn both high school and postsecondary credit, with a maximum limit of 10 postsecondary credits, by completing postsecondary level courses with a passing grade.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) adopts rules for the administration of CHS programs that are jointly developed by the OSPI, the State board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), and the public baccalaureate institutions.

The Running Start Program (Running Start) allows students in grades 11 and 12 to enroll in college courses at community colleges and other participating institutions of higher education, and to simultaneously earn both high school and college credit. Students choosing to participate in Running Start are responsible for applying for admission to the institution of higher education. Students in Running Start do not pay for tuition, but do pay for educational materials, course fees, and transportation costs.

Maximum enrollment terms for Running Start students are provided in statute. A student who enrolls in an institution of higher education in grade 11 may not enroll in Running Start courses for high school credit and postsecondary credit for more than the equivalent of the coursework for two academic years. For students in grade 12, the equivalent coursework limit is one academic year.

The OSPI, the SBCTC, and the WSAC are jointly responsible for developing and adopting rules governing the Running Start Program.

Interscholastic Athletic and Extracurricular Activities.

Each school district board of directors has statutory authority to control, supervise, and regulate the conduct of interscholastic athletic and extracurricular activities for students of the district. Each school board also has the authority to delegate its control, supervision, and regulation to the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) or any other voluntary nonprofit entity.

The WIAA is a nonprofit organization and rule-making body that was formed in 1905 to create equitable playing conditions between high school sports teams in Washington. The WIAA consists of nearly 800 high schools and middle/junior high schools, both public and private, that have volunteered to abide by its policies.

Summary of Second Substitute Bill:

Bridge Year Pilot Program.

Establishment and Purpose. The bridge year pilot program (pilot program) is established to provide students in the graduating class of 2021 and 2022 with the option of an additional academic year to address learning loss and missed opportunities in extracurricular activities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Public and private schools may participate in the pilot program, and the pilot program, which expires July 31, 2023, is to be administered by the OSPI in accordance with any rules it adopts.

Liaisons. Each high school participating in the pilot program must designate a school staff member as a bridge year liaison to serve as the school's central point of contact for students interested in pursuing, and participating in, a bridge year. School districts are not obligated to hire an individual to serve as a bridge year liaison.

Bridge year liaison's must, in consultation with the student, develop an individual learning plan (ILP) for each student pursuing a bridge year. The ILP must define academic and cocurricular goals for the bridge year and detail activities and strategies for accomplishing those goals including, counseling, academic support, coursework, and cocurricular or athletic participation. The credits taken by students in the pilot program must form a coordinated sequence of academic content that prepares the student for high-skilled, high-wage, or in-demand occupations.

Student Eligibility. A student who has met all applicable high school graduation requirements in the graduating class of 2021 or 2022 may defer graduation from high school to pursue a bridge year. Students who are eligible to participate in the pilot program must be 19 years of age or younger and, with limited exceptions, may not turn 20 during the bridge year.

Graduation Provisions. The host high school (the school the student attended at the beginning of student's senior year) must permit students participating in the pilot program to participate in graduation ceremonies with the graduating class of 2021 or class of 2022, but may not issue diplomas to those students until the conclusion of the bridge year. For the purpose of calculating the four-year graduation rates, students that have met all graduation requirements have graduated with their initial graduation cohort.

Academic Requirements. Students participating in the pilot program must satisfy credit and grade point average requirements, and complete two academic terms. During the first term of the student's bridge year, the student must take between two and four high school credits, or the postsecondary equivalent, at the student's host high school, an institution of higher education, or a combination both. During the student's second term, the student must take between nine and 12 quarter credits, or the equivalent, at an institution of higher education or through college in the high school courses. Participating students must maintain a grade point average of at least 2.0 in order to remain in the pilot program.

The institution of higher education at which a student attends must report at least quarterly to the bridge year liaison concerning the student's academic progress and performance, in a manner specified by the student's ILP. At the conclusion of each bridge year term, the host high school must update the student's high school transcript to reflect any high school credits earned during the year.

School districts participating in the pilot program must expunge from a student's transcript any "D" or "F" grade, or its equivalent, for a course if the student takes the same course during the student's bridge year and completes the course with a higher grade than the grade in the transcript.

If a student elects to pursue a bridge year in the fall term but does not do so in the following term, the student's host high school must release all final transcripts and other records as necessary and as may be requested.

Dual Credit Programs.

Students that participate in the pilot program are eligible to enroll in CHS courses at their high school and Running Start courses at participating institutions of higher education. Running Start equivalent coursework limits established for students in grades 11 and 12 do not apply to students participating in the pilot program.

Interscholastic Athletic and Extracurricular Activities.

A student who pursues a bridge year may participate in activities sanctioned by the WIAA and

extracurricular activities at the student's host high school. A student participating in a sport or extracurricular activity during the student's bridge year must pay applicable student fees and be subject to the high school's student code of conduct, athletic code of conduct, and any other applicable codes, rules, or policies required for student participation in the activities.

A student who decides not to continue the bridge year is ineligible to participate in a sports program or other extracurricular activities.

The WIAA is directed to make all qualifying students who are also participating in the pilot program aware of eligibility appeal processes related to season limitations. Except for this directive, the governance or eligibility rules established by a local, state, or national organization with bona fide authority over a particular extracurricular activity remain unchanged.

Notwithstanding the provisions of any law, rule, or regulation to the contrary, an insurer doing business in the state and issuing liability insurance policies to school districts must provide coverage for students pursuing a bridge year and participating in sport or extracurricular activities as part of a school or school district's liability insurance policy.

Funding.

Students participating in the pilot program are eligible recipients for funds distributed under provisions governing basic education funding.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.