HOUSE BILL REPORT
SB 5299

As Passed House - Amended:

April 5, 2021

Title: An act relating to the use of computer science credits for the purpose of graduation requirements.

Brief Description: Allowing the use of computer science credits for the purpose of graduation requirements.

Sponsors: Senators Wellman, Kuderer, Hunt, Mullet, Nguyen and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/12/21, 3/25/21 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/5/21, 75-23.

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended By House)

- Allows high school students to substitute a computer science course aligned to state computer science learning standards as an alternative to either a third year mathematics or a third year science course, for the purposes of meeting graduation requirements.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, Ortiz-Self and Stonier.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McEntire, Rude and Steele.

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.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

High School Graduation Requirements. In general, to qualify for graduation from a public high school, students must: (1) satisfy course and credit requirements established by the State Board of Education (SBE); (2) meet any locally established requirements; (3) complete a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP); and (4) meet the requirements of at least one graduation pathway option. Requirements of the SBE obligate graduating students to complete 24 credits in delineated subject areas. Of these 24 credits, three must be in mathematics, three must be in science, and four are electives.

Graduation credit rules of the SBE are mandated by law to provide that the content of the third credit of mathematics and the content of the third credit of science may be chosen by the student based on the student's interests and HSBP with agreement of the student's parent or guardian, or agreement of the school counselor or principal.

Computer Science. Beginning no later than the 2022-23 school year, each school district must provide an opportunity for all high school students to access an elective computer science course. To help school districts in meeting this requirement, the OSPI developed a definition of computer science and guidance that includes a list of 42 computer science courses that are aligned with the state computer science learning standards.

The OSPI has also established a list of statewide career and technical education (CTE) course equivalencies. Four courses related to computer science have mathematics or science equivalencies. In addition, high schools and school districts may adopt local course equivalencies for CTE courses not on the state list.

School districts are required to approve advanced placement (AP) computer science courses as equivalent to high school mathematics or science. In addition, school districts may award academic credit for computer science based on student completion of certain competency examinations.

High School and Beyond Plan. The purpose of a HSBP is to guide a student's high school experience and prepare the student to meet postsecondary education and career goals. The HSPBs must be: (1) initiated during the seventh or eighth grade; (2) updated to reflect high school assessment results; (3) revised for changing interests, goals, and needs; and (4) identify available interventions and academic support for students who are not on track to graduate. The HSPBs must also include, among other elements, identification of career and educational goals, identification of dual credit opportunities, and a four-year plan for course taking. Decisions on whether a student has met HSBP requirements are made at the local level.

Summary of Amended Bill:

For purposes of meeting graduation requirements, a student may substitute a computer science course aligned to state computer science learning standards as an alternative to either a third year mathematics or a third year science course if:
1. prior to the substitution, the school counselor provides the student and the student's parent or guardian with written notification of the consequences of the substitution on postsecondary opportunities;
2. the student, the student's parent or guardian, and the student's school counselor or principal agree to the substitution; and
3. the substitution is aligned with the student's HSBP.

A student may use the permitted substitution only once.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary 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) In the past, working in computer science was not as chic as it is today. Sometimes people do not initially consider working in computer science, but later find out that they enjoy it and are good at it. Digital technology is now a part of everything that we do. Technology is constantly changing.

Students need to understand the many types of technology available for their use, including the strengths, weaknesses, and dangers of the equipment, programs, and applications. They also need to have a basic understanding of mathematics and science, which come together to create computer science. Not all students need to understand computer science, but it is an interest for many students.

Many high schools do not offer computer science, so a few years ago legislation was enacted that directs high schools to offer at least one computer science elective. The state is working on collecting data on what computer science courses are offered in high schools.

The state has a definition and learning standards for computer science. Some computer science courses have already been identified as being appropriate for use as a mathematics or science graduation credit.

There should be meaningful HSBPs and flexible credits that are centered around students' interests and postsecondary goals. Students who are interested in computer science as a career will likely take AP computer science.

This bill is for those students for whom a second year of Algebra or a third year of science is not necessary for their career goals. These students can take a computer science elective and then substitute it for graduation requirements in third year mathematics or science. This will allow students to fit computer science into a packed scheduled that otherwise has little flexibility and receive graduation credit for it.

There is a question about whether a student could use the provision of the bill twice to substitute a computer science course for both the third year of mathematics or science.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Wellman, prime sponsor; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; and Jenny Plaja, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.