
Education Committee

ESSB 5414

Brief Description: Regarding statewide assessments and curricula.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe, King, Oemig and McDermott).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Articulates legislative intent about the principles, components, and design of the statewide student assessment system, and directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and the State Board of Education (SBE) to begin redesigning the system accordingly.
- Directs the SPI to revisit other aspects of the assessment system and report back by December 1, 2009.
- Amends the statutory timelines for implementation of the new end-of-course assessment for the high school mathematics assessment and revises the timelines for review and recommendations regarding science curricula.
- Retains the statutory date by when students must meet the state standard on the high school mathematics and science assessments for graduation purposes, but also requires that the SBE determine when the assessments should be required for graduation, based on the validity and reliability of the assessments.

Hearing Date: 3/17/09

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383)

Background:

Assessment System.

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is the statewide academic assessment used to measure student knowledge and skills on the state learning standards or Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). The WASL also serves as the state's assessment

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instrument for purposes of school and school district accountability under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The WASL in reading and mathematics is administered in each of grades 3 through 8 and 10. The writing WASL is in grades 4, 7, and 10, and the science WASL is in grades 5, 8, and 10. The 2008 Legislature directed the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to reduce the number of open-ended questions on the reading and mathematics WASL in all grades except high school.

There are different types of assessments for different purposes. Summative assessments collect performance information at the end of a unit, course, or program of study in order to sum up achievement and are often used to meet accountability requirements. Formative assessments use a variety of strategies to provide ongoing monitoring of student progress and give feedback to students and teachers that can be used to inform and improve student learning. Diagnostic assessments are a subset of formative assessments that provide a detailed analysis of an individual student's performance in a particular area to identify the reason for that performance. The WASL is a summative assessment.

"Reliability and validity" are psychometric terms used to gauge the technical quality of an assessment. Generally speaking, reliability refers to the extent that the assessment yields consistent results and does not randomly vary in its outcomes. Validity refers to the degree that the assessment measures what it is intended to measure. Included in considerations of reliability and validity is the question of whether the assessment is appropriate for its intended use or purpose.

Graduation.

To obtain a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA), which is required for graduation, high school students must meet the state standard on the tenth grade WASL in reading, writing, and mathematics or an approved alternative assessment. Until 2013, a student who does not meet the state standard on the mathematics WASL may graduate from high school without a CAA by meeting certain conditions. Beginning with the graduating class of 2013, students will also have to meet the state standards on the science WASL to earn a CAA.

Mathematics and Science.

In 2007, the State Board of Education (SBE) and the SPI were directed to undertake a comprehensive review and revision of the state learning standards in mathematics and science. For mathematics, the 2008 Legislature determined that additional work was necessary and directed the SBE and the SPI to continue the revisions. The final mathematics standards for high school were approved for adoption in July 2008. The 2008 Legislature also directed that the high school mathematics WASL be redesigned as a series of end-of-course assessments (EOCs) in particular subject areas rather than a comprehensive assessment. Timelines for implementing the EOCs and for using them in place of the current mathematics WASL for purposes of graduation are outlined in statute. Due to the delay in adopting the final mathematics standards, some of the timelines can no longer be met.

The review and revision of the mathematics and science standards also includes recommendations for no more than three basic curricula for elementary, middle, and high school grade spans to be aligned with the new standards. The new science standards have been completed, but can be adopted only after the 2009 Legislature has had an opportunity for review.

The current timelines require the SPI to present recommendations to the SBE on the science curricula by May 15, 2009, and the SBE to provide comments back to the SPI by June 30, 2009.

WASL Workgroup.

In 2008 the Legislature created a WASL Workgroup (Workgroup) composed of seven legislative members to review and evaluate the current assessment system by January 1, 2009, and potentially make recommendations to improve it. The Workgroup developed both long-term and short-term recommendations for the assessment system. The long-term recommendations include a list of principles that should be established as legislative intent for the design of a new assessment system and a description of recommended components within that system. The short-term recommendations include certain activities to be conducted by the SPI and the SBE, as well as a re-examination of the date for the graduation requirement in mathematics and science.

Summary of Bill:

Assessment System.

The Legislature finds that the statewide student assessment system should improve and inform instruction, support accountability, and provide useful information to all levels of the educational system. The Legislature intends to redesign the current assessment system to include multiple assessment formats, including formative and summative assessments; enable statewide and nationwide comparisons of student achievement; and be balanced so that information used to make significant decisions includes many data points.

Components of the assessment system include instructionally-supportive formative assessments, a state-administered summative assessment, and classroom-based assessments. Key design elements and characteristics of each type of assessment are described. Pre-service and ongoing training for teachers and administrators on the effective use of different types of assessments should be provided, and as the statewide data system is developed, data should be collected for all required statewide assessments. The SPI, in consultation with the SBE, is directed to begin design and development of an overall system meeting these principles and characteristics, and report annually beginning December 1, 2009, on progress and costs.

The SPI is also required to:

- revise the number of open-ended questions on the current statewide assessment at all grades while retaining the validity and reliability of the test and continuing to measure critical thinking skills, and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2009, with a cost analysis of the changes; and
- revisit the alternative assessments, the appeals process, and the portfolio assessment for students with disabilities and recommend improvements by December 1, 2009.

Graduation.

The specific dates by when students will be required to meet the state standard on the mathematics and science WASL for graduation are maintained. Also, after a determination is made by the SBE that the assessments in mathematics and science are sufficiently reliable and valid, the graduation requirement will be imposed. This determination must be made by September 1 of the freshman year of the graduating class to which the requirement applies. A separate determination can be made for mathematics and for science.

Mathematics and Science.

Timelines for implementing the mathematics EOCs are adjusted so that the EOCs are implemented statewide beginning in 2011. Students in the graduating classes of 2013 and 2014, rather than only the class of 2013, are allowed to use either the EOCs or the comprehensive math assessment for graduation purposes. Use of only the EOCs begins with the graduating class of 2015 rather than 2014.

The timeline for recommendations for science curricula are adjusted so that the SPI must complete the review of curricula and make recommendations by June 30, 2009, rather than by May 15. The SBE must provide comments within two months of receiving the SPI recommendations, rather than by June 30, 2009. Recommendations for no more than three high school science curricula can be made in each of three major domains of science: earth and space, physical, and life science. The SPI, in consultation with the SBE and the Professional Educator Standards Board, must identify strategies and develop an implementation plan to assure that all students have the opportunity to learn the new science standards. The SPI must also recommend whether to use an end-of-course assessment for high school science and identify potential costs. A report is due to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2009.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except Section 6 dealing with the timelines for recommending science curricula, which has an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.