

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1709

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to educational assessments.

Brief Description: Changing educational assessments.

Sponsors: Representatives Shabro, Talcott, Curtis, DeBolt, Ahern and Tom.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/10/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to have diagnostic tools available beginning September 1, 2006 and clarifies the types of characteristics the tools must have.
- Permits school districts to offer norm-referenced tests at district expense.
- Requires the SPI to norm-reference the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in reading and mathematics by the 2006-07 school year.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

By law, Washington's student assessment system must be designed so teachers can use the assessment results to help students who have not mastered the state's essential academic learning requirements. The assessment design must also allow teachers to evaluate their instructional practices.

Washington's assessment system for students includes both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests or assessments. In norm-referenced assessments, the results for individual

students and groups of students are compared to the students' peers across the country. The distribution of student scores occurs, by design, along a bell curve. In criterion-referenced assessments, a student's test results are measured against the state standard for that content area.

Public school students in the third, sixth, and ninth grades take nationally norm-referenced assessments. In addition, public school students in the fourth, seventh, and 10th grades take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), a criterion-referenced assessment.

Last year, through the passage of 3ESHB 2195, the Legislature directed the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to create a collection of diagnostic tools that teachers can use to evaluate the learning needs of individual students. The tools must be inexpensive, easily administered, and quickly and easily scored. The results of the tools must be provided in a format that can be easily shared with students and their parents.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Diagnostic Assessments

To the extent that funding is available, diagnostic tools designed to help students meet state standards will be available beginning September 1, 2006, subject to available funds, for students in the first through 12th grades. The tools will be individualized, aligned to the state standards, and include the ability to be scored within one hour with information provided to teachers within 48 hours. In addition, the instruments will be cost-effective, with results that allow a teacher to measure student growth using reliable and stable measurement scales.

Norm-referenced Assessments

School districts may, at their own expense, administer norm-referenced assessments to students.

Beginning with the 2006-07 school year, student results on the WASL will be norm-referenced for reading and mathematics in elementary, middle, and high school. The norm-referenced results will be reported to parents, the community, the SPI, and the public annually. The report will occur at the same time and in the same manner as other reports on the WASL.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Removes references to mandated norm-reference tests but permits districts, at their own expense, to continue to offer the tests. Removes the requirement that assessment vendors provide diagnostic tests. Revises language in current law on the characteristics of the diagnostic tools the SPI will make available to schools, requires diagnostic tools for first through 12th grades subject to available funds, and removes a reference to diagnostic tools in math.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The act takes effect August 1, 2005.

Testimony For: (In support of original bill) Parents and teachers need the right tools to help children achieve at high levels. Among the best tools are diagnostic assessments that provide teachers and parents with information about the specific areas in which students need extra help. Districts such as Kennewick have made significant improvements in the achievement levels of their students by relying on diagnostic tools as one essential component of the district's approach. There are some wonderful norm-referenced assessments that include very helpful diagnostic components available. Norm-referenced assessments provide comparative and diagnostic information of value to parents and teachers. Even students want to know how well they scored in comparison to other students.

(With concerns on original bill) Norm-referencing the WASL is technically possible but it will be complex and expensive. The OSPI should be able to look at a variety of vendors for the diagnostic tools in the legislation.

Testimony Against: (Opposed to original bill) The legislation retains a state obligation to pay for norm-referenced assessments. Norm-referenced assessments don't provide valuable information and so should be discontinued.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Representative Shabro, prime sponsor; Sharon Hanek and Cynthia Blix, citizens.

(With concerns on original bill) Gary King, Washington Education Association; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; and Tom Cone, Vancouver School District.

(Opposed to original bill) Greg Hall, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Barbara Merkins, Washington Association of School Administrators.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.