
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Carol Liu, Chair
2015 - 2016 Regular

Bill No: AB 1876
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Urgency: No
Consultant: Kathleen Chavira
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Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Pupils: diploma alternatives: language options

SUMMARY

This bill prohibits the California Department of Education, beginning January 1, 2019, from approving or renewing a contractor or test center to administer tests for the purpose of a high school equivalency certificate unless the contractor/testing center provides the test in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and requires the test to be administered in the examinee's choice of these languages.

BACKGROUND

Existing law requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to issue a California high school equivalency certificate and an official score report to any person who has not completed high school and who meets all of the following requirements:

- 1) Is a resident of California or is a member of the armed services assigned to duty in California.
- 2) Has taken all or a portion of a general educational development test approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) and administered by a test center approved by the California Department of Education, with a score determined by the SBE to be equal to the standard of performance expected from high school graduates.
- 3) Meets one of the following:
 - a) Is at least 18 years of age.
 - b) Would have graduated from high school had he or she remained in school and followed the usual course of study toward graduation.
 - c) Is at least 17 years of age, has accumulated fewer than 100 units of high school credit, and is confined to a state or county correctional agency.
 - d) Is at least 17 years of age, has accumulated fewer than 100 units of high school credit prior to enrollment in a dropout recovery high school, and has successfully completed the program offered by a dropout recovery high school that provides the student with all of the following:

- i) Instruction aligned to state academic content standards.
- ii) The opportunity to complete the requirements for a high school diploma.
- iii) At least one year of instruction or instruction followed by services related to the academic program.

Existing law provides that a California high school equivalency certificate is deemed to be a high school diploma for the purpose of meeting the requirements of employment by all state and local public agencies in California. (EC § 51420 and § 51425)

The State Board of Education has approved the use of three high school equivalency tests:

- 1) The General Educational Development Test (GED).
- 2) The High School Equivalency Test (HiSET).
- 3) The Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC).

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Prohibits the California Department of Education (CDE), beginning January 1, 2019, from approving or renewing a contractor/test center to administer tests for purposes of the high school equivalency certificate unless the contractor/testing center provides the test in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.
- 2) Requires the test to be administered in the examinee's choice of the three specified languages.
- 3) Declares that these provisions are intended to supplement and not supplant any other requirements for approval of contractors/testing centers adopted by the CDE.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, California has an estimated population of 10 million immigrants and roughly 44 percent of the total population speaks a language other than English at home. The author also cites a 2011 report by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) which finds that, in California, 36 percent of immigrants ages 25-64 had not graduated from high school. The report also noted that immigrants dominate the sector of adults in California with less than a high school education, accounting for 73 percent of this population. Offering the high school equivalency exam in Spanish and Vietnamese will better equip immigrants in California who lack a high school diploma to obtain employment, compete in the job market, and have the opportunity to increase their income. This bill requires the test be administered in

Vietnamese because it is the second (after Spanish at 87 percent) most frequently spoken language among California's English learners (ELs) in schools (2.3 percent of ELs). According to 2015 U.S. Census information, there are about 300,000 Vietnamese in California who indicate that they speak English "less than very well."

- 2) **Current status.** The State Board of Education has approved three high school equivalency tests for use in California: the General Educational Development Test (GED), the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET), and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC). According to the California Department of Education (CDE), all three approved test centers currently provide the exam in English and in Spanish.

In 2013, about 65,000 Californians took the General Education Development Test (GED) and approximately 45,000 passed the exam. Of those who took the test, 37,430 (57.6%) were reported as Hispanic, and 8,624 (13.2%) took the test in Spanish.

Testing fees vary from test to test and from one test center to another, but are generally around \$140 to \$150 per test. The state currently subsidizes these testing fees for homeless students.

While the high school equivalency exam is generally used for purposes of employment, GED Testing Service reports that it has been working with the California State University to offer college credit based on a student's score and information has been provided to the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges for their review and consideration.

- 3) **Unintended consequences.** According to the CDE, a high school equivalency certificate is the same for all students regardless of the language of its administration. However, the transcript for the test will indicate whether it was taken in another language, and the CDE has received anecdotal reports of instances when postsecondary educational institutions or employers did not accept transcripts unless the administration of the test was in English. CDE reports that there are no current options for students to demonstrate English proficiency if the exam is taken in a language other than English.

The Committee may wish to consider:

- a) Absent a means for assessing English proficiency, would the results of a high school equivalency exam administered in a language other than English have value to higher education institutions or employers?
- b) Should administration of a test in a language other than English be required to include an assessment of the functional English skills of the examinee?
- c) Current law authorizes the Superintendent of Public Instruction to charge a one-time maximum fee of \$20 to examinees to cover the costs of administration of the exam. In addition, a contractor/testing center is

authorized to charge an examinee its own separate fee (currently \$140-\$150 per exam). Would the cost to test developers to meet the requirements of this bill result in an increase in fees charged of examinees?

- 4) ***Related legislation.*** AB 2656 (O'Donnell), also on the Committee's agenda today, extends to foster youth the fee waivers for the California High School Proficiency Exam and the high school equivalency exam that are currently provided to students who are homeless.

SUPPORT

None received on this version.

OPPOSITION

None received.

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