

Alaska State Legislature

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Rep. Paul Seaton, Chairman **HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

HB 206 Sponsor Statement

Alaska has one of the highest drop-out rates in the nation. HB 206 addresses this problem by providing two incentives for students to stay in school until graduation: adding a student's career preparedness assessment score to their high-school diploma, and allowing students who pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam to take college or vocational education credits for free until high school graduation.

The career preparedness requirement attempts to ensure that high school graduation is based on student competency for real-world employment applications. The Department of Education and Early Development (EED) currently requires that all 11th graders take a career assessment test, in this case the WorkKeys Assessment. WorkKeys is a job skills analysis and assessment system that sets out specific skills and levels of skills required by employers, so that students understand the connection between what they learn in school and what is required on the job. HB 206 builds on the EED plan by requiring that the career preparedness assessment be taken again before a student exits high school, and requiring that those assessment scores be posted on a student's transcript and graduation certificate. This would allow a student to use their final year of high school to improve upon specific skill and make their scores meaningful for employment or college qualification.

The second part of HB 206 allows students who take and pass all three sections of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam prior to graduation to take college credits or vocational school credits at the expense of the school district until graduation. This could allow students to advance toward an associate degree or vocational education certificate by the time they have graduated high school. The High School Graduation Qualifying Exam has been identified as a contributing factor to the high-school drop out. Students interpret that passing the exam means they have met their high school qualifying criteria, leading to a lack of interest in school. Incorporation of classes that are selected based on relevance to the individual student will help maintain interest and achievement.

HOUSE BILL NO. 206

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Introduced: 3/25/09

Referred: Education, Finance

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 "An Act establishing a career assessment requirement in public schools; and relating to
2 postsecondary courses for secondary school students."

3 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 * **Section 1.** AS 14.03 is amended by adding new sections to read:

5 **Sec. 14.03.073. Secondary student career assessment.** (a) Each school
6 district in the state shall require students in grade 12 to complete a career preparedness
7 assessment as described in (b) of this section.

8 (b) The commissioner shall select for use in the state an assessment designed
9 to measure a student's level of preparedness to make the transition to work or college.
10 The assessment must assess a student's career aptitude and readiness for postsecondary
11 education or training in the areas of

- 12 (1) applied mathematics;
13 (2) reading for information; and
14 (3) locating information.

1 (c) Subject to the availability of appropriations, the department shall

2 (1) obtain a license that enables school districts to administer the
3 assessment described in (b) of this section with no charge assessed to the district by
4 the vendor of the assessment;

5 (2) provide districts with training and support in administering the
6 assessment; and

7 (3) provide a report to each student on the results of the student's
8 assessment, based on nationally recognized criteria for evaluating a student's
9 preparedness to make the transition to work or college.

10 (d) The results of a student's career preparedness assessment shall be
11 displayed in summary form on the student's high school diploma.

12 **Sec. 14.03.074. Secondary student enrollment in postsecondary institution.**

13 (a) A secondary student who passes all portions of the examination required under
14 AS 14.03.075 may enroll in a postsecondary institution in the state that is approved by
15 the commissioner if

16 (1) the student is enrolled in a public secondary school in the state;

17 (2) the student is otherwise eligible to enroll, as determined by the
18 postsecondary institution; and

19 (3) the postsecondary courses will be completed before the student's
20 graduation from secondary school.

21 (b) The school district in which the student is enrolled in secondary school
22 shall pay the course fees for postsecondary courses in which the student enrolls under
23 this section.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Marcia Olson. I am a Career & Technical Education Program Specialist for the Department of Education, and I've been asked to give you a brief overview of the Alaska Career Ready program.

Alaska Career Ready is

- a program to ensure that Alaska students and job-seekers have the applied academic skills – sometimes called foundational skills -- that are required in various careers. These include skills such as Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information in graphical formats.
- The program provides the opportunity for students and job-seekers to do 4 main things: 1. assess their foundational skill levels; 2. practice and improve those skills; 3. learn what foundational skills are required by various careers; and 4. document their skills by earning a nationally-recognized certificate, called a Career Readiness Certificate.
- The program is a joint effort between the Department of Education and the Department of Labor.

Alaska Career Ready is based on the WorkKeys system.

- WorkKeys is a job skills analysis and assessment system developed by the ACT Company. ACT is probably better known for its college entrance exam, the ACT test. The WorkKeys system is housed in the Workforce Development Division of the ACT company, and is geared specifically towards foundational skills as they are used in the workplace.
- The WorkKeys system sets out specific skills and levels of skills so that employers, students, and job seekers are all speaking the same language and using the same measurement system to talk about these skills. The system gives students, in particular, a way to see the connection between what they learn in school and what skills they will actually need to use on a job.
- To determine the skills to be included in the WorkKeys system, ACT has analyzed or “profiled” over 15,000 specific jobs, and they continue to profile thousands more each year. Through these profiles, they have determined several skill areas that are important in most careers, including the 3 areas I mentioned earlier (Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information in visual formats. *(Teamwork, Observation, Writing, Business Writing, Applied Technology, and Listening.)*)
- Within each skill area, they have determined varying complexities or “levels” for the skill. Each job profile reports the level of each skill that is recommended for success in that type of job.
- The results of all job profiles are kept in a database that is accessible on the WorkKeys website. This provides students and job-seekers with an easy way to find out what levels of skills are recommended for success in hundreds of different careers.
- So the job profiling is the first part of the WorkKeys system. Then, based on these profiles, the ACT company has developed assessments for each of these skill areas, so that individuals can find out where their skills are and compare them to the skills required for a different careers.
- If a person scores at least the minimum level on each of the three assessments (Reading, Math, and Locating), he/she will earn a nationally recognized “Career Readiness Certificate” issued by ACT, which lists the skills the person demonstrated.
- The WorkKeys system is used in approximately 25 states, and by employers, schools, and job training programs across the country, such as Subaru, Dow Chemical, Northrop Grumman, Chicago Public Schools, Syracuse University, Aims Community College, New Jersey State AFL-CIO, British Petroleum, and many others.

Alaska Career Ready also has an instructional component.

- There is a web-based instructional program that students and job seekers may use in order to practice and improve their skills. This software is not provided by the ACT company, but by an independent curriculum company called WIN. The lessons are based directly on the WorkKeys skills.
- The software provides practice tests, or “placement tests”, to determine initial skill levels; tens of thousands of lessons to practice and improve these skills; and a built-in management system that records each learner’s progress.

Education regulations

- Current regulations require assessments be given starting with the 2009-2010 school year.
- 11th graders—WorkKeys® Assessment in each of 3 areas (Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information).
- 6th and 8th graders—informal placement test in each of the same 3 areas. These are not the WorkKeys tests; they are practice tests available from within the instructional software.
- The Department of Education is providing training and technical support for schools to provide the assessments.