

## WSPTA President Testimony on Senate Early Learning & K12 Education 1/25/19 JAC SHHR1 8am

Good morning, Chair Wellman and members of the committee. I am Michelle Nims, President of Washington State PTA, the state's oldest and largest child advocacy association with more than 133,000 members. I am also a volunteer and a parent.

### **SB5014**

The adopted position of Washington State PTA is that there should be no single assessment used for making decisions about high school graduation. Therefore, we support SB 5014, which would delink state assessments from high school graduation requirements.

However, interventions and academic supports designed to help students not on track for graduation are eliminated. We would request that the Legislature maintain or expand these interventions.

I reached out to several high school principals I know to ask about delinking assessments. I was told many stories of students who did well in their classes, had more than enough credits to graduate, even some that were doing well in community college classes – but who had to take an assessment repeatedly in order to get their diploma. One kept trying until she was 19 or 20, one missed passing by only 1 point, and one even gave up and moved out of state. Many of these students were English language learners who are disproportionately held back from graduating on time by these assessments.

In addition, I hear from parents and students about the anxiety and stress these assessments put on them. Some students know that their high school diploma or college acceptance is on the line. There are many bills this session aimed at mental health supports for students. Delinking these tests is one way to relieve a major source of anxiety for some students and allow them to focus on their personal goals.

### **SB5146**

Regarding SB 5146, it is the adopted position of Washington State PTA members that the state assessment system should be balanced, with high standards and multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning, and that there should be no single assessment used for making decisions about high school graduation.

We would like to thank the State Board of Education for trying to inject some flexibility into a high school diploma. We appreciate the work group created in Section 4 to focus on competency-based crediting and know that parents would welcome the opportunity to participate.

The changes to “unusual circumstances” and clarification to credits earned in middle school are good to have and we’d encourage you to keep them in whatever bill is adopted.

While we appreciate that this bill would extend the expedited appeals waiver indefinitely, we would suggest that the conversation should start with delink and, if after all the discussions, the legislature maintains some requirement beyond a 24-credit diploma to graduate, then this is a minimum necessity.

Respectfully, we don't think this bill goes far enough to help every student reach his or her potential.

We need to give every student what they need to succeed and not put up barriers or obstacles, that mostly impact our most vulnerable students, making it harder for them to succeed.

### **SB 5548 - Other**

Good morning again. I am Michelle Nims with the Washington State PTA.

We fully support a 24-credit high school diploma and believe students should be given maximum flexibility to chart a path according to the goals in their High School and Beyond Plan.

That said, the requirement in SB 5548 to pass one or more of the many options to earn a diploma will make parents' heads spin. There are testing options, CTE sequence options, being admitted to college or the military, etc. It is incredibly complicated.

The one thing this bill is missing, for students starting in the class of 2022, is good old-fashioned work. A student who gets a job after high school – maybe because they need a break, maybe because they don't have the money to do college and want to save for a year, or maybe they just want to work in a family business – none of that is considered an okay pathway to earn a diploma. Instead of flexibility, this bill undervalues a job after high school and withholds a diploma if a student hasn't passed one of the many pathways. We are also concerned because it is unclear to us how the new pathway requirements would work with students on IEPs because there is no option for work.

This is a complex approach that will require school counselors and teachers to invest significant time with parents and students so that they understand the options and identify which one they will use.

The simplest way to approach this is to recognize that the 24-credit diploma is rigorous, that Washington is one of the few states erecting barriers to a high school diploma, and simply delink assessments from graduation.