

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill No: SB 160

48th Legislature, 1st Session, 2007

Short Title: Require Use of Standardized Grading System

Sponsor(s): Senator Sue Wilson Beffort and Others

Analyst: Pamela Herman

Date: January 26, 2007

Bill Summary:

SB 160 would require the Public Education Department (PED) to adopt a standardized alphabetic or numeric grading system based on the 4.0 or 100 percent scale to be used by all schools in the state.

The bill would permit a public school to supplement the standardized system with a narrative or other means to convey a student's success in developing academic, social, behavioral, or other skills.

Fiscal Impact:

SB 160 does not contain an appropriation.

PED indicates that to implement a uniform statewide grading system that accurately reports student attainment of state academic content standards would be a costly endeavor for the state; however, PED does not provide an estimate of the cost of such an effort.

Issues:

SB 160 may be ambiguous. In its bill analysis, PED states on one hand that the requirement of SB 160 would not significantly change grading in schools today; and on the other hand that if SB 160 were interpreted to require a uniform statewide standards-based grading system in which grades represent the same level of student achievement across the state with comparable measures at each grade level, for each subject, it would represent a significant and potentially costly change.

According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), because of ongoing efforts to institute statewide academic standards and measure student achievement toward meeting them through standardized assessments and a uniform accountability system, states are also taking a new look at student report cards. NASBE reports that, in addition to ensuring comparability and uniform evaluations across districts within a state, these states are also interested in preventing grade inflation and basic fairness. NASBE points out that the stakes for students can potentially be large.

NASBE raises the following issues for consideration in implementing statewide grading scales:

- grading policies in general are often considered to be within the purview of local districts and student classroom grades, in particular, are seen as a teacher's prerogative;
- district policies that weight certain courses such as honors and advanced college placement need to be taken into account to ensure uniformity;
- individual teacher and school policies regarding grading on a curve versus criterion referenced grading also need to be accounted for; and
- some educators consider letter grade report cards overly simplistic compared with contextual student achievement reports such as checklists of student abilities that give parents a better idea of their students' mastery of all the subject matter, although the two systems are not necessarily incompatible.

Florida, Arkansas, and Tennessee are three states that have implemented some form of statewide grading scale.

Related Bills:

None