

Senate Bill No. 646

(By Senators Laird, Plymale, Foster, Miller and Stollings)

[Introduced February 17, 2012; referred to
the Committee on Education.]

A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section, designated §18-2-6b, relating to the General Educational Development Diploma (GED); making legislative findings; setting forth legislative intent; and requiring the State Board of Education to study GED issues and make a report with recommendations by a certain date.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

That the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended by adding thereto a new section, designated §18-2-6b, to read as follows:

ARTICLE 2. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

§18-2-6b. General Educational Development diploma; legislative findings and intent; examination costs; testing materials and procedures; report required.

1 (a) The Legislature makes the following findings related
2 to the General Educational Development (GED) examina-
3 tion:

4 (1) The GED examination is an instrument for success
5 that can keep a student from dropping out of school and can
6 transform the future for both school age and adult individu-
7 als who attain a GED diploma. One in every seven Ameri-
8 cans with a high school credential has received the GED, as
9 well as one in every twenty college students. For those who
10 have not graduated from high school, attaining a GED
11 diploma greatly increases their employment opportunities
12 and earning potential.

13 (2) While West Virginia's average per-capita income has
14 increased over the past ten years as the state's economy has
15 held steady or grown slightly, most other states have shown
16 declines. Despite these positive changes, West Virginia still
17 ranks as one of the five poorest states in the nation. Addi-
18 tionally, many counties within the state fall far below the
19 state average; therefore, the current cost of the GED exami-
20 nation would be difficult for many citizens to afford without
21 help and significant increases will make the cost of the GED
22 examination prohibitive.

23 (3) In addition to the cost factor, large areas of West
24 Virginia are without broadband Internet access or without
25 adequate broadband Internet access speeds, which results in
26 diminished opportunities for rural residents to participate in
27 the rapidly unfolding digital revolution compared to their
28 nonrural neighbors. Citizens living in these areas have few
29 opportunities to become adept in computer technology and,
30 therefore, most, especially adults seeking to earn a GED
31 years after leaving the public school system, are not profi-
32 cient or even comfortable using the Internet.

33 (4) Individuals who can benefit most from earning a GED
34 diploma are those who lack many of the skills needed to
35 secure employment or to function successfully in an age
36 dependent upon technology. They also are those who lack the
37 financial resources to obtain the needed skills so most
38 citizens for whom the GED diploma becomes unattainable
39 are likely to remain in a state of poverty.

40 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature to make the GED
41 diploma available to the widest possible range of state
42 residents who have not achieved a high school diploma. To
43 keep the GED diploma within reach of state citizens, the
44 Legislature intends to examine the following issues:

45 (1) Impact on prospective GED test takers of the pro-
46 posed changes in the design and delivery of the qualifying
47 examination made by the American Council on Education
48 (ACE) in 2011;

49 (2) Impact of the increase in costs per test taker; and

50 (3) Alternatives available to reduce costs and to retain
51 the option of pen and paper testing for those who desire it.

52 (c) Therefore, in view of the findings and intent set forth
53 in subsections (a) and (b) of this section, respectively, the
54 state board shall undertake an exhaustive study of the issues
55 surrounding administration of the GED examination in the
56 state including, but not limited to, the following:

57 (1) Analysis of research and/or pilot testing that was
58 done in West Virginia by the American Council on Education
59 prior to their decision to eliminate paper and pen examina-
60 tions, including justifications offered for eliminating this
61 type examination as a possible option;

62 (2) Determination of the current and future costs to the
63 state to provide GED examinations free of charge to eligible
64 test takers; and

65 (3) Recommendations for statutory or policy changes to
66 achieve the following goals:

67 (A) Reducing or controlling escalating costs of adminis-
68 tering the GED examinations; and

69 (B) Retaining paper and pen testing for those individuals
70 who request or require it; or

71 (C) Eliminating or reducing significantly the difficulty
72 for individuals who are not comfortable or proficient in
73 taking online examinations.

74 (d) The state board shall complete its work and report its
75 findings, conclusions and recommendations, together with
76 drafts of any legislation or policy changes necessary to
77 effectuate the recommendations, to the Legislative Oversight
78 Commission on Education Accountability no later than July
79 1, 2012.

(NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to examine the issues surrounding proposed changes in administration and costs of examinations to receive a General Educational Development (GED) Diploma. The bill sets forth legislative findings and intent. The bill requires the State Board of Education make a study of the issues concerning the GED, including costs of administering the examinations and exploring optional pen and paper testing. The bill requires the report and recommendations be made by July 1, 2012.

This section is new; therefore, strike-throughs and underscoring have been omitted.)