

Take the WASL early? Many do

The move paid off for 492 sophomores across the county who passed the exams as freshmen.

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Herald Writers*

It's WASL time for thousands of Washington sophomores, but Shawn Rood most likely will be in bed when his classmates at Granite Falls High School are taking their high-stakes exams.

"I will probably sleep in," he said.

Shawn, 15, earned the right to snooze longer on test days, which begin Tuesday for high school students.

As a freshman, he voluntarily took and passed all three sections of the 10th-grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning that count toward graduation.

He's one of 492 sophomores in Snohomish County - nearly 5 percent of the sophomore class - who scored high enough on the reading, math and writing exams last spring to put the WASL in their rearview mirrors.

State law allows freshmen to take any or all required sections of the 10th-grade WASL a year early. Passing the WASL is a requirement for the class of 2008.

"We are seeing kids in greater and greater numbers wanting to take it in the ninth grade," said Thomas Shapley, a spokesman for the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Statewide, 14,000 freshmen have signed up for at least one of the three exams. That's more than double the 6,000 from a year ago, the first year the state allowed ninth-graders to take the tests.

The Arlington School District will have roughly 200 freshmen attempt at least one section of the exam, up by more than 150 from a year ago.

Mukilteo's freshman participation could be up more than 100 students, according to preliminary figures. Marysville has 127 early signups, up more than 30.

High school students will take the reading and writing tests over the next two weeks and the math and science exams in April. Middle and elementary school students also will take the WASL in April.

Schools and school districts have different philosophies on how hard to push the early testing for freshmen. Some figure it's better to wait a year and don't do a lot of promotion; others make it a high-profile option.

Nowhere else in the county has greater participation than Everett.

The Everett School District saw nearly 70 percent of its freshmen take at least one part of the WASL last year. About the same number are signed up to take one or more tests this year.

Of the 1,010 students who took the WASL as freshmen last year, 327 took and passed all three reading, writing and math sections. That's about one-third of the class.

At Everett High School, those students have a variety of options for filling their time as their classmates try - or try again - to pass the WASL.

Study skills classes and study halls will be offered, along with seminars on stress management and a program to help teens chart their potential career paths.

There also will be some fun options, such as watching "Remember the Titans" or "Akeelah and the Bee."

A geography tournament and games of chess and Scrabble also are in the works.

Many who attempted the math test a year early, however, fell short. So during this week's reading and writing testing, Cascade and Henry M. Jackson high schools will be giving those students extra math coaching in preparation for the math WASL in April.

Lakewood High School sophomore Akaash Saini doesn't have to worry about passing the WASL this year after posting solid scores as a freshman.

For Akaash, 16, it seemed like a can't-lose proposition last spring.

"My mentality was if I passed it, that's great, and if I didn't, I would have a greater understanding of what's on it," he said.

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