

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2541

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Higher Education*

Title: An act relating to higher education.

Brief Description: Regarding the study of American Indian languages and cultures.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Dellwo, Jacobsen, Zellinsky, Wineberry, R. Fisher, Wood, Fuhrman, Schmidt, Wilson, Winsley, Paris, J. Kohl, O'Brien and Anderson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Higher Education, February 3, 1992, DP.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
HIGHER EDUCATION**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 12 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Chair; Ogden, Vice Chair; Wood, Ranking Minority Member; May, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dellwo; Fraser; Ludwig; Miller; Prince; Sheldon; Spanel; and Van Luven.

Staff: Susan Hosch (786-7120).

Background: By law, each student who graduates with a teaching credential from a Washington institution of higher education must take at least one course in either Washington State or Pacific Northwest history and government.

By law, the Higher Education Coordinating Board establishes minimum admission standards for the state-supported four-year universities and colleges. At its discretion, each institution may adopt more rigorous standards than those established by the board. The authority to establish these standards has one limitation. Coursework in sign language must satisfy any foreign language admissions requirement that either the board or the institutions adopt.

The board has adopted an admissions requirement that each entering student have two years of a single foreign language before entering a four-year university or college. The student must study the language in school, during the eighth grade or later. Two years of study in American Sign

Language will satisfy this requirement. No other foreign language is specified in the board's admissions guidelines. The foreign language requirement is waived for students from non-English speaking countries who enter the United States educational system in the eighth grade or later.

Some members of the Indian Educators' Association have expressed concerns about the lack of training new teachers receive in the culture and history of Washington's Native Americans. In addition, these educators report that Native American languages are not taught for credit in the state's public schools.

Summary of Bill: Any course in Washington State or Pacific Northwest history and government taught to fulfill statutory requirements for future teachers will include information on the culture, history, and government of the American Indians of the state and region.

Coursework in an American Indian language will satisfy any admissions requirement adopted by either the Higher Education Coordinating Board or the institutions for instruction in a language other than English.

The phrase "language other than English" replaces "foreign language" in the statute on minimum admissions standards.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Native Americans throughout the country believe that teachers need to be trained in the culture, history, and psychology of Native American students. This kind of training will help teachers to empathize with and respect the cultural differences of their Native American students. In turn, this understanding and respect will help to raise the self esteem and cultural pride of those students.

Native Americans have an oral tradition. Much of their culture, history, religion, and psychology is embodied in their language and spoken wisdom stories. During the early decades of this century, Native American students were removed from their families and sent to boarding schools. In those schools, many children were forbidden to speak their native languages. In some cases, children who did so were punished through sticking their tongues on frozen pipes, or having their ears clipped. As a result, many tribal elders, wanting to protect their own children from similar punishments, did not teach them to speak their

tribal languages. Those languages are dying out. Very few public schools offer Native American languages for credit. Students must learn their tribal languages during after school hobby courses, if they are offered at all. If colleges and universities accept American Indian languages, some public schools may begin to offer it to their students, along with French, Japanese, Spanish, and other languages.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: John Baller, Quinault Indian Nation; Darlena Watt-Palmanteer, Colville Business Council, Colville Tribe; Dawn Vyvyan, Yakima Indian Nation; Marion Boushie, Washington State Indian Educators' Association; Gloria Bean, Puyallup Tribe; and Jens Stahmer, student, South Puget Sound Community College (all pro).