

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1175

As Passed Legislature
April 25, 1993

Title: An act relating to education.

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

Sponsors: Representatives Jacobsen, Dellwo, Dorn, J. Kohl, Brumsickle, Linville, Dunshee, Pruitt, Johanson, Wood, Leonard and Basich.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Education, February 25, 1993, DP;
Passed House, March 17, 1993, 98-0;
Amended by Senate;
Passed Legislature, April 25, 1993, 98-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Dorn, Chair; Cothorn, Vice Chair; Brough, Ranking Minority Member; Thomas, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Brumsickle; Carlson; G. Cole; Eide; G. Fisher; Hansen; Holm; Jones; Karahalios; J. Kohl; Patterson; Pruitt; and Vance.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Stevens.

Staff: Margaret Allen (786-7191).

Background: American Indians have expressed concern that their children are no longer learning the Indian languages. Part of the reason is that Indian languages are rarely taught in schools.

In addition, it is thought that the term "foreign language" is often used inappropriately. As the original inhabitants of North America, American Indians think English is the foreign language.

A concern also exists that history classes in the state's schools do not provide enough information regarding the culture, governance and history of American Indian peoples.

The dropout rate of American Indian students in the state's public schools is more than twice the overall state dropout average. Some suggest the lack of accurate instruction and perspective about American Indians contributes to poor self image and low retention of American Indian students.

Summary of Bill: References to "foreign" languages in the education code are changed to "languages other than English." When references to "languages other than English" are made relative to course offerings and high school graduation requirements, it is clarified that American Indian languages qualify as languages other than English.

Schools are encouraged to include information on the culture, history, and government of American Indian peoples in Washington State history and government classes.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This bill compliments a similar bill that has passed out of the House Higher Education Committee.

Indian education is a national priority; last year the president called for a national conference on Indian education. Indian students have trouble feeling good about themselves and their education in the public schools when their culture and its contributions are ignored or misrepresented in the curriculum. Studies show Indian children progress better in school when allowed to learn their language.

Based on their creation stories, the Indians of Washington state believe they were created here, so they feel their languages are the native languages; they are not "foreign" languages. Indians are losing their culture because the younger generations are not able to communicate with the tribal elders in their native languages. Knowledge of the language of a people gives an understanding of that culture. An understanding of Indian people will result in better relations between the cultures. Indian communities and organizations could assist in these efforts.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Representative Jacobsen, sponsor; Doll Watt-Palmanteer, Colville Tribal Business Council; Loetta Watt, Colville tribal member/parent; Randy Scott, Quinault Indian Nation; and Sally A. Brownfield, teacher in Hood Canal School District.