

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1378

Title: *An act relating to providing educational opportunities for students.*

Brief Description: *Providing educational opportunities for students with different learning needs.*

Sponsors: *Representatives Radcliff, H. Sommers, D. Sommers, Carlson, Johnson, Sump, Costa, Mitchell, Poulsen, Linville, Dunshee, Cooke, Mason, Keiser, Wood, Kenney and Kessler.*

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Meeting Date: *February 6, 1997.*

Bill Analysis Prepared by: *Joe Hauth (786-7111).*

Background: School districts must provide instructional programs to a wide variety of children with very different learning needs. School districts may have difficulty in providing services to this wide range of students, for instance, students who are academically at-risk or who have had discipline problems. Alternative educational services are available, including alternative learning programs within school districts, vocational skill centers, education centers for drop-outs, and other public and private educational programs outside of a school district.

Alternative Education Programs

School districts may provide alternative learning experiences for students that count toward a course of study. If the school district provides an alternative learning experience, the school district must adopt a written plan that describes how student performance will be supervised, evaluated, and recorded by school district staff. School districts may contract with an agency to provide courses if a school district adopts a resolution that it is in the best interest of the students to expand the options available to students. If the school district contracts with an agency, several conditions must be met, including complying with applicable laws, satisfying funding, staffing, and enrollment requirements, and ensuring that a contract is established and monitored. WAC 392-121-182; WAC 392-121-188.

Skills Centers

Skills centers are run by eight interdistrict cooperatives. The eight skills centers are: Sno-Isle, Spokane, New Market, Yakima, Tri-Tech, Clark County, Kitsap Peninsula, and Sea-Tac. Each of the eight skills centers functions as a multi-district cooperative and acts as an extension of local high schools at off-site locations. Skills centers offer classes that are three periods long and are taught by a vocationally certified instructor. According to the legislative evaluation and accountability program committee (1995),

skills centers generally offer higher-cost programs, enroll more high-risk students, use more contractual services for instruction, and provide more hands-on learning than comprehensive high school programs.

Education Centers

The Legislature created education centers for public school dropouts. Education centers operate on a client-centered basis, with specific attention given to diagnosing the student's learning needs and improving the student's motivation and academic performance. Certified teachers must provide instruction. Students may take the general educational development (GED) test or reenter public school if they demonstrate satisfactory performance. Students must have dropped out of school for 30 days prior to applying, or be referred to an education center by a public school official prior to being out of school 30 days. Students who have been expelled or suspended may enroll in education centers. RCW 28A.205; WAC 392-185.

Other Schools

School districts may accept applications from nonresident students. School districts must establish policies for admitting nonresident students and for allowing intradistrict transfers. RCW 28A.225.

Summary of Bill: A list of entities with whom a school district can contract is added to statute. The list contains:

- other schools;
- alternative education programs not operated by the school district;
- education centers;
- skill centers;
- dropout prevention programs; and
- other public or private organizations, excluding sectarian or religious organizations.

Students who have been expelled, suspended, subjected to disciplinary actions, or who are academically at risk are eligible for educational services from these entities.

The contract between the school district and the organization must specify the specific learning standards that the student is expected to achieve. The student's placement must be determined jointly by the school district, the service provider, and the student's parent or legal guardian. The Superintendent of Public Instruction must adopt rules to allow a student to reenter at the appropriate grade level. Students who are 16 years or older may take the general educational development (GED) test. School districts may require a student who has been suspended or expelled to attend an alternative educational organization as a condition of continuing enrollment.

The funding for alternative educational service provider contracts must be derived from the school district's state funded apportionment program, and assumes, for purposes of funding, that the student is enrolled in the school district. School districts

may retain up to 15 percent of the total amount allocated for administrative purposes.

The education center criteria for eligible common school dropouts are clarified. A person is a common school dropout even if one month has not passed since the person dropped out, if the school board asks the education center to admit the person because the person has dropped out or because the person is unable to attend the school for disciplinary reasons, including suspension or expulsion. The Legislature encourages school districts to cooperate with education centers in providing alternative educational opportunities.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 30, 1997.

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