

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2409

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### As Reported By House Committee On:

Education

**Title:** An act relating to character education.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the character education partnership program.

**Revised for 1st Substitute:** Encouraging character education programs in schools.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Talcott, Stensen, Carlson, Rockefeller, Quall, Santos, Haigh, O'Brien, Veloria, Keiser, D. Schmidt, Thomas, D. Sommers, McDonald, Lantz, Hurst, Skinner, Ruderman and Esser.

### Brief History:

#### Committee Activity:

Education: 1/17/00, 2/3/00 [DPS].

#### Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- School districts are strongly encouraged to implement, in partnership with parents and their local communities, character education programs that incorporate into each school's curriculum the character traits and values identified in the state's basic education laws.
- School districts that choose to implement a character education program will receive for that purpose one dollar per elementary school student for the 2001 fiscal year.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Quall, Democratic Co-Chair; Talcott, Republican Co-Chair; Haigh, Democratic Vice Chair; Schindler, Republican Vice Chair; Carlson; Cox; Keiser; Rockefeller; Santos; D. Schmidt; Schual-Berke; Stensen; Thomas and Wensman.

**Staff:** Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

## **Background:**

During the 1990's, the Legislature adopted two laws that alluded to the role of schools in character development. In 1993, as part of the state's education reform legislation, the goal of the Basic Education Act was amended as follows:

"The goal of the Basic Education Act for the schools of the state of Washington set forth in this chapter shall be to provide students with the opportunity to become responsible citizens, to contribute to their own economic well being and to that of their families and communities, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives. To these ends, the goals of each school district, with the involvement of parents and community members, shall be to provide opportunities for all students to develop the knowledge and skills essential to:

- Read with comprehension, write with skill, and communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings;
- Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history; geography; arts; and health and fitness;
- Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems; and
- Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities."

In 1994, the Legislature added additional language to the Basic Education Act on essential values and character traits: "The Legislature also recognizes that certain basic values and character traits are essential to individual liberty, fulfillment, and happiness. However, these values and traits are not intended to be assessed or be standards for graduation. The Legislature intends that local communities have the responsibility for determining how these values and character traits are learned as determined by consensus at the local level. These values and traits include the importance of:

- honesty, integrity, and trust;
- respect for self and others;
- responsibility for personal actions and commitments;
- self-discipline and moderation;
- diligence and a positive work ethic;
- respect for law and authority;
- healthy and positive behavior; and
- family as the basis of society."

Since the mid 1990's, three school districts, one elementary school, and the Seattle Indian Center have participated in a federal grant program that funds locally

developed and supported character education programs. With funding of about \$31,000 per site per year since 1997, the five programs have each developed unique approaches to character development. The grants will expire after this year.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** The Legislature finds that academic success rests on a foundation of character. The Legislature intends to encourage school districts, in partnership with parents and local communities, to integrate character education into each school's curriculum. School districts are strongly encouraged to implement character education programs that incorporate into the curriculum the character traits and values identified in the state's basic education laws. The districts are also strongly encouraged to develop the programs in partnership with parents and the entire spectrum of stakeholders in their local communities. School districts that choose to implement character education programs will receive funding for that purpose for the 2001 fiscal year. The funding formula is based on one dollar for each full-time equivalent elementary school student. However, the minimum amount each school district will receive is \$200 for each elementary school the district operates.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The findings section is revised and the competitive grant program proposed in the original bill is removed. The law describing various essential character traits and values that are part of the state's educational objectives is revised to encourage school districts to implement character education programs around those traits and values. School districts may receive funding for character education programs on a dollar per elementary school basis if they choose to accept the encouragement.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 20, 2000.

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

**Testimony For:** (Original bill) Academic success, like success in life, rests on a foundation of character. In schools, issues of character and safety are inextricably intertwined. Most school safety issues are dealt with through disciplinary measures implemented after a problem has occurred; this legislation proposes a preventive approach instead. Across the country, in schools with character education programs, disciplinary actions are cut in half, staff absences have declined, and student suspensions are down by 10 percent. When students and teachers learn how to show respect for each other, academic achievement increases and school climate dramatically improves. This legislation will help parents, schools, and communities to develop a way to integrate common core values into their schools' curriculum, help schools to create a common language, and give teachers permission to include

character into class discussions. Children tend to emulate heros, and today their heros are stars from sports, music, movies and television, whether or not those stars are people of character. It would be better to teach children about people of character so they can choose heros with the traits and values that will help the children live responsible and healthy lives. When schools, parents, and churches teach character, the messages children receive are reinforced by the entire adult society surrounding them. Some parents are absent from their children's lives, but those children still need guidance and direction in order to succeed.

(Concerns) The funding proposed for character education should be available to all children, so the competitive grant process proposed in the legislation should be replaced with an allocation system for all school children.

**Testimony Against:** (Original bill) The legislation does not define the values and character traits that will be included in the character education programs developed by local communities and schools. The values may not be healthy or appropriate. The character education programs developed may interfere with parental rights and values. In addition, the requirement for competitive bidding is a problem. Value clarification as practiced in society today, along with death and suicide education, have helped to create the violence in our schools.

**Testified:** Representative Gigi Talcott and Representative Michael Stensen, prime sponsors; James M. Stewart, Family Character First; Tracia Lofgreen, C. Joy McDivitt; Joe Pope, Association of Washington School Principals; Dwayne Slate, Washington State School Directors Association; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Barbara Casey, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; Mark Walker, Kathy Walker, Kinsey Garcia, Debbie Blankenship, Rogers High School; Robert Howard, University of Washington; Bob Young, Mayor, city of Bonney Lake; and Ken Kanikeberg, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(Opposed) Cris Shardelman.