

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2409

As Passed House:
February 10, 2000

Title: An act relating to character education.

Brief Description: Encouraging character education programs in schools.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by 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];
Appropriations: 2/5/00, 2/7/00 [DP2S].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/10/00, 89-8.

Brief Summary of Second 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 may receive funding for that purpose from the state general fund for the 2001 fiscal year.

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).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Education. Signed by 27 members: Representatives Huff, Republican Co-Chair; H. Sommers, Democratic Co-Chair; Barlean, Republican Vice Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; D. Schmidt, Republican Vice Chair; Alexander; Cody; Crouse; Gombosky; Grant; Kagi; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lambert; Linville; Lisk; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; Regala; Rockefeller; Ruderman; Sullivan; Sump; Tokuda and Wensman.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Benson; Boldt; McIntire and Mulliken.

Staff: Julie Salvi (786-7349).

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 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. When developing the character education programs, the districts shall comply with the Open Meetings Act.

School districts that choose to implement character education programs may receive funding for that purpose for the 2001 fiscal year. The funding formula is based on an equal amount per full-time equivalent elementary school student. However, the minimum amount each school district will receive is \$200 for each elementary school the district operates. If the funding is not appropriated by June 30, 2000, the legislation is null and void.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Second Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed; however, the bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Testimony For: (Education) (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 heroes, and today their heroes 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 heroes 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.

(Appropriations) Since the passage of HB 1209, achievement has increased through standards, assessments and state accountability. This bill recognizes that parents are the first and primary moral educators and that schools have a role in reinforcing traits and values deemed important by parents and the local community. Section two encourages schools to develop character education programs consistent with the traits and values first enacted in HB 1209. Programs funded under the provisions of this bill are expected to be developed in coordination with parents and community stakeholders for grassroots level ownership. Studies have shown that schools with the best student achievement tend to be schools where students understand the purpose of schooling, where they know how to get along with each other and with the adults in their schools. This is money well spent.

Testimony Against: (Education) (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.

(Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Education) 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.

(Appropriations) Representative Gigi Talcott; Representative Don Cox; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; and Ken Kanikeberg, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.