

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 6709

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Children & Family Services

**Title:** An act relating to coordinated service and education planning for children in out-of-home care.

**Brief Description:** Addressing service and education planning for children in out-of-home care.

**Sponsors:** Senators Eide, Costa, Rasmussen, Thibaudeau, Prentice, Fraser, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe, Haugen and Keiser.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Children & Family Services: 2/21/02, 2/28/02 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Bill**  
**(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to submit a proposal to the Legislature by October 1, 2002 addressing the educational stability of children in foster care fewer than 75 days.
- Requires the implementation of a pilot project within existing resources to assist foster children to remain enrolled in the school they were attending before entering foster care.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Tokuda, Chair; Kagi, Vice Chair; Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Miloscia, Morell and Nixon.

**Staff:** Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

**Background:**

Each year in Washington, over 12,000 school-age children enter state custody and the

foster care system because of abuse, neglect, abandonment or family conflict. Approximately half of these children leave state custody within 60 days.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) completed a statutorily required study in November, 2001, entitled "Educational Attainment of Foster Youth". The study included a review of previous research in this area, and a statewide analysis of foster youth in the Washington public schools.

Among the study findings, researchers found that compared to their peers not in foster care:

- foster youth score 15-20 points below non-foster youth in statewide achievement tests;
- 59 percent of foster youth in 11<sup>th</sup> grade complete high school on time, compared with 86 percent of non-foster youth;
- twice as many foster youth repeat a grade, change schools in a school year, or enroll in special education, compared with non-foster youth; and,
- a youth's length of stay in foster care does not appear to be related to educational attainment.

The study report identifies a number of factors that influence academic achievement for all youth. Of the five most important predictors of on-time high school graduation, the second most important factor was the number of times a child changes school during the school year. The study found that twice as many foster youth changed schools once during the school year, and three times as many foster youth changed schools twice, when compared to non-foster youth.

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### **Summary of Amended Bill:**

The DSHS and the OSPI are required to submit a proposal to the Legislature by October 1, 2002 addressing the educational stability of children in foster care fewer than 75 days. Representatives of school districts and foster care advocates must be consulted.

The proposal must consider when children might best be served by continuing attendance at the school they were enrolled in prior to the placement out of home, how costs related to transportation may be addressed, arrangements for children being home schooled or in private school, coordination of judicial scheduling, and any regulatory or statutory changes needed to carry out the proposal.

The Nooksack Valley and Mount Vernon school districts are required to implement a pilot project, within existing resources, to assist children in foster care fewer than 75 days to continue attending the school in which they were enrolled prior to entering foster care. The school districts are required to provide data to the working group studying this issue. The DSHS is required to negotiate a plan with the schools for transporting the

child.

The bill contains an emergency clause.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The Senate bill required the DSHS and the OSPI to submit a proposal to the Legislature by October 1, 2002 addressing the educational stability of children in foster care fewer than seventy-five days.

The bill as amended retains this provision, and adds a requirement that the Nooksack Valley and Mount Vernon school districts implement a pilot project within existing resources to assist children in foster care fewer than 75 days to continue attending the school in which they were enrolled prior to entering foster care. The school districts are required to provide data to the working group studying this issue. The DSHS is required to negotiate a plan with the schools for transporting the child. The amended bill also contains an emergency clause.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 20, 2002.

**Effective Date of Amended Bill:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

**Testimony For:** Kids in foster care need stability. The study by the Institute shows that drop out rates are horrendous. Stability would really help. The workgroup will move this issue forward in the right direction, and can help define how this policy will work for kids in foster care.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Donna Christensen, Washington State Catholic Conference; Darlene Flowers, Foster Parents Association of Washington State; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Carol Taylor Cann, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; and La Verne Lamoureux, Department of Social and Health Services.