

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2356

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 27, 2002

Title: An act relating to school placement for school age children in foster care.

Brief Description: Creating a working group and pilot project to address school age children who enter short-term foster care.

Sponsors: House Committee on Children & Family Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Kagi, McIntire, Santos, Dickerson, Tokuda, Darneille, Clements, Schual-Berke and Wood).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/21/02, 2/27/02 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Costa, Vice Chair; Carlson, Franklin, Hewitt, Kastama, Kohl-Welles, Long and Stevens.

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

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 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 eleventh 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.

Summary of Amended Bill: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must, within existing resources, convene a workgroup and prepare a plan on educational stability for children in short- term foster care. The membership of the workgroup is described. The duties of the workgroup are to:

- determine the current status of school placement for children placed in short-term foster care;
- identify options and possible funding sources from existing resources which could be made available to assure that children placed in short-term foster care are able to remain in the school where they were enrolled prior to placement;
- submit recommendations to the Legislature by November 1, 2002, to assure the best interest of the child receives primary consideration in school placement decisions.

The Nooksack Valley and Mount Vernon school districts must 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 must provide data to the working group studying this issue. DSHS must negotiate a plan with the schools for transporting the child but is not responsible for the cost of transportation.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The date for the pilot project to be implemented is changed to April 30, 2002. The Department of Social and Health services is not responsible for transportation costs of children in the pilot project.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: We need to better understand what happens to children in foster care. This pilot project will allow us to see how their education is affected.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Stephenie Burbach, Families for Kids; Laverne Lamoureux, Children's Administration, DSHS; Carol Taylor Cann, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; Julie Walters, Washington State Court Appointed Special Advocates; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.