

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2704

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to alternative learning experience programs.

Brief Description: Providing standards for alternative learning experience programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Talcott, Haigh, Tom, Kenney, Anderson, Nixon, Carrell, Boldt, Kirby, Benson, Hunter, Jarrett, Priest, Skinner, Upthegrove, Shabro, Miloscia, Quall, Buck, Ruderman, Moeller, Rockefeller and Kagi.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/26/04, 1/28/04 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Describes the type of student plans, staff contact and assessments that must be included in alternative learning experience programs funded with state monies.
- Permits the enrollment of part-time students, direct parental involvement, and individualized instruction in the programs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; McDermott, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Tom, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, Haigh, Hunter, McMahan and Rockefeller.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

Under current law, school districts may provide directly or through contract for alternative learning programs. The programs generally serve students with learning needs that can best be met outside a traditional classroom setting. Under the rules currently in place for these programs, participants must be enrolled in the programs full-time and must spend at least part of their time on the school site.

Beginning in 2000, the Superintendent of Public Instruction recommended a new set of program rules. The rules would permit part-time enrollments and would allow contact to include indirect contact through the use of instant messaging, telephone calls, and other telecommunication linkages. Since the rule change can affect school enrollments, the agency has submitted it to the legislative fiscal committees for their review and approval as is required by current law. The law requires the superintendent to submit recommended basic education formula changes to the Legislature for its approval, amendment or rejection.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

School districts may contract for or directly provide alternative learning experience programs for eligible full-time and part-time students. The programs must fulfill the following requirements:

- Address the needs of students for learning in a nontraditional environment.
- Be supervised by certificated staff.
- Provide each student with direct personal contact. The contact may be provided in various ways, including interaction through a telephone, interactive computer or interactive video.
- Through contact, provide each student with instruction, testing, assignment review, and evaluation.
- Annually assess each full-time student, using all required state and district assessments.
- Exempt part-time home-schooled students and private-school students from the requirement to take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning.

The programs may:

- Include significant parental participation in the design and implementation of a student's learning plan.
- Include individualized courses of study.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The superintendent will adopt program rules, e-mail is one of the types of permissible direct contact, school districts must adopt and periodically review policies for the programs, students in the programs must have individual learning plans, and the language was moved from a section of current law and placed in its own new section.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 26, 2004.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of

session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Alternative learning programs have proven to be successful in meeting the educational needs of students who do not have access or do not respond to a traditional classroom setting. Among the types of students who benefit are children who are in the hospital or incarcerated. This legislation will help clarify the types of technology that may be used to communicate with students and will allow part-time students to participate in the programs. It allows distance learning to be incorporated into the programs, helping programs such as the Federal Way Internet Academy clarify its role in the public schools. Permitting part-time student enrollment will allow home-schooled students to participate in the programs while retaining their home-school status.

Testimony Against: Children who are home-schooled are not at risk. The state auditor is in the process of auditing parent partnership programs and no legislation should pass until that audit is complete. The Legislature should be concerned about the fiscal impact of the legislation.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Talcott, prime sponsor; Rep. Haigh, co-sponsor; John Cohen, Steilacoom Historical School District; Lile Holland, Washington Association for Learning Alternatives; Alton McDonald, National Action Network; Wes Pruitt, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; and Sally McLean, Federal Way Public Schools.

(In support with concerns) Greg Williamson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Martin Mueller, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(Opposed) DiAnna Brannan, Christian Homeschool Network.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.