

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1659

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to equitable opportunity for all.

Brief Description: Creating the joint select committee on equitable opportunity for all.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, McCoy, Pettigrew, Kenney, Hunter, Chase, Dickerson, Simpson and Upthegrove.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/9/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the Joint Select Committee on Equitable Opportunity for all to study efforts underway for the implementation of action items recommended by the Multi-Ethnic Think Tank and to report back to the Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott and Santos.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires schools and school districts receiving federal Title I funding to report on the percentage of students who reach state standards in reading and mathematics. Districts must monitor their progress toward federal improvement goals through results on the fourth, seventh, and 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading and mathematics. In addition to measuring the progress of students as a whole, schools and districts must measure and report on the progress of students in various demographic subgroups. The subgroups include students who fall into categories labeled Black, White, Asian, American Indian, Hispanic, low-income, special education, and limited English proficient. The federal law includes a graduated series of

school improvement and corrective action steps districts and the state may take in Title I schools and districts if students in any subgroup do not make adequate progress toward the goals over a number of years.

Minority students comprise a growing percentage of the student population in Washington, in part due to the rising number of immigrants to the state. In 2000, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, through its community outreach office, coordinated the Multi-Ethnic Think Tank (Think Tank). The Think Tank represented an alliance of the African American, American Indian/Alaska Natives, Asian Pacific Islander American, Hispanic, and low socio-economic communities. The work of the Think Tank produced a set of recommended action steps aimed at raising the academic achievement of students in these populations.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Joint Select Committee on Equitable Opportunity (Committee) is created for the purpose of evaluating what efforts exist to implement the action steps recommended by the Multi-Ethnic Think Tank in its 2002 position paper. The Committee will consist of two members from each caucus in the House of Representatives and Senate representing the committees on education and juvenile justice issues.

The Committee will consult with stakeholders representing communities of color, special education, and others and will study the efforts already underway and the resources necessary for full implementation of the following action items:

- (1) add a fifth Washington learning goal to ensure culturally competent education;
- (2) infuse multicultural education goals into the existing four Washington state learning goals;
- (3) integrate multicultural and technological learning objectives in the Washington essential academic learning requirements;
- (4) standardize the data collection, categorization, and reporting for all ethnic groups;
- (5) recruit and retain racial and ethnic minority staff and administration; and
- (6) require professional development to be culturally and linguistically responsive.

By September 1, 2006, the Committee will report its findings to the Legislature and must recommend a reasonable time frame for full implementation. The implementation recommendations must be prioritized based on existing efforts and the resources necessary for full implementation. The Committee may also include recommendations regarding additional actions that support and elucidate the functionality of multicultural education and cultural competency in meeting the goals of education.

The Committee will be staffed by Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research. Legislative members will be eligible for per diem and travel expenses.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes a technical correction to the original bill and also expands the scope of recommendations the Committee may bring back to the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill addresses rigor for all of our students by adding the element of cultural competence for all of our students. Children who are engaged with a multi-cultural education will achieve academically. Parents have difficulties communicating with schools across different languages and cultures. This bill provides a strategic approach to addressing the achievement gap and the problem of dropouts.

The achievement gap is the reason for this bill. We need systemic changes; not add-on programs. The essential academic learning requirements are not accomplished when the context of the school doesn't reflect the culture of the students. Cultural competence is more than facts. It conveys to students that their history and culture are important and valuable. It is important to teach about tribal contributions to science and mathematics. Where inequity exists, we all are impacted.

When students fail the WASL, it undermines their self esteem and it is sort of a constant barrage against their cultural identity. This test is culturally and economically biased. The most consistent data we get from this test is a measurement of household income. Students who score well are from higher income homes where parents also have higher educational levels.

This bill would be a revolution. This is no small task. It would be the beginning of bringing children from the margins into the circle. Each action step in this bill has been thought out and articulated by hundreds of diverse, ethnic representatives of the Think Tank. It will be critical to have this bill funded.

The goal of this bill is important. All students should have the skills they need, and we should have high expectations for all students. We suggest adding a provision for looking at specific actions teachers and principals can take to be more responsive to students.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (Original bill) Representative Santos, prime sponsor; Doreen Cato, First Place; Uriel Iniguez; Christie Perkins, Washington Special Education Coalition; Michael Felts, Suquamish Tribe; Martina Whelshula, Colville Indian Reservation; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Jamie Valadez, Lower Elwha Kallam Tribe; Anna Marie Wilson, Nisqually Tribe; and Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.