
Education Committee

HB 2886

Brief Description: Increasing the number of school nurses.

Sponsors: Representatives Seaquist, Priest, Sullivan, Haigh, Green, Quall, Haler, Jarrett, Santos, Kenney, Appleton, Moeller, Morrell, Barlow, Roberts, Liias, Simpson, Goodman, Lantz, McIntire, VanDeWege, Conway and Nelson; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that the formula for distribution of basic education funds reflect, by the 2013-14 school year, a ratio of one school nurse for every 750 full-time equivalent students, to be phased in over five years beginning with the 2008-09 school year.
- Subject to funding, establishes the School Nurse Corps to provide a regional school health service system.
- Requires public school districts to provide for professional registered nurse services to manage the student and school health services.

Hearing Date: 1/31/08

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

Staffing Levels. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services includes, in "Healthy People 2010", a goal of a school nurse to student ratio of 1:750. The January 11, 2008 report on funding of school health services, "How the K-12 Public Schools Budget Funds School Health Services", prepared by Legislative fiscal staff, finds the nurse to student ratio in Washington public schools is 1:2,269. This figure does not include contributions through the School Nurse Corps (SNC) or nurses that have been hired by school districts as consultants.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

School Nurse Corps Program (SNC). The SNC was designed in response to findings that many small school districts did not provide nursing services and that even where some nursing services were provided, the nurse to student ratio was quite high. The SNC places a school nurse supervisor in each Educational Service District (ESD) and supplies a pool of nurses that districts may share. Each ESD SNC program is designed and implemented based on the identified needs of the communities and schools within that ESD. Since its inception, the SNC has been administered through the OSPI.

Basic Education Funding. By statute, the formula for distributing Basic Education funds to school districts is based on a staffing ratio of 49 Certificated Instructional Staff (CIS) per 1,000 average annual FTE students in grades K through three and 46 CIS per 1,000 FTE students in grades four through 12. This is equal to one CIS for every 20.4 students in grades K through three, and one CIS for every 21.7 students in grades four through 12.

The term CIS includes teachers, counselors, librarians, nurses, school psychologists, and other individuals who must be certified by the state to provide instruction and instructional support services in public schools. The formulas do not distinguish between the various types of CIS, and there is no statement of legislative intent or direction to school districts about prioritizing among the various staff.

The formula in the operating budget for the General Apportionment Program provides an enhanced staffing ratio for grades K through four of 53.2 CIS per 1,000 FTE students, or one CIS for every 18.8 students. The enhancement is not considered part of Basic Education and school districts must document actual staffing ratios at least equal to the allocation in order to receive those funds.

Summary of Bill:

The following findings are made:

- the statewide average of school nurses to students is 1:2650;
- the need for school nurses is increasing with the increasing incidence of various medical problems, including peanut allergies, asthma, and diabetes type 2;
- each school district has its own unique challenges to providing the level of support needed to meet the health needs of students at school;
- unless students are healthy, they cannot learn; and
- studies show that an adequate nurse-to-student ratio is 1:750.

The Basic Education formula must reflect by the 2013-14 school year, a ratio of one certificated nurse for every 750 FTE students. This new requirement is to be phased in over five years, commencing with the 2008-09 school year, in accordance with distribution provisions specified in the omnibus state appropriations act. Public school districts are required to provide for professional registered nurse services to manage the student and school health services in accord with the new school nurse to student ratio found in the revisions to the Basic Education formula.

A new section is added codifying the SNC and its purposes. Subject to funding, the OSPI is to establish the SNC with the purpose of providing a regional school health service system directed toward improving the health, wellness, and safety of students. The SNC shall assign a school nurse to each ESD.

The SNC shall provide health services to students in the neediest school districts. The OSPI shall establish a process for school districts to receive additional health services, however, the resources provided through the SNC shall not supplant funding already being used by the school districts for health services. To the extent funding is provided, the SNC shall assist in conducting annual school health services district assessments, provide technical assistance, offer school nurse professional development, and assist in orienting and mentoring new school nurses.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2008.

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