
Education Committee

SSB 6743

Brief Description: Regarding training and guidelines for teachers of students with autism.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Rasmussen, McAuliffe, Tom and Shin).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB), together with the autism task force and others, to develop autism awareness and training policy guidelines for schools, and to report these guidelines to the Governor, Legislature, and the school districts.
- Requires school districts to use the autism awareness and training guidelines to develop and adopt school district policy to ensure that school personnel are well-prepared and up-to-date on the most effective methods of teaching children with autism.

Hearing Date: 2/26/08

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD is a developmental disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is characterized by impairments in social interactions, language and communication, and repetitive behaviors and preoccupations. Across the spectrum, there is a wide variability in symptoms and severity. In Washington, ASD is estimated to affect between two and six children per 1000.

Educator Training and Certification. The 20 member Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) has responsibility and authority for policy and oversight of Washington's system of educator preparation certification, continuing education, and assignment. This body establishes certification and endorsement requirements for teachers, administrators, and educational staff associates. These certification and endorsement requirements do not apply to classified staff.

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.

For an endorsement in special education, course work regarding "exceptionality", defined as an overview of all disabling conditions, including low to high incidence disabling conditions, is required. Course work in alternative delivery systems and strategies, and instructional methods, for special education is also required. There is no requirement in statute or rule that teachers receive instruction specific to ASD or any other particular disabling condition.

Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force. In 2005, the Legislature created the Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force (task force). The 2007 Legislation extended and funded the task force through June 30, 2008.

Summary of Bill:

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), together with the autism task force and state and nonprofit agencies that promote autism awareness and provide programs and services for people with autism, must develop autism awareness and training policy guidelines for schools to ensure that teachers responsible for autistic children are well-prepared and up-to-date on the most effective methods of teaching children with autism. These guidelines must ensure that candidates for certificates complete instruction in autism awareness and methods of teaching students with autism. For those already certificated, instruction in autism awareness is required by the 2010-11 school year as part of the professional development requirements established by the OSPI.

By September 1, 2008, the OSPI and the PESB must develop recommendations for autism awareness instruction and methods of teaching for all teacher preparation and professional development programs and submit the recommendations to the Governor and the education committees of the Legislature. Three months later, on December 1, 2008, the OSPI is to report the policy guidelines to school districts to use to develop and adopt their policies.

By April 1, 2009, the school districts must use the guidelines to ensure that teachers are well-prepared and up-to-date on the most effective methods of teaching children with autism. The autism guidelines adopted by the school districts are made applicable to classified staff seeking a special education endorsement or certification, although under current law a classified employee is a staff member working in a role which does not require a valid teaching certificate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available on original bill.

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