

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2679

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 25, 2008
Ways & Means, March 03, 2008

Title: An act relating to improving educational outcomes for students in foster care.

Brief Description: Creating programs to improve educational outcomes for students in foster care.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Roberts, Pettigrew, Hunt, Hasegawa, Sullivan, Chase, Morrell, McIntire, Santos, Barlow, Simpson, Kenney, Goodman, Wood, Darneille, Lantz and McDonald).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/08, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/20/08, 2/25/08 [DPA-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/03/08 [DPA(EDU)].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Tom, Vice Chair; King, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Eide, Hobbs, Holmquist, Kauffman, McDermott, Oemig, Rasmussen, Weinstein and Zarelli.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Fairley, Hatfield, Hobbs, Honeyford, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Tom.

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: The Washington Legislature established in statute a state policy that, wherever practical and in the best interests of the child, children placed into foster care must remain enrolled in the schools they were attending at the time they entered foster care. In order to maximize the educational continuity and achievement for foster children, administrative

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regions of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must develop protocols with the school districts specifying strategies for communication, coordination, and collaboration regarding the status and progress of foster children placed in the region.

Under current Washington law, in order to serve students who are the subject of child dependency cases, their educational records must be released to the DSHS upon request. DSHS must certify that it will not disclose the education records to any other party without the written consent of the parent or student, unless authorized under state law.

There are nine educational service districts (ESDs) in Washington, each serving a specific region of the state. ESDs provide training, technical assistance, administrative support and other services to school districts. The Puget Sound ESD includes 35 school districts in King and Pierce counties plus Bainbridge Island.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Subject to available funds, Puget Sound ESD must designate a foster care program supervisor to coordinate programs and services for students in foster care. The foster care supervisor must: facilitate the use of education resources to improve educational stability and other measurable outcomes for foster children; develop and distribute model school district policies for foster children; provide specified training to public school staff; provide technical assistance to schools for interagency agreements related to foster children; coordinate with the McKinney-Vento program supervisor in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI); coordinate with OSPI the interpretation of federal law relative to data exchange; provide technical assistance to school districts to facilitate local data exchange; coordinate with the Children's Administration education leads in Regions 4 and 5 to complete interagency agreements for top priority school districts; and establish a model information and data-sharing agreement between school districts and the Children's Administration.

Subject to available funds, Puget Sound ESD must also create a grant program for local school districts to improve stability and educational outcomes for students in foster care. The grants must be awarded to school districts with the highest incidence of Child Protective Services (CPS) removals and foster care placements. The grant money must not supplant current funding; it must be used to supplement and enhance educational stability and outcomes. Grant activities may include dedicated staff time for various activities that support foster youth and fees normally covered by parents for extracurricular activities, school pictures, yearbooks, ASB cards, school fines, etc. Puget Sound ESD must report annually to the Legislature on the grant program outcomes.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction must report annually to the Legislature on the educational experiences and progress of students in foster care. The data must be disaggregated in the smallest units possible without identifying an individual student.

Subject to available funds, DSHS must fund two school district-based foster care recruitment pilots in one or more school districts with the highest number of CPS removals and foster care placements. The pilots must coordinate with existing foster care recruitment contracts and the family-to-family model. DSHS must report annually to the Legislature on the increase or decrease of foster homes within the pilot areas.

Education records of students who are the subject of child dependency cases must be transmitted to DSHS within two days after receiving a request from DSHS.

A null and void clause is included.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): Clarifies that the foster care program supervisor must provide training to public school staff and coordinate with both education leads in both Region 4 and Region 5 of the Children's Administration. Clarifies that students who are the subject of dependency cases are the ones whose education records must be transmitted upon DSHS's request.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Substitute Bill (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Children in foster care need educational stability and extra assistance that parents normally provide. All too often these children have high drop out rates and end up in the criminal justice system. Students in foster care have to repeat credits as a result of moving from school to school. These measures and investments address educational stability that will strengthen the educational progress and help children do better in school. School is often the only stable aspect of life for foster youth. The state has a special obligation toward these children.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Representative Roberts, prime sponsor; Peggy Brown, OSPI; Janis Avery, Treehouse; Jemila Lee Booker, Passion to Action.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on EDU Recommended Amendments (Ways & Means): PRO: Children in foster care need educational stability and extra assistance that parents normally provide. This bill will provide the additional supports to assist students.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.