

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6549

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, January 28, 2008

Title: An act relating to culminating projects in the area of environmental education.

Brief Description: Creating the sustainable environment culminating project grant program.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Hobbs, Tom, Weinstein, Franklin, Zarelli, Parlette, Jacobsen and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/23/08, 1/28/08 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6549 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Tom, Vice Chair; Eide, Hobbs, Kauffman, McDermott, Oemig, Rasmussen and Weinstein.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator King, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: Beginning with class of 2008, all public high school students must complete a culminating project as a graduation requirement. While each school district determines the guidelines for the Culminating Project, the students must demonstrate their learning competencies and their preparations related to statewide learning goals.

Washington law requires all public schools to give instruction in science with special reference to the environment. Additionally, the State Board of Education created a rule that requires instruction about conservation, natural resources, and the environment to be provided at all grade levels in an interdisciplinary manner.

Nine educational service districts (ESDs) in Washington each serve a specific region in the state. ESDs provide training, technical assistance, administrative support, and other services to school districts.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The Sustainable Environment Culminating Project grant program is created. The program will establish an organized regional approach,

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providing students with environmentally related culminating projects that connect school academics with natural resource career possibilities.

Grant funds for the program will be disbursed through a competitive grant process administered by ESDs that receive funding. These ESDs must award the grant funds to a nonprofit organization that has experience with delivering applied learning opportunities to students in the areas of environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource based education. The nonprofit grant recipients may work with tribal education departments. ESDs may also pool grant funds in order to award one grant to a single nonprofit organization that will work with individual school districts.

The nonprofit grant recipients are required to provide instructional, professional, and technological assistance to school districts. The nonprofits must assist school districts develop culminating projects for students. The projects must allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a real-world hands-on context; provide a forum that allows students to interact with professionals; promote leadership skills; improve student learning and promote a sense of personal responsibility through hands-on, technology-assisted science and community research; and help students learning about responsible stewardship and careers in sustainable design.

By December 2009, the nonprofit grant recipients must report to the ESDs and the Legislature regarding the number of students served by the program, the types and number of projects completed, and the feedback received from students and educators.

Subject to the availability of funds, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must work with the nonprofit grant recipients to implement a statewide online project database where students can find project opportunities thorough connections with community-based and agency resources and post their projects. The database should be housed and managed by OSPI.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Requires ESDs receiving funding to award grant funds to a nonprofit organization that has proven experience with delivering applied learning opportunities to students in the areas of environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource based education. Explains that the nonprofit grant recipients may work with tribal education departments.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2008.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Students are very likely to be successful whenever they have the opportunity to do relevant hands-on learning. Forests provide habitat, beauty, clean water and air, and jobs; there is a statewide realization of how important it is to tie our economy to a healthy environment. Young folks need to be engaged now to help begin solving the problem of climate change. While companies believe sustainable development is

important, there are not enough skilled people to meet this challenge. Students will have a lot of environmental and natural resource career opportunities. Environmental science in high school helps students find fields they would like to pursue in college. However, school districts presently have a limited ability to make connections between students and the environmental professionals and organizations. A public-private partnership is needed to facilitate connections with professionals in an organized regional approach. The ESDs will make the program sustainable on a regional basis. The OSPI database would be a great resource and expand opportunities for students.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Mark Doumit, Washington Forest Protection Association; Lynne Ferguson, Ayana Cleveland, Megan Houghton, Parker Townley, Martharose Laffey, Pacific Education Institute; Brian Barker, Pacific Education Institute, Association of Washington School Principals; Abby Ruskey, Pacific Education Institute, Environmental Education Association of Washington; Bob Butts, Gilda Wheeler, OSPI; Bill Keim, ESD 113; Craig Engelking, Sierra Club.