

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6743

As Amended by House, March 6, 2008

Title: An act relating to autism awareness instruction for teachers of students with autism.

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 History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/28/08, 2/06/08 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 2/15/08, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6743 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

Staff: Roman Dixon (786-7438)

Background: Under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), the federal government requires special education teachers to be highly qualified. "Highly qualified" means that the individual has met specific certification and licensure requirements. Washington State has adopted the federal standard. In addition, Washington also requires that special education teachers providing, designing, supervising, monitoring, or evaluating the provision of special education, possess substantial professional training. This requirement subjects a special education teacher to additional training requirements. However, under current law, neither IDEA nor Washington require teachers to receive instruction specific to autism awareness and methods of teaching students with autism.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Training policy guidelines are created for schools to ensure that teachers responsible for children with autism are well prepared and up-to-date on the most effective methods of teaching children with autism.

Candidates for a Washington instructional certificate must satisfactorily complete instruction in autism awareness and methods of teaching students with autism at an accredited institution of higher education. All other teachers (of students with autism) are required to complete the autism awareness instruction by the 2010-11 school year as part of their professional

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.

development. In addition, the autism instructional requirements also apply to classified staff seeking a special education endorsement or certificate.

By September 1, 2008, the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must develop and submit recommendations for autism awareness instruction to the Governor and the education committees of the Legislature.

By December 1, 2008, the OSPI must report the policy guidelines to school districts so that the districts can develop and adopt their policies.

By April 1, 2009, school districts must use the guidelines to develop and adopt district policies.

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 Original Bill: PRO: Children with autism have different issues than those for whom the teachers of special education have been trained. These children can succeed with the proper instruction. If the training is not required, the teachers and administrators won't do it.

OTHER: Without looking at the fiscal note, it appears that getting all of the current teachers and paraeducators this training might be fairly costly. The PESB has created a specialty endorsement that provides the opportunity for existing teachers to enhance their skills. An instructor just needs to propose that a specialty endorsement be done for autism.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor.

OTHER: Nasue Nishida, Professional Educator Standards Board; Lucinda Young, Washington Educators Association; Brian Jeffries, OSPI.

House Amendment(s): By September 1, 2008, subject to appropriated funds:

- OSPI must print and distribute the Autism Guidebook (Guidebook) as developed by the Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force and make the Guidebook and other relevant materials available on the OSPI website. OSPI must provide copies of the Guidebook to Educational Service Districts, school districts and other interested parties who request copies. The Guidebook must include specified guidelines to address the unique needs of children with autism.
- OSPI, in collaboration with other specified organizations, must distribute information on child find responsibilities per IDEA to agencies, districts, and schools that participate in the location, evaluation, and identification of children who may be eligible for early intervention services or special education services.
- OSPI, in collaboration with specified organizations, must develop posters to be distributed to medical offices and clinics, grocery stores, and other public places with

information on autism and contact information for services and support. These materials must be made available on the Internet.

By December 1, 2008, PESB and OSPI, in collaboration with other specified organizations, must develop recommendations for autism awareness instruction and methods of teaching students with autism for all educator preparation and professional development programs. The recommendations must be submitted to the Governor and the education committees of the Legislature and must be made available to school districts on OSPI's website.

If approved by the Legislature, each school district must use the recommendations developed by OSPI to develop and adopt a school district policy regarding recommended and required professional development for teachers and appropriate classified staff by July 1, 2009.

Replaces reference to "autistic children" with "children with autism."