
Education Committee

HB 1502

Brief Description: Increasing the number of school nurses.

Sponsors: Representatives Green, Kenney, Morrell, Appleton, Blake, Pettigrew, Seaquist, Ormsby, Chase, Haigh, Lias, Quall, Cody, Roberts, Goodman, White, Santos, Conway and Simpson.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that the formula for distribution of basic education funds reflect, by the 2015-2016 school year, a ratio of one school nurse for every 750 full-time equivalent students, to be phased in over seven years beginning with the 2009-2010 biennium.
- Requires public school districts to provide nurse services to manage the student and school health services in accord with the new, phased-in nurse to student ratios.

Hearing Date: 2/6/09

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195)

Background:

Nurse 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 through 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.

School Nurse Corps Program.

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.

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 Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (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 full-time equivalent (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 1:2,650;
- the need for school nurses is increasing with the increasing incidence of various medical problems, including peanut allergies, asthma, and diabetes;
- 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 shall reflect by the 2015-16 school year, a ratio of one certificated nurse for every 750 FTE students. This new requirement is to be phased in as follows:

- One nurse to every 1500 FTE students during the 2009-11 biennium.
- One nurse to every 1250 FTE students during the 2011-13 biennium.
- One nurse to every 1000 FTE students during the 2013-15 biennium.
- One nurse to every 750 FTE students during the 2015-17 biennium.

Public school districts are required to provide for 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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 1/26/2009.

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