
Education Committee

HB 1762

Brief Description: Increasing parental and community involvement in public education.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, Kenney and Morrell.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Tasks school districts with affording certain rights and annually informing students and their parents and guardians of these rights.
- Charges the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) with reporting on school district implementation.
- Creates an education advisory committee to advise and make recommendations regarding: (1) methods to increase parental and community involvement in public education; (2) strategies to improve the educational opportunities for all students; and (3) the effectiveness of the OEO and the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning.

Hearing Date: 2/10/09

Staff: Cece Clynych (786-7195)

Background:

Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO)

Established in 2006, the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is an agency within the governor's office. The OEO's purpose is to:

- provide information to students, parents, and the public regarding the public K-12 system;
- help resolve complaints by parents and students;
- refer complainants and others to appropriate resources, agencies, or departments;
- develop parental involvement materials;
- identify obstacles to greater parental and community involvement in education;

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.

- identify and recommend strategies for improving the success rates of ethnic and racial student groups and students with disabilities; and
- provide policy makers with recommendations that contribute to the improvement of the public K-12 system.

One of the recommendations in the OEO's 2007 Annual Report was to create a "Bill of Rights" to help Washington families understand what they can expect from public schools and the role they play in education.

Center for Improvement of Student Learning (CISL)

In 1993, as part of education reform, the Legislature created the CISL under the auspices of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The Legislature directed the CISL to serve as an education information clearinghouse. In 1996, the Legislature expanded the CISL's role to include providing best practices research on improving reading instruction. Pursuant to the same 2006 legislation that created the OEO, CISL was directed to: (1) serve as an information clearinghouse, including maintaining a website; (2) provide best practices research; (3) help inform educators regarding school boards' powers; (4) provide training and consultation services; (5) identify strategies to improve success rates of students in certain ethnic and racial groups; and (6) establish a model procedure to notify parents when students have not attended class or missed a day of school. The CISL may contract with others to help provide these services. The OSPI was charged with reporting to the Legislature biennially regarding the CISL, beginning in September of 2007.

Summary of Bill:

Rights of Students and Their Parents or Guardians

School districts must make a reasonable effort to ensure that students and their parents or guardians are afforded the following rights:

- to be treated respectfully;
- to have their questions answered and their messages returned in a timely manner;
- to be genuinely welcomed and encouraged to be involved, at school and at home, in the education process;
- to receive timely communications from schools;
- to access education records in accordance with state and federal laws and to be advised of the policies and procedures governing access;
- to inspect all required school district policies, including but not limited to policies regarding bullying prevention and sexual harassment; and
- to be advised of the existence of the OEO as well as its purposes and contact information.

Annually, school districts must inform students and their parents or guardians of these rights. School districts are not authorized to inform or permit participation by a parent or guardian if to do so would conflict with a valid restraining order, protective order, or a court order for custody or visitation.

Students, their parents or guardians, school personnel, and the OEO are directed to use the least formal means available, and preferably direct discussion, to satisfactorily resolve disputes that may arise regarding the delineated rights. No new private right of action is intended nor should

the language be so construed. At the same time, it should not be construed to limit a party's ability to bring an action based on rights conferred by other state or federal law.

The OEO is tasked with reporting to the Legislature regarding whether school districts have implemented these rights.

Creation of the Education Advisory Committee

The Governor shall create an education advisory committee. The advisory committee will make recommendations to the Governor regarding the OEO and to the OSPI regarding the effectiveness of the CISL. The committee shall also advise and make recommendations regarding methods to increase community involvement and ways to improve educational opportunities for all students.

Committee members shall serve three year terms. Of the committee's members, five must be parents or guardians of children enrolled in public K-12 schools and one must be a certificated employee or administrator in a public K-12 school, all of whom shall be selected by the Governor from a list submitted by the OSPI. Of the parents or guardians, at least one of these shall have a student enrolled in special education and one shall be a member of the Washington Congress of Parents and Teachers. In addition to those members selected by the Governor, there shall be a member from each of the four ethnic commissions and the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs. Committee members must represent the geographic and ethnic diversity of this state. The Superintendent of the OSPI shall serve as a nonvoting ex officio member of the committee and shall act as secretary.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 2/4/2009.

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