

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1889

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to paraeducator tutors.

Brief Description: Regarding paraeducator tutor certification.

Sponsors: Representatives Sullivan, Priest, Ormsby, Santos and Simpson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/11/09, 2/18/09, 2/20/09 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to establish voluntary paraeducator tutor certification, including certification standards, process, and requirements.
- Requires the SPI to approve professional development for certified paraeducator tutors to maintain their certification.
- Directs the SPI to submit a proposal to provide incentives for paraeducator tutors to pursue certification to the Legislature by December 1, 2009.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Probst, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cox, Dammeier, Hunt, Johnson, Liias, Maxwell, Orwall, Santos and Sullivan.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383)

Background:

Paraeducators are classified staff in a school who perform many functions, including providing instructional assistance and tutoring under the supervision of a teacher. There are

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no state requirements regarding the educational qualifications of paraeducators, although the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has developed recommended core competencies for paraeducators.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, paraeducators who provide instruction and are paid in whole or in part by Title I funds must meet a federal definition of "highly qualified." Since 2006, Title I paraeducators must either:

1. have completed two years of study at an institution of higher education;
2. have earned an Associate's Degree (or higher); or
3. demonstrate competency through an approved formal assessment.

In Washington, there are multiple options for the formal assessment, including: an online assessment administered by the Educational Testing Service; a portfolio that is graded by a regional review panel; a school district assessment approved by the OSPI; or an approved paraeducator apprenticeship program.

Paraeducators who are not associated with Title I are not required to meet these qualifications, although many districts encourage it to allow for flexibility in staffing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must establish voluntary paraeducator tutor certification by developing certification standards, a certification process, and certification requirements. Certification is for a five-year period. The SPI also approves professional development courses for certified paraeducator tutors to maintain their certification. Approved courses must be available in many different formats. The SPI is directed to develop a proposal to provide incentives for individuals to pursue paraeducator tutor certification and submit the proposal to the Legislature by December 1, 2009.

A paraeducator tutor is a paraeducator who provides or assists in providing direct instruction to students.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

It is clarified that paraeducator tutor certification is voluntary. The duties of the SPI are clarified as follows: to develop paraeducator tutor certification standards, process, and requirements; and approve professional development required for paraeducator tutors to maintain their certification. The SPI must (rather than should) submit a proposal to provide incentives for paraeducator tutor certification. "Paraeducator tutor" is defined.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 9, 2009.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Paraeducators are a vital part of the education team. There are over 20,000 paraeducators working in our schools today, partnering with teachers and helping our students learn and have the resources to be successful. There is much talk about the importance of professional development for teachers, but we frequently overlook professional development for paraeducators. There really are not any rules about qualifications for paraeducators. There should be state standards that would create a career path and support for paraeducators. An increasing number of students need special assistance from trained staff. Meeting the challenges of various groups of students—from special education to Title I to learning assistance—is a very difficult task without adequate training.

Ultimately, students will benefit from this bill. Some school districts have very high minimum qualifications for paraeducators and are able to provide paid training days. Not all school districts can do that. Many paraeducators have previously been in other careers; these are not under-skilled individuals in the slightest. When we use the words "paramedic" and "paralegal" it implies someone who is trained, certified, and well-respected. Why is it that the word "paraeducator" implies someone who monitors lunch and makes copies? We need to dispel stereotypes about paraeducators. The more educated the paraeducator, the more student achievement will soar.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Sullivan, prime sponsor; Doug Nelson and Marijean Woodward, Public School Employees of Washington and the Service Employees International Union; Ginger Cornwell and Pam Lux, Public School Employees of Washington; and Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.