

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1762

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, March 26, 2009

Title: An act relating to increasing parental and community involvement in public education.

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Education Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Santos, Kenney and Morrell).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/05/09, 62-35.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/18/09, 3/26/09 [DP-WM, DNP, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair, Early Learning; Oemig, Vice Chair, K-12; Hobbs, Jarrett, McDermott and Tom.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators King, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland and Holmquist.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Roach.

Staff: Juliana Roe (786-7438)

Background: The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) was established in 2006 as an agency within the Governor's Office. Its 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; identify and recommend strategies for improving the success rates of ethnic and racial student groups and students with disabilities; and provide policymakers with recommendations that contribute to the improvement of the public K-12 system.

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.

OEO recommended in its 2007 Annual Report that a "Bill of Rights" be created to help Washington families understand what they can expect from public schools and the role they play in education.

Summary of Bill: School districts must annually inform students and their parents or guardians of their rights either orally or in writing. These rights are as follows: 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. Students, their parents or guardians, school personnel, and the OEO are directed to use the least formal means available to resolve disputes regarding the delineated rights.

The OEO must consult with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, school districts, parent and teacher organizations, and student programs to determine whether school districts have implemented the delineated rights and report its findings to the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 10, 2009.

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: Parents and guardians are our children's first and best teachers. It is important to teach parents and guardians how to weave their way through the maze of policies and cultures involved in a school setting. The "Bill of Rights" set forth provide basic elements, such as the right to be treated respectfully; be welcomed; have questions answered and communicated in a timely fashion; and know school policies and procedures. This is something that will help support and develop parental involvement.

The OEO has been working all over the state in order to pursue the untapped resource of parents, guardians, and family members. The OEO can serve as a bridge to the gap between schools, districts, and parents, guardians, and family members in order to help students achieve. The biggest complaint that the OEO receives is that there is a breakdown of communication and respect. The OEO is used to mediate the conflict. Research shows that parent involvement leads to student achievement and the OEO strives to involve all parties. In order to do so, it is important to provide training and development to teachers, administrators, parents, and family members.

OTHER: The idea behind this bill is a good one, but only if it is funded. Right now, it appears as though this is another unfunded mandate at a time in which we are removing unfunded mandates from our system. Attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics need to be

embedded into the school culture to foster the communication and respect that is needed. Success cannot be achieved otherwise.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Santos, prime sponsor; Adie Simmons, Maria Flores, Office of Education Ombudsman; Sharon Rodgers, Iris Okimoto Nielsen, Sandra Rollins, parents; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; Kim Howard, Washington State PTA.

OTHER: Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators.