
Education Committee

HB 1447

Brief Description: Encouraging innovation in public schools.

Sponsors: Representatives Hunt, Orwall, Roberts, Liias, Haigh, Probst, Reykdal, Upthegrove and Hargrove.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a School Innovation Program (Program) intended to foster change in the public school system.
- Requires applicants to prepare a Program plan and, if funding is provided, directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to select no more than 10 pilot projects to operate for six years beginning in the 2013-14 school year.
- Authorizes waivers of specified state laws and rules for schools under the Program.
- Establishes a Program Account and authorizes the OSPI to seek public and private grant funds to support the Program.

Hearing Date: 2/8/11

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

In 1987 the Schools for the 21st Century was established in legislation as a pilot program intended to foster change in the public school system. The State Board of Education (SBE), in consultation with a Governor-appointed Task Force, selected 33 pilot schools which then received funding for 10 supplemental days of staff time and additional funding for training, curriculum development, and other resources. Pilot schools could also seek waivers of state laws regarding length of the school year, student-to-teacher ratios, Basic Education requirements, restrictions on funding for categorical programs, and other administrative rules.

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.

While their approaches varied, the pilot schools tended to focus on the following types of activities:

- collaborative instruction;
- alternative assessment;
- outcomes-based education;
- structural change, such as scheduling or class size reduction;
- partnerships with the community, families, and businesses; and
- curriculum change.

The first round of 22 pilot schools operated for six years, and the second round of 11 pilot schools operated for four years until 1994 when the Schools for the 21st Century law expired.

In 1995 legislation was enacted that authorized any school district to apply for waivers of state laws, similar to what had existed for the Schools for the 21st Century. A school district may apply to the SBE or the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) for a waiver in order to "implement a plan for restructuring its educational program." Currently 83 school districts have a waiver of the 180-day school year under this law. The SBE also grants waivers from credit-based graduation requirements; two districts have received these waivers.

Laws that require school districts to separately account for funds to support categorical programs such as the Learning Assistance Program, Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program, or Highly Capable Program are not addressed in the current waiver process. The law that establishes minimums and limits on salaries paid to certificated instructional staff is also not waiveable.

The Quality Education Council (QEC) was established in 2009 to make strategic recommendations on the Basic Education program and the funding to support it. The QEC is composed of eight legislators, representatives of five state education entities, and a representative from the Governor's Office.

Summary of Bill:

The School Innovation Program (Program) is established with the intent of fostering change in the public school system. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in consultation with the QEC, establishes a grant application and review process. The QEC also recommends pilot projects for approval by the OSPI and assists with developing criteria for review of requests for waivers of state laws and rules. Initial applications are due March 31, 2013.

Each applicant must prepare a plan that includes activities to be carried out under the Program, a budget and expected sources of funding, evaluation and accountability processes, and justification for any waiver of state laws and rules. Statements of support must be included from the school board, superintendent, principal and staff of the school, each local employee association affected, and the local parent organization. Applications may include proposals for a performance-based system of staff evaluation and compensation. Applications may also include proposals for activities that would require additional funding.

A Program Account is created, and the OSPI is authorized to seek public and private grant funds to support the Program.

If funding is provided or available in the Program Account, the OSPI selects no more than 10 pilot projects. One project must be an entire school district. Pilot projects operate for six years beginning in the 2013-14 school year, if funding is provided.

Current laws that authorize the SBE or the SPI to grant waivers from laws and rules pertaining to Basic Education requirements, student-to-teacher ratios, and length of the school year are amended to include schools under the Program. In addition, Program schools may apply for waivers of laws pertaining to limits on salaries for certificated instructional staff, comingling of state funds for categorical programs, and flexibility in calculating course credits for high school courses.

If funding is provided, the OSPI offers resources, support, and technical assistance to the pilot projects and facilitates linkages between pilot projects, colleges and universities, and others. The OSPI must report to the Education Committees of the Legislature on the progress of the Program every two years starting in 2015, and must collect and disseminate information about the pilot projects.

The Program expires June 30, 2020.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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