

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2373

As Reported by House Committee On:
Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Title: An act relating to improving educational outcomes for homeless students.

Brief Description: Enacting provisions to improve educational outcomes for homeless students.

Sponsors: Representatives Parker, Lytton, Stonier, Dahlquist, Seaquist, Zeiger, Santos, Farrell, Pettigrew, Kagi, Bergquist, Walsh, Pollet, Fey, Ryu, Roberts, Cody, Gregerson, Orwall, Haler, S. Hunt, Tarleton, Freeman, Walkinshaw, Muri and Habib.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/27/14.

Appropriations Subcommittee on Education: 2/7/14 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to report data on homeless students to the Governor and the Legislature, which must be disaggregated by subgroups of students at both the state and district levels.
- Requires the OSPI to report to the Legislature dropout rates for homeless students in grades 7 through 12.
- Requires the OSPI to post on its website a short video that provides information on identifying and providing support to homeless students, and why these activities are critical to student success.
- Requires the OSPI to adopt and distribute best practices for choosing and training district-designated homeless student liaisons.
- Requires school districts to strongly encourage additional training for staff and homeless student liaisons annually.
- Requires school districts to include in existing information distributed with enrollment or annual information, information about services and support for homeless students.

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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Fagan, Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Dahlquist, Haler, Lytton, Pettigrew, Seaquist, Sullivan and Wilcox.

Staff: Jessica Harrell (786-7349) and Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

The federal McKinney-Vento Act requires local school districts to identify homeless students and provide them with support. Between 2005 and 2011, the number of homeless students identified in the State of Washington increased by 96 percent, to 27,300.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is the agency charged with overseeing K-12 public education in Washington. The OSPI submits a report to the Legislature each year, accounting for the educational progress of each student in the state. One component of these reports is the dropout rates for students in grades 7 through 12 by ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability status. The dropout rates for homeless students are not currently tracked or reported. The OSPI also tracks and reports transportation expenditures, including additional expenditures for transporting homeless students.

All school districts are required to post the educational rights of homeless students in all school buildings and throughout the community. The OSPI has a variety of posters related to this subject on its website that can be ordered or printed for free.

The OSPI has established a variety of programs that provide educational support and opportunities for students, including the Learning Assistance Program, the Highly Capable Program, and the Running Start Program.

Summary of Bill:

The OSPI must report data on homeless students to the Governor and the Legislature beginning January 10, 2015, and each odd-numbered year thereafter. This report should be disaggregated by subgroups of students, at both the state and district level, and include the following:

- the number of identified homeless students enrolled in public schools;
- the number of students participating in the Learning Assistance Program, the Highly Capable Program, and the Running Start Program; and
- the academic performance and educational outcomes of homeless students.

In the annual report to the OSPI, school districts must report dropout rates for identified homeless students in grades 7 through 12, in addition to the previously required data.

By July 1, 2014, the OSPI must adopt and distribute to each school district best practices for choosing and training school district-designated homeless student liaisons.

The OSPI, in collaboration with community experts on homelessness and homeless education policy, must develop or acquire a short video to be posted on the OSPI's website. The video must provide information on identifying and providing support to homeless students, and why these activities are critical to student success.

School districts are required to strongly encourage an all-school staff review of the video annually, and a state training for the district-designated homeless student liaison. The school districts must include in existing materials shared with students, at the beginning of the school year or at enrollment, information about services and support for homeless students. School districts may use the brochure posted on the OSPI's website and are strongly encouraged to use a variety of communications each year.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill:

- changes the date of the OSPI report to the Legislature and Governor to every other year starting January 10, 2015, rather than every other year starting December 1, 2014;
- requires school districts to make an annual effort that strongly encourages the homeless student liaisons to attend trainings;
- clarifies that specified reports to the OSPI, Legislature, and Governor include the number of identified homeless students, rather than the number of homeless students;
- changes the requirement that school districts provide a brochure to parents describing the services and support for homeless students, to a requirement that school districts include this information with other information distributed to students at enrollment or at the beginning of the school year; and
- strongly encourages school districts to use a variety of communications each year to notify students and families about services and support available to them if they are experiencing homelessness, and lists some communication options.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Education):

(In support) This bill essentially synthesizes data that is already being collected. Federal law requires the state to collect the data, and this bill just categorizes the data so the state can understand what percentage of homeless students are dropping out, what percentage are

excelling, etc. This bill will help us maximize our efforts as a state. Washington has identified 27,390 homeless students, but there is no other information about these students. This bill will help close the opportunity gap, improve dropout rates, and target test improvement efforts. After learning this information, these questions can be answered: Why does one district have a higher homeless student graduation rate than others? What are they doing? How can it be replicated? This bill will ensure all children heading down the path to long-term homelessness are identified, receive intervention, graduate from high school, and transition successfully into adulthood. Homeless students must be identified to ensure equal access. Less than 1 percent of school districts get a modest support grant from the OSPI to support a homeless liaison, though all are required to have a liaison. Liaisons can offer support such as transportation, access to housing, and help students access higher education. Some students that are homeless during their childhood change schools frequently. Homeless students find it difficult to focus in school. Once students are identified as homeless, they can be provided with school supplies, access to clothing and food banks, and other support, such as transportation, so students do not have to change schools. Once students are identified as homeless, their education is stabilized. Teams of support staff can help homeless students access summer education and Running Start, and help them apply to universities. Homeless students often struggle in school, and many students repeat sixth grade. This bill provides tools for training staff on the issue of homelessness and ensures students know their rights and services available to them. There may need to be some changes to the provision in the bill requiring a brochure for parents. There is huge variation between the success of students who ask for help and those who do not. One skilled counselor, who really cares for kids and knows how to help, can encourage students to ask for help.

(In support with concerns) It is good to address the needs of students who do not fit the traditional molds, but continuously fall into the gaps in the system. To track certain groups of students, Washington researchers require a sample size of at least 20 students in each category before the category will be evaluated. Although the population of homeless students is growing, having such a large sample size may keep the data gathered by this bill from being accurate around this group of students and perpetuate these students falling into the cracks. Maybe the researchers could use a smaller sample size.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations Subcommittee on Education):

(In support) None.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Education): (In support) Representative Parker, prime sponsor; Katara Jordan, Columbia Legal Services; Miles Nowlin, Shelton School District; Jennifer Petit; Liz Allen, University of Washington School of Law Children and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic; and Steve Leahy, America's Edge.

(In support with concerns) Elizabeth Richer, League of Education Voters.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations Subcommittee on Education): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.