

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1682

As Reported by House Committee On: Education

Title: An act relating to improving educational outcomes for homeless students through increased in-school guidance supports, housing stability, and identification services.

Brief Description: Improving educational outcomes for homeless students through increased in-school guidance supports, housing stability, and identification services.

Sponsors: Representatives Fey, Stambaugh, Walsh, Riccelli, Goodman, Orwall, Zeiger, Appleton, Van De Wege, Lytton, Gregerson, Reykdal, Tarleton, Ortiz-Self, Kagi, Carlyle, Wylie, Bergquist, S. Hunt, Tharinger, Senn, Robinson, Moscoso, Pollet, Walkinshaw, McBride and Jinkins.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/12/15, 2/17/15 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Provides for a competitive grant program to evaluate and award state-funded three-year grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support, and includes an appropriation of \$2 million for this purpose.
- Tasks the Department of Commerce, in consultation with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), with administering a housing grant program that links homeless students, their families, and unaccompanied homeless students with stable housing located in the homeless student's school district.
- Requires that the OSPI's data collection and reporting on homeless children include data regarding "unaccompanied homeless students."

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass.
Signed by 19 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Ortiz-Self, Vice Chair; Reykdal, Vice

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.

Chair; Magendanz, Ranking Minority Member; Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stambaugh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Fagan, Gregory, Griffey, Hargrove, Hayes, S. Hunt, Kilduff, Lytton, Orwall, Pollet and Springer.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Klippert and McCaslin.

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

According to a recent report from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), between the 2008-09 school year and the 2013-14 school year, the state experienced a 56-percent increase in the number of enrolled homeless students reported by school districts. During the 2013-14 school year, 32,494 students were identified as homeless. The percentage of homeless students meeting standard on assessments is much lower than the percentage for all students statewide. Homeless students had a 46.1 percent four-year graduation rate and a 31.5 percent cohort dropout rate, compared to an all student statewide graduation rate of 77.2 percent and a cohort dropout rate of 12.3 percent.

The Department of Commerce (Department) has a number of homeless assistance and prevention programs within its portfolio, including:

- Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG). The CHG combines state homeless resources into a single grant opportunity for county governments and other designated entities.
- Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG). The ESG is funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transitions to Housing Act of 2009. The Department is a grantee of HUD and administers this award for eligible counties and cities that are not direct recipients of HUD. The purpose of the ESG program is to provide homelessness prevention assistance to households who would otherwise become homeless and to provide assistance to rapidly re-house persons who are experiencing homelessness.
- Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP). The IYHP provides rental assistance and case management for eligible youth who have aged out of the state foster care system. The Department contracts with five agencies to provide program services.
- Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA). The HOPWA is a federally funded program providing housing assistance and supportive services for low-income people with HIV/AIDS and related diseases, and their families. The Department does not provide direct housing support or services to individuals or families, but administers funding to local providers within the State of Washington who, in turn, provide services to individuals and families.
- Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). The HMIS is used by state and federally funded homeless and housing service providers to collect and manage data gathered during the course of providing housing assistance to people already experiencing homelessness and to households at-risk of losing their housing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Competitive Grant Program.

The OSPI is tasked with creating a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded three-year grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support. Support may include homeless education liaisons. The process must complement any similar federal grant program or programs in order to minimize agency overhead and administrative costs for the Superintendent of Public Instruction and school districts. Districts may access both federal and state money to identify and support homeless students.

Award criteria for the grants must be based on demonstrated need and may consider the number of overall percentage, or both, of homeless children and youths enrolled in preschool, elementary, and secondary school in the district and the ability of the district to meet these needs. School districts may not use grant funds to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for homeless student supports.

An appropriation of \$1 million per year for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, and \$1 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2017, is included.

Housing Grant Program.

If specific funding is appropriated for this purpose, the Department, in consultation with the OSPI, is charged with administering a grant program that links homeless students, their families, and unaccompanied homeless students with stable housing located in the homeless student's school district. This competitive grant process may make grant awards of up to \$500,000 to school districts partnered with eligible organizations. The grant program is limited to 15 school districts per school year.

In determining which school districts receive grants, preference must be given to districts with a demonstrated commitment of partnership and history with eligible organizations. "Eligible organization" means any local government, local housing authority, Regional Support Network, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, federally recognized Indian tribe within the state, or regional or statewide nonprofit housing assistance organization.

Beneficiaries of funds from the grant program must be from very low-income households. "Very low-income" is defined as a family or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than 50 percent of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the grant recipient is located.

Applications for the grant program must include contractual agreements between the housing providers and the school districts defining the responsibilities and commitments of each party to identify, house, and support students. Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- rental assistance, including security deposits, utilities, and moving expenses;
- transportation assistance, including gasoline for vehicles and bus passes;
- emergency shelter; and
- housing stability case management.

Grantee school districts and the eligible organizations must report to the OSPI and the Department on the findings of the grantee, the housing stability of the homeless families, the academic performance of the grantee population, and any related policy recommendations.

Data on all grant program participants must be entered into and tracked through the Department's Homeless Client Management Information System.

The OSPI must monitor the grant programs at least once every two years, commencing with the 2015-16 school year, including monitoring the process used by the district to identify and reach out to homeless students, assessment data and other indicators to determine how well the district is meeting the academic needs of homeless students, district expenditures used to expand opportunities for these students, and the academic progress of students under the program. Program review and monitoring may be conducted concurrently with other program reviews and monitoring conducted by the Department.

"Unaccompanied Homeless Students".

The OSPI's data collection and reporting on homeless children must include data regarding "unaccompanied homeless students." "Unaccompanied homeless student" is defined as a student who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and is without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as set forth in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The provision that would have added a homeless student education liaison to the prototypical school model is removed, and is replaced by the competitive grant program for school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support, which may include education liaisons.

The housing grant program is limited to 15 school districts, rather than 15 schools. It is made clear that unaccompanied homeless students, as well as homeless students and their families, may be assisted. The reporting requirement with respect to this grant program is changed. School districts do not need to report directly to the Legislature. Instead, school districts and the eligible organizations with which they work will report to the OSPI and the Department.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 18, 2015.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. Section 3, relating to the competitive grant program, is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are about 33,000 homeless students in Washington. Only 13,000 were identified when this was first tracked. It is a struggle for school districts to serve these students, and more resources are needed. The graduation rate for homeless students is very low. This bill puts together support services, such as counseling, and a housing grant program. There is a companion measure in the Senate which includes an amendment that replaces the addition of a homeless education liaison into the prototypical school model with a grant program instead.

The grant program is a way to expand programs like the one that is operating at McCarver Elementary in Tacoma between Tacoma Public Schools and the Tacoma Housing Authority. Before the grant program was put in place, the mobility rate was 179 percent. Now, it is down to 75 percent which is still high, but has been greatly reduced. The data is clear that high mobility rates are ruinous. In Puyallup, while the Free and Reduced Price Lunch student count is not as high as it is in other districts, the number of homeless students is over 200 and this generates expenditures of over \$450,000 on transportation under the McKinney-Vento Act. Getting homeless students into stable housing would help both students and districts.

The services that a homeless student receives vary greatly, depending upon what resources the district has available. In one situation, one girl received assistance from a homeless education liaison within 12 hours of the district being informed that she was homeless, while her sister received very little assistance. The one sister graduated from high school, despite frequent moves. The other sister had to repeat 9th grade four times, and eventually passed her General Education Development test out-of-state. A homeless woman, fleeing an abusive situation, with five children in the Shelton School District was able to go to the homeless education liaison for transportation, clothing, food, and housing. All schools need homeless education liaisons, who can collaborate with entities in the community to provide help. Counselors are great, but liaisons know about the resources available for someone who is homeless.

Homelessness can happen to anyone. Look at these children as "us" and not "them." The children are at a significant disadvantage, doing their homework in cars, parks, and libraries, and having to travel long distances to school. It was very hard on two middle-school-age girls who were homeless with their mother and father, traveling from hotel to hotel. Although the school was advised, no help was initially offered and it wasn't until the parents learned of rights under the McKinney-Vento Act that transportation was provided. If there had been a liaison in place, the family would have learned of the grant program earlier.

Only 46 percent of homeless children graduate on time, compared to 76 percent of all students. Homeless graduation rates have to rise if the state is to meet its graduation goals.

(In support with concerns) Initiative 1351 needs to be fully funded. In addition, these students must have homes so that they can stay in the school district where they start school. There needs to be more work done to understand how federal money can be used. The data collection piece is critical. This is not a new problem. It is that now there is more awareness because it is identified if a student is homeless. This is a good bill, but there are fiscal concerns with it. While transportation is critical, it is better to house these students.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Fey, prime sponsor; Representative Stambaugh; Brandy Sinecy; Michael Mirra, Tacoma Housing Authority; Miles Nowlin; Sarah Greenwell, Olympia School District; Jim Blanchard, Auburn Youth Resources; Betty Jimerson, Youth Women's Christian Association; Julia Suliman, Washington State Board of Education; and Katara Jordan, Columbia Legal Services.

(In support with concerns) Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; and Alan Burke, Washington State School Directors' Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.