
Education Committee

HB 2325

Brief Description: Requiring the superintendent of public instruction to develop an elective firearms safety and hunter education course for high school students.

Sponsors: Representatives Muri, Haler, Rossetti, Magendanz and Wilson.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to, in consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, develop a program of instruction for firearms safety and hunter education for students in grades 9 through 12.
- Establishes that, beginning with the 2017-18 school year, any school district may adopt the program as an elective one-half credit course for high school students.
- Authorizes the director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife to cooperate and partner with the SPI and school districts in their implementation and provision of hunter education training opportunities offered as part of the public school curriculum.

Hearing Date: 2/11/16

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matters pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and its office has numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute, including:

- making rules and regulations necessary for the administration of public education requirements; and
- preparing courses of study and other materials and books for the discharge of education duties.

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.

With respect to course preparation, the Legislature periodically considers and charges the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction with developing model curricula for use in Washington's school districts, some of which includes safety-oriented themes.

Hunter Education Program.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is responsible for the operation of a statewide hunter education program. This program, or an equivalent program in another state, must be completed by applicants for a state hunting license that are age 44 or younger. The only exemption available is for prospective hunters over the age of 18. These individuals may receive a one year deferral once in their lifetime to hunt without completing the training course as long as they are doing so in the company of a licensed hunter.

The hunter education program consists of at least 10 hours of instruction in safety, conservation, sportsmanship, and firearm handling. Average classes involve four to six sessions and require the student to pass a written test and, with the exception of students who are in the military, demonstrate firearms handling skills. The WDFW offers both a live course option and a home study option. Live courses are scheduled throughout the state.

Hunter education courses are taught by volunteers, either individually or as a team, who are trained and certified by the WDFW. All instructors must be at least 21 years of age, and must undergo a background investigation by the WDFW.

Summary of Bill:

The SPI, in consultation with the WDFW, must develop a program of instruction (program) for firearms safety and hunter education for students in grades 9 through 12 that satisfies hunting license prerequisites established in statute. The program must be developed according to a schedule that provides school districts with sufficient time to adopt the program for the 2017-18 school year. In developing the program, the SPI is encouraged to seek partnerships with public and private entities for the purpose of minimizing costs associated with its development and implementation.

The program must include a firearms safety and hunter education component, and a civics component that examines the Constitution of the United States with an emphasis on the Bill of Rights. The academic rigor of the civics component must exceed that of the compulsory study and graduation prerequisite requirements for the study of the Constitution of the United States that are established in statute.

Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, any school district may adopt the program as an elective one-half credit course to instruct students in grades 9 through 12, or grades 10 through 12 if grade 9 is not offered at the high school, in the content area addressed by the curriculum. To the extent practicable, the firearms safety and hunter education component of the program must be taught:

- by hunter education instructors authorized by the WDFW under its hunter education training program; and

- at a local firearms range selected by the applicable school district that has elected to make its facilities, property, or both available to students either free of charge or at a reduced rate.

A school district may provide additional instruction that supplements the program developed by the SPI. School districts adopting the program are encouraged to seek partnerships with public and private entities for the purpose of minimizing costs to students participating in a firearms safety and hunter education course.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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