

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5543

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to school safety.

Brief Description: Improving student safety.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Kastama, McAuliffe, Eide, Regala, Rasmussen, Thibaudeau, Costa, Kohl-Welles and Winsley; by request of Governor Locke and Superintendent of Public Instruction).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/20/02, 2/27/02 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to provide guidance to schools in developing comprehensive safe school plans.
- Requires the guidance to include a comprehensive school safety checklist and successful model comprehensive safe school plans.
- Model comprehensive safe school plans must include prevention, intervention, all-hazards/crisis response, and post crisis recovery.
- The SPI has the authority to adopt rules so that in case of emergency, students and staff will be able to take appropriate action as the emergency demands.
- Exempts from public disclosure comprehensive safe school plans and school safety risk assessments to the extent they relate to specific vulnerabilities.
- Provides for an emergency clause for specific portions of the act.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Haigh, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, McDermott, Rockefeller, Santos, Schmidt and Upthegrove.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Schindler.

Staff: Ilene Miller (786-7310).

Background:

The State Board of Education (SBE), based on the advice of the Washington State Patrol's Director of Fire Protection, is required to adopt rules regarding the evacuation of schools during sudden emergencies. Pursuant to this authority, the SBE has issued rules requiring local school boards and governing bodies of private schools to develop and practice evacuation plans. The rules must be published and distributed, and the evacuation plans are to be taught periodically to all school personnel as well.

Summary of Amended Bill:

By June 1, 2003, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must provide guidance to schools on developing comprehensive safe school plans. This guidance must be developed in consultation with representatives from the emergency management division of the state Military Department, educators, classified staff, principals, superintendents, administrators, the American Society for Industrial Security, the state Criminal Justice Training Commission, and the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs. The guidance must include a comprehensive school safety checklist, and successful models of comprehensive safe school plans.

The model comprehensive safe school plans must include elements of: (1) prevention, (2) intervention, (3) all-hazards/crisis response, and (4) postcrisis recovery. The SPI, in consultation with school district superintendents must establish timelines for schools to develop their own comprehensive safe school plans. The SPI also must require schools to periodically report progress on their comprehensive safe school plans. Additionally, schools must consider the guidance provided by the SPI when developing their own plans.

The SPI has the authority to adopt rules that allow students and staff to take appropriate action in case of an emergency. The rules must be adopted in consultation with the fire protection bureau of the Washington State Patrol, and the emergency management division of the state Military Department. The rules may also establish the type and frequency of drills that schools are required to conduct.

To the extent that they identify specific vulnerabilities, comprehensive safe school plans and school safety risk assessments are exempt from public disclosure.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amended bill requires the SPI to provide guidance to schools in developing comprehensive safe school plans. This guidance must include a comprehensive school safety checklist and successful model comprehensive safe school plans. The amended bill requires that model plans include prevention, intervention, all-hazards/crisis response, and postcrisis recovery. The amended bill changes the authority to establish rules that provide for what to do in case of an emergency from the SBE to the SPI. Additionally, the SPI is given the authority to establish guidelines and frequency of drills. The amended bill requires that comprehensive safe school plans and school safety risk assessments, to the extent they relate to specific vulnerabilities, be exempt from public disclosure. The amended bill provides for an emergency clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Testimony For: Safe schools are an absolute priority. We need safe and civil learning environments in order for students to have the best achievements possible. Schools are currently required to have plans for fires and earthquakes. This means that plans are already most of the way there. Schools need to go the rest of the way to make their plans all-hazards plans. School districts are working hard to develop crisis plans and to deal with issues of school safety.

(With concerns) This bill mandates schools to have safe school plans, and there is no money in the budget for this type of mandate. Budget language only encourages a plan; it does not require it. There are not enough resources to mandate safe school plans.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Senator Kastama, prime sponsor.

(In support with concerns) Ahndrea Blue, Governor's Office; Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Doug Nelson, Public School Employees of Washington; and Joe Pope, Association of Washington School Principals.