

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1889

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education
Education Appropriations

Title: An act relating to paraeducator tutors.

Brief Description: Regarding paraeducator tutor certification.

Sponsors: Representatives Sullivan, Priest, Ormsby, Santos and Simpson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/11/09, 2/18/09, 2/20/09 [DPS];

Education Appropriations: 2/25/09, 2/26/09 [DPS(ED)].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to establish voluntary paraeducator tutor certification, including certification standards, process, and requirements.
- Requires the SPI to approve professional development for certified paraeducator tutors to maintain their certification.
- Directs the SPI to submit a proposal to provide incentives for paraeducator tutors to pursue certification to the Legislature by December 1, 2009.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Probst, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cox, Dammeier, Hunt, Johnson, Lias, Maxwell, Orwall, Santos and Sullivan.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383)

Background:

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.

Paraeducators are classified staff in a school who perform many functions, including providing instructional assistance and tutoring under the supervision of a teacher. There are no state requirements regarding the educational qualifications of paraeducators, although the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has developed recommended core competencies for paraeducators.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, paraeducators who provide instruction and are paid in whole or in part by Title I funds must meet a federal definition of "highly qualified." Since 2006, Title I paraeducators must either:

1. have completed two years of study at an institution of higher education;
2. have earned an Associate's Degree (or higher); or
3. demonstrate competency through an approved formal assessment.

In Washington, there are multiple options for the formal assessment, including: an online assessment administered by the Educational Testing Service; a portfolio that is graded by a regional review panel; a school district assessment approved by the OSPI; or an approved paraeducator apprenticeship program.

Paraeducators who are not associated with Title I are not required to meet these qualifications, although many districts encourage it to allow for flexibility in staffing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must establish voluntary paraeducator tutor certification by developing certification standards, a certification process, and certification requirements. Certification is for a five-year period. The SPI also approves professional development courses for certified paraeducator tutors to maintain their certification. Approved courses must be available in many different formats. The SPI is directed to develop a proposal to provide incentives for individuals to pursue paraeducator tutor certification and submit the proposal to the Legislature by December 1, 2009.

A paraeducator tutor is a paraeducator who provides or assists in providing direct instruction to students.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

It is clarified that paraeducator tutor certification is voluntary. The duties of the SPI are clarified as follows: to develop paraeducator tutor certification standards, process, and requirements; and approve professional development required for paraeducator tutors to maintain their certification. The SPI must (rather than should) submit a proposal to provide incentives for paraeducator tutor certification. "Paraeducator tutor" is defined.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 9, 2009.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Paraeducators are a vital part of the education team. There are over 20,000 paraeducators working in our schools today, partnering with teachers and helping our students learn and have the resources to be successful. There is much talk about the importance of professional development for teachers, but we frequently overlook professional development for paraeducators. There really are not any rules about qualifications for paraeducators. There should be state standards that would create a career path and support for paraeducators. An increasing number of students need special assistance from trained staff. Meeting the challenges of various groups of students—from special education to Title I to learning assistance—is a very difficult task without adequate training.

Ultimately, students will benefit from this bill. Some school districts have very high minimum qualifications for paraeducators and are able to provide paid training days. Not all school districts can do that. Many paraeducators have previously been in other careers; these are not under-skilled individuals in the slightest. When we use the words "paramedic" and "paralegal" it implies someone who is trained, certified, and well-respected. Why is it that the word "paraeducator" implies someone who monitors lunch and makes copies? We need to dispel stereotypes about paraeducators. The more educated the paraeducator, the more student achievement will soar.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Sullivan, prime sponsor; Doug Nelson and Marijean Woodward, Public School Employees of Washington and the Service Employees International Union; Ginger Cornwell and Pam Lux, Public School Employees of Washington; and Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Education be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Sullivan, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Haler, Hunter, Kagi, Probst, Quall, Rolfes and Wallace.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Anderson and Cox.

Staff: Wendy Polzin (786-7137)

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Education Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Education:

No new changes were recommended.

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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Paraeducators are an important part of the educational process. This bill recognizes the need for paraeducators to be trained and prepared to be active participants in the classroom. The fiscal note for this bill is significant, and there may be work done to bring it down. There are over 20,000 paraeducators working with 55,000 teachers in the state. The state spends hundreds of millions of dollars on professional development and career pathways for certificated employees. There is no state funding for paraeducator professional or career development. This is an investment that will result in kids learning. There is no mandate on employees or school districts to participate in these standards, but it does provide opportunities. There may be cost savings through the better interaction of teachers and paraeducators. Teachers will know what skills and training the paraeducator have and it will result in benefits to students.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Sullivan, prime sponsor; Doug Nelson, Public School Employees of Washington; and Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.