

RCW 28A.600.455 Gang activity—Suspension or expulsion. (1) A student who is enrolled in a public school or an alternative school may be suspended or expelled if the student is a member of a gang and knowingly engages in gang activity on school grounds.

(2) "Gang" means a group which: (a) Consists of three or more persons; (b) has identifiable leadership; and (c) on an ongoing basis, regularly conspires and acts in concert mainly for criminal purposes. [1997 c 266 s 2.]

Findings—Intent—1997 c 266: "The legislature finds that the children of this state have the right to an effective public education and that both students and educators have the need to be safe and secure in the classroom if learning is to occur. The legislature also finds, however, that children in many of our public schools are forced to focus on the threat and message of violence contained in many aspects of our society and reflected through and in gang violence activities on school campuses.

The legislature recognizes that the prevalence of weapons, including firearms and dangerous knives, is an increasing problem that is spreading rapidly even to elementary schools throughout the state. Gang-related apparel and regalia compound the problem by easily concealing weapons that threaten and intimidate students and school personnel. These threats have resulted in tragic and unnecessary bloodshed over the past two years and must be eradicated from the system if student and staff security is to be restored on school campuses. Many educators believe that school dress significantly influences student behavior in both positive and negative ways. Special school dress up and color days signify school spirit and provide students with a sense of unity. Schools that have adopted school uniforms report a feeling of togetherness, greater school pride, and better student behavior in and out of the classroom. This sense of unity provides students with the positive attitudes needed to avert the pressures of gang involvement.

The legislature also recognizes there are other more significant factors that impact school safety such as the pervasive use of drugs and alcohol in school. In addition to physical safety zones, schools should also be drug-free zones that expressly prohibit the sale, use, or possession of illegal drugs on school property. Students involved in drug-related activity are unable to benefit fully from educational opportunities and are disruptive to the learning environment of their fellow students. Schools must be empowered to make decisions that positively impact student learning by eradicating drug use and possession on their campuses. This flexibility should also be afforded to schools as they deal with other harmful substance abuse activities engaged in by their students.

Toward this end, the legislature recognizes the important role of the classroom teacher who must be empowered to restore discipline and safety in the classroom. Teachers must have the ability to control the conduct of students to ensure that their mission of educating students may be achieved. Disruptive behavior must not be allowed to continue to divert attention, time, and resources from educational activities.

The legislature therefore intends to define gang-related activities as criminal behavior disruptive not only to the learning environment but to society as a whole, and to provide educators with the authority to restore order and safety to the student learning environment, eliminate the influence of gang activities, and eradicate

drug and substance abuse on school campuses, thus empowering educators to regain control of our classrooms and provide our students with the best educational opportunities available in our schools.

The legislature also finds that students and school employees have been subjected to violence such as rapes, assaults, or harassment that has not been gang or drug-related criminal activity. The legislature intends that all violence and harassment directed at students and school personnel be eradicated in public schools." [1997 c 266 s 1.]

Severability—1997 c 266: "If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1997 c 266 s 16.]