

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6454

---

As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Early Learning & K-12 Education, January 28, 2008

**Title:** An act relating to improving educational outcomes for students in foster care.

**Brief Description:** Creating programs to improve educational outcomes for students in foster care.

**Sponsors:** Senators Tom, McAuliffe, Rasmussen, Kline, Shin, Kohl-Welles and Rockefeller.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education:1/23/08, 1/28/08 [DPS-WM, DNP, w/oRec].

---

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6454 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Tom, Vice Chair; Eide, Hobbs, Kauffman, McDermott, Oemig, Rasmussen and Weinstein.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass.  
Signed by Senator Holmquist.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.  
Signed by Senator King, Ranking Minority Member.

**Staff:** Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

**Background:** The Washington Legislature established in statute a state policy that, wherever practical and in the best interests of the child, children placed into foster care must remain enrolled in the schools they were attending at the time they entered foster care. In order to maximize the educational continuity and achievement for foster children, administrative regions of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must develop protocols with the school districts specifying strategies for communication, coordination, and collaboration regarding the status and progress of foster children placed in the region.

In 2006, DSHS Children's Administration placed Educational Advocacy (EA) Coordinators in all six regions of the state. EA Coordinators intervene on behalf of youth who have unmet educational needs and train social workers, caregivers, and community providers on topics such as special education, federal and state education legislation, and school discipline.

---

*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.*

Under current Washington law, in order to serve students who are the subject of child dependency cases, their educational records must be released to DSHS upon request. DSHS must certify that it will not disclose the education records to any other party without the written consent of the parent or student, unless authorized under state law.

There are nine educational service districts (ESDs) in Washington, each serving a specific region of the state. ESDs provide training, technical assistance, administrative support, and other services to school districts. Puget Sound ESD includes 35 school districts in King and Pierce Counties, plus Bainbridge Island.

**Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute):** Subject to available funds, Puget Sound ESD must designate a foster care program supervisor to coordinate programs and services for students in foster care. The foster care supervisor must facilitate the use of education resources to improve educational stability and other measurable outcomes for foster children; develop and distribute model school district policies for foster children; provide specified training to public school staff; provide technical assistance to schools for interagency agreements related to foster children; coordinate with the McKinney-Vento program supervisor in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI); coordinate with OSPI the interpretation of federal law relative to data exchange; provide technical assistance to school districts to facilitate local data exchange; coordinate with the Children's Administration education leads in Regions 4 and 5 to complete interagency agreements for top priority school districts; and establish a model information and data-sharing agreement between school districts and the Children's Administration.

Subject to available funds, Puget Sound ESD must also create a grant program for local school districts to improve stability and educational outcomes for students in foster care. The grants must be awarded to school districts with highest incidence of Child Protective Services (CPS) removals and foster care placements. The grant money must not supplant current funding; it must be used to supplement and enhance educational stability and outcomes. Grant activities may include dedicated staff time for various activities that support foster youth and fees normally covered by parents for extracurricular activities, school pictures, yearbooks, ASB cards, school fines, etc. Puget Sound ESD must report annually to the Legislature on the grant program outcomes.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction must report annually to the Legislature on the educational experiences and progress of students in foster care. The data must be disaggregated in the smallest units possible without identifying an individual student.

Subject to the availability of funds, DSHS must fund two school district-based foster care recruitment pilots in one or more school districts with the highest number of CPS removals and foster care placements. The pilots must coordinate with existing foster care recruitment contracts and the family-to-family model. DSHS must report annually to the Legislature on the increase or decrease of foster homes within the pilot areas.

Education records of students who are the subject of child dependency cases must be transmitted to DSHS within two days after receiving a request from DSHS.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute):** Clarifies that the foster care program

supervisor must provide training to public school staff and coordinate with both education leads in Regions 4 and 5 of the Children's Administration. Clarifies that students who are the subject of dependency cases are the ones whose education records must be transmitted upon DSHS's request. Places sections 1 and 3 in chapter 28A.310 RCW, titled Educational Service Districts.

**Appropriation:** For fiscal year 2009: 585,000 dollars for increasing the number of EA Coordinators by nine full-time employees; 108,000 dollars for the two district-based foster care recruitment pilots (section 4) from the state General Fund to DSHS Children's Administration; 50,000 dollars for a foster care program supervisor (section 1); and 200,000 dollars for the grant program (section 3) from the state General Fund to Puget Sound ESD.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 15, 2008.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: There is no greater achievement gap than with foster kids; this is completely unacceptable. We have targeted intervention strategies to close this achievement gap. Educational stability is the key factor for improving educational outcomes for foster care, and this bill will have a positive impact on both. The EA coordinator provides very practical supports, including helping the family and school collaborate to create a plan to maintain the foster child's placement in the school and family. Having two pilot projects for school-based recruitment is essential. Using foster parents directly attached to school districts makes it easier to transport kids if they remain in the same district and enables students to stay in their school. Most kids in foster care reside in the Puget Sound ESD.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Tom, prime sponsor; Rob Credle, foster parent; Janis Avery, Treehouse; Martin Mueller, OSPI; Wes Pruitt, Workforce Board; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Daryl Duugs, Washington Federation of State Employees.