

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6129

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to paraeducator development.

Brief Description: Concerning paraeducator development.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Hill, McAuliffe, Tom, Dammeier, Hobbs, Litzow, Baumgartner and Mullet).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/19/14, 2/26/14 [DPA].

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

- Directs the Professional Educator Standards Board to convene a work group to design options for program-specific minimum employment standards for paraeducators, recommend professional development, develop a career ladder, and design an articulated pathway for teacher preparation from paraeducator certificates through teacher certification.
- Requires an initial report with recommendations in specific areas by January 10, 2015, and a final report by January 10, 2016.
- Requires community and technical college apprenticeship and certificate programs for paraeducators to offer transferrable course credits beginning in 2016-17.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Stonier, Vice Chair; Dahlquist, Ranking Minority Member; Magendanz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Fey, Haigh, Hargrove, Hawkins, Hayes, S. Hunt, Klippert, Lytton, Muri, Orwall, Parker, Pollet, Seaquist and Warnick.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

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.

Background:

According to the School District Personnel Summary Report published by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), school districts employed 23,083 instructional aides or paraeducators in the 2012-13 school year. This translates into 12,002 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff positions.

The table below indicates the programs to which these paraeducators were assigned. Head count figures are duplicated because some individuals are assigned to more than one program.

Program	Headcount	FTE
Special Education	12,718	6,049
Basic Education	10,384	3,077
Title I/Learning Assistance Program	4,525	1,399
English Language Learners	2,014	672
Early Childhood	685	390
Other Education	950	338
Food Services/Transportation	425	77

The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) establishes minimum qualifications for teachers and other certificated employees, including standards for cultural competence. However, paraeducators are classified employees. Federal law requires that paraeducators employed using Title I funds and those assigned to special education meet certain minimum qualifications or demonstrate core competencies. Paraeducators using Braille must pass a competency test, and legislation enacted in 2013 requires that educational interpreters for the deaf must meet a specified competency level beginning in 2016-17. There are also standards for individuals who work in state and federally funded early learning programs.

Otherwise, qualifications for paraeducators are determined by the employing school district.

There are a number of options for paraeducators to meet the minimum qualifications, including apprenticeship programs offered through the Public School Employees of Washington and associate degrees from community and technical colleges. Some community and technical colleges also offer non-degree certificate programs for paraeducators.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The OSPI must convene a work group to examine the use of paraeducators across school districts, including their roles and assignments in the classroom and the variation in paraeducator deployment in support of teachers. The findings of the work group must be submitted to the PESB by August 31, 2014.

The PESB must convene a work group including the Green River Community College Center of Excellence for Careers in Education, Educational Service Districts, educator associations, community and technical college paraeducator apprenticeship and certificate programs, colleges of education, the OSPI, special education parents and advocacy organizations, organizations representing communities of color, and the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee. The work group also includes at least two paraeducators from each program for which standards will be developed.

By January 10, 2015, the PESB work group must submit a report to the legislative education committees that recommends the following:

1. multiple options for assuring minimum employment standards and professional development opportunities for paraeducators who work in programs that assist English Language Learner students, the Learning Assistance Program, and Title I;
2. a career ladder that encourages paraeducators to pursue advanced education, professional development, and increased instructional responsibility;
3. an articulated pathway of teacher preparation, including a comparison of current pathways to teaching with the articulated pathway and recommended strategies to address gaps; and
4. professional development for certificated employees that focuses on maximizing the success of paraeducators in the classroom.

The pathway must include:

- paraeducator certificate and apprenticeship programs that offer course credits that apply to transferrable associate degrees and are aligned with the PESB certification standards;
- associate degree programs that add to certificate programs, incorporate field experiences, and are fully transferrable to bachelor's degree programs;
- bachelor's degree programs that lead to teacher certification without duplicating the associate degrees; and
- the PESB standards for cultural competence.

By January 10, 2016, the PESB work group must submit a final report that recommends multiple options for assuring minimum employment standards and professional development for paraeducators working in Basic Education and special education. The final report also includes whether training requirements for paraeducators who work with special education students should be aligned with training requirements for home care aides providing similar services to students when they are not in school, and if so, how this alignment should occur.

The PESB and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges may exercise their authorities under current law for program and degree approval to implement the articulated pathway.

Beginning in 2016-17, paraeducator certificate and apprenticeship programs offered by community and technical colleges must provide candidates the opportunity to earn transferrable course credits and incorporate the PESB standards for cultural competence.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The OSPI must convene a work group to examine the use of paraeducators across school districts and submit findings to the PESB by August 31, 2014. The PESB work group also includes a representative from the school directors and at least two paraeducators from each program for which standards will be developed. The PESB work group recommendations regarding minimum employment standards must include multiple options for assuring such standards. The final report of the work group also includes examination of alignment of training requirements for paraeducators who work with special education students with training requirements for home care aides providing similar services to students when they are not in school. Community and technical college programs for paraeducators must offer transferrable course credits and incorporate cultural competence beginning in 2016-17, rather than in 2015-16. An appropriation of \$150,000 is removed and a null and void clause is added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Paraeducators are excited about the possibilities presented by this bill. They have long asked for high quality professional development. There is some concern about employment standards and the idea that this might become a licensure program that would limit access to the profession. However, this bill is a study with the right people around the table. The House version of the bill is preferred because it separated the work between the PESB and the OSPI. The OSPI should work on standards, and the PESB should stay focused on licensure. Washington is the first state to take on this issue. The paraeducators appreciate being involved in the process with an opportunity to weigh in on the future of their profession. Eventually this will have an impact on school districts and their budgets.

The advocates are willing to work with everyone to sort out the differences between the two bills. There was an opportunity for full testimony in support of the House bill. It is time to move forward and integrate all the issues. This is landmark legislation that needs to be done right. This will make a difference in programs for high-needs students. It allows paraeducators to be trained and pursue a career ladder. This legislation supports two of the parents' top priorities: teaching quality and closing opportunity gaps.

(In support with concerns) The inclusion in the House bill of the study by the OSPI of paraeducator roles and responsibilities was appreciated, because that is the first question needing to be addressed. There are still questions about the appropriateness of the assignment of this work group to the PESB. The null and void clause on the House bill is appreciated, but there are still concerns about cost. There has been much testimony about training and professional development, but this bill is not really about training. It hands the

issue of minimum employment standards over to the state educator licensing agency. Minimum employment standards presumably occur before someone is able to be employed; professional development occurs afterward. This is an enormous undertaking and has far-reaching implications for the thousands of currently-employed paraeducators. It is groundbreaking in scope.

The intent of the bill is important, but there is continued concern about the short time frame for colleges to put articulated pathways and credit-bearing courses into place. The timing of recommendations regarding standards and the requirement to redesign courses to meet those standards does not line up. Collaboration with the PESB on these issues is already underway.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Doug Nelson, Public School Employees of Washington; and Sherry Krainick, Washington State Parent-Teacher Association.

(In support with concerns) Kathy Goebel, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; and Jennifer Wallace, Professional Educator Standards Board;.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.