

Education Committee

HB 1639

Brief Description: *Creating a peer mentor program.*

Sponsors: *Representatives Keiser, Talcott, Cox, Pearson, Quall, Santos, Haigh and Schual-Berke; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.*

Brief Summary of Bill

Hearing Date: *2/7/01*

Staff: *Susan Morrissey (786-7111).*

Background:

The state provides funding to school districts to support the Teacher Assistance Program, a program that provides mentors, training, and other types of help to beginning teachers. The program has been in existence since 1985.

In August of 1999, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) studied the state's teacher preparation and development programs, including the Teacher Assistance Program. The study found that the program does not reach all teachers and that the type of assistance offered tends to be emotional support and help with basic teaching skills. The Institute surveyed beginning teachers and their principals to ascertain their level of satisfaction with the types of assistance offered through the program. The survey result indicated that half of the teachers and three-quarters of the principals who responded thought that the program made a difference in helping teachers get through their first year of teaching. However, those surveyed were less positive about the impact of the program on helping beginning teachers improve specific skills such as classroom management and the incorporation of the essential academic learning requirements into classroom instruction. In addition, beginning teachers reported that the amount of time provided for observation was too limited.

The WSIPP found that the state has not adopted expectations for the types of

accomplishments expected from the program. In addition, it found that the program had not been changed to reflect increased expectations for student learning.

The 1999-01 budget provides \$6,818,000 for the Teacher Assistance Program. Funding is allocated to districts based on the number of beginning teachers in the district. The 2000 supplemental budget cited the WSIPP study on the program and directed the SPI to submit a report to the education and fiscal committees of the legislature documenting the outcome of program changes implemented in response to the study. The report is due by November 15, 2001.

Summary of Bill:

The teacher assistance program is renamed and its requirements are completely revised. The peer mentor program is established in its stead. The purpose of the peer mentor program: to nurture professional growth and excellence in beginning teachers through special training and assistance from experienced and trained peer mentors.

To the extent that funding is provided for the program, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) will distribute funding to peer mentor programs that serve beginning teachers and meet other program requirements. To be eligible for state funding, each peer mentor program must provide the following types of assistance to beginning teachers:

An orientation process and assistance in preparing for the start of a school year.

The assignment of a peer mentor who will provide constructive feedback, the modeling of instructional strategies, frequent meetings and other forms of contact, and strategies, training, and guidance in critical areas such as classroom management, assessment, student discipline, and other areas.

The provision of release time, substitute, mentor training, and other measures for both the beginning and mentor teachers, to allow each an adequate amount of time to observe the other.

Assistance in the incorporation of the essential academic learning requirements into instructional plans and in the development of complex teaching strategies.

Guidance and help with the development and implementation of professional growth plan that includes a professional self evaluation component and one or more informal performance assessments.

Each peer mentor program will include strong collaboration among the peer mentor, beginning teacher, and the beginning teacher's principal. It will also include stipends for peer mentors and, at the option of the school district, it may include stipends for beginning teachers. The programs may serve more experienced teachers, if assistance to beginning teachers is not adversely impacted and the experienced teacher has requested the assistance.

By December 1, 2001, districts must incorporate these elements into their state funded assistance programs for beginning teachers. Districts that have not incorporated all these elements into their beginning teacher assistance programs may receive state funds to assist beginning teachers until that date.

To the maximum extent possible, SPI will simplify and minimize reporting requirements for

the program. However, SPI may develop a system to track data on the teaching assignments, retention, and mobility of beginning teachers. Participating districts will report that information to SPI.

If funding is provided, SPI will operate a peer mentor academy to help districts provide effective training for peer mentors. School districts are encouraged to include training for peer mentors in their peer mentor programs.

The terms peer mentor-, beginning teacher-, mentor academy-, and district- are defined. A beginning teacher is a first or second year teacher who holds a valid teaching certificate. A peer mentor is an educator who is selected by the district, has five or more years of teaching experience, is an excellent teacher and has the experience and skill necessary to facilitate adult learning. The local bargaining unit for teachers will help develop the criteria to identify excellent teachers and will participate in the mentor selection process.

Appropriation: *None.*

Fiscal Note: *Not Requested.*

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