

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2577

As Passed House:

February 14, 2002

Title: An act relating to character education.

Brief Description: Encouraging locally developed and implemented character education programs.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Talcott, Haigh, Cox, Schindler, Pearson, Anderson, Carrell, Schmidt, Nixon, Morell, Casada, Esser, Benson, Holmquist, Miloscia, Mitchell, Mulliken, Quall, Woods, Campbell, Ogden and Upthegrove).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/31/02, 2/5/02 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/14/02, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Strongly encourages school districts to implement character education programs and directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to make character education programs and instructional material available to districts through the agency's website.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Haigh, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, McDermott, Rockefeller, Santos, Schindler, Schmidt and Upthegrove.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

During the 1990s the Legislature adopted two laws that alluded to the role of schools in

character development. In 1993 as part of the state's education reform legislation, the goal of the Basic Education Act was amended as follows:

"The goal of the Basic Education Act for the schools of the state of Washington set forth in this chapter shall be to provide students with the opportunity to become responsible citizens, to contribute to their own economic well being and to that of their families and communities, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives. To these ends, the goals of each school district, with the involvement of parents and community members, shall be to provide opportunities for all students to develop the knowledge and skills essential to:

- Read with comprehension, write with skill, and communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings;
- Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history; geography; arts; and health and fitness;
- Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems; and
- Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities."

In 1994 the Legislature added additional language to the Basic Education Act on essential values and character traits. "The Legislature also recognizes that certain basic values and character traits are essential to individual liberty, fulfillment, and happiness. However, these values and traits are not intended to be assessed or be standards for graduation. The Legislature intends that local communities have the responsibility for determining how these values and character traits are learned as determined by consensus at the local level. These values and traits include the importance of:

- honesty, integrity, and trust;
- respect for self and others;
- responsibility for personal actions and commitments;
- self-discipline and moderation;
- diligence and a positive work ethic;
- respect for law and authority;
- healthy and positive behavior; and
- family as the basis of society."

Since the mid 1990s a number of schools, school districts, and the Seattle Indian Center have participated in a federal grant program that funds locally developed and supported character education programs. With funding of about \$31,000 per site per year, the five programs each developed unique approaches to character development.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

School districts are strongly encouraged to implement character education programs that incorporate into the curriculum the character traits and values identified in the state's basic education laws. The districts are also strongly encouraged to develop the programs in partnership with parents and the entire spectrum of stakeholders in their local communities. When developing the character education programs, the districts shall comply with the Open Meetings Act. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will collect and make available on its website programs and materials that help teach students how to demonstrate the character traits in a school setting. The website will have a link to the Safety Center. The OSPI may update access to the information using new technologies as resources are available. School districts may post their policies, programs, instructional materials, vendors, and partnerships and may provide a link to the district's website for further information.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Academic success, like success in life, rests on a foundation of character. In schools, issues of character and safety are inextricably intertwined. Most school safety issues are dealt with through disciplinary measures implemented after a problem has occurred; this legislation proposes a preventive approach instead. Across the country, in schools with character education programs, disciplinary actions are cut in half, staff absences have declined, and student suspensions are down by 10 percent. When students and teachers learn how to show respect for each other, academic achievement increases and school climate dramatically improves. Children tend to emulate heroes, and today their heroes are stars from sports, music, movies and television, whether or not those stars are people of character. It would be better to teach children about people of character so they can choose heroes with the traits and values that will help the children live responsible and healthy lives. The newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act has enhanced funding for character education programs.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Talcott, prime sponsor; Representative Haigh-; Bob Higley, Washington Evangelicals for Responsible Government; Rainer Houser, Association of Washington School Principals; Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; James Stewart, Character First!; Anne McDivitt, Citizen; Lois McMahan, Citizen; Dan Steele, Washington State School Directors' Association; and Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators.