

Education Committee

SSB 5324

Brief Description: Concerning support for students experiencing homelessness.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Frockt, Zeiger, Darneille, Walsh, Kuderer, Palumbo, Das, Hasegawa, Hunt, Wellman, Cleveland, Pedersen, Keiser, Nguyen, McCoy, Van De Wege, Dhingra and Saldaña).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Modifies a competitive grant program of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction that assists districts in identifying and supporting homeless students.
- Modifies a competitive grant program of the Department of Commerce, including changing who is eligible to receive funds, that links homeless students and their families with stable housing in the student's school district.
- Requires all kindergarten through grade 12 public schools to establish a building point of contact who is responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied homeless youth and connecting them with the school district's homeless student liaison.

Hearing Date: 3/18/19

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Competitive Grants to Identify Homeless Students and Increase School District Supports. Legislation enacted in 2016 (*i.e.*, Third Substitute House Bill 1682, enacted as Chapter 157, Laws of 2016) directed the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to create a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support.

As provided in the legislation, award criteria for the grants must be based on demonstrated need and may consider the number or overall percentage, or both, of homeless children and youths

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enrolled in preschool through grade 12 in the district, and the ability of the district to meet these needs. School districts may not use grant funds to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for homeless student supports, but they may use grant funds for homeless education liaisons.

Districts receiving grants must measure during the academic year how often each student moves, what services families or unaccompanied youth could access, and whether a family or unaccompanied youth received stable housing by the end of the school year.

Homeless Students Housing Grant Program—Department of Commerce.

The 2016 legislation also established a grant program related to student homelessness in the Department of Commerce (Department). As prescribed in the legislation, the Department, subject to legislative funding and in consultation with the OSPI, must administer a competitive grant program that links homeless students, their families, and unaccompanied homeless students with stable housing located in the student's school district.

The legislatively established goal of the program is to provide educational stability for homeless students by promoting housing stability.

The grant awards, which are limited to \$100,000 per school, are for school districts partnered with eligible organizations, a term defined to include local governments, local housing authorities, federally recognized Indian tribes, and others. Total awards may not exceed \$500,000 per school district and grants are limited to a maximum of 15 school districts per school year. In determining which school districts receive grants, preference must be given to districts with a demonstrated commitment to partnership and history with the eligible organizations.

Applications for the grant program must include contractual agreements between the housing providers and the school districts defining the responsibilities and commitments of each party to identify, house, and support students. Eligible activities for assistance include, but are not limited to:

- rental assistance, including security deposits, utilities, and moving expenses;
- transportation assistance, including gasoline for vehicles and bus passes;
- emergency shelter; and
- housing stability case management.

Beneficiaries of funds from the grant program must be from very low-income households. "Very low-income" is defined as a family or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than 50 percent of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the grant recipient is located.

Grantee school districts must compile and report information to the Department. The Department must report to the Legislature the findings of the grantee, the housing stability of the homeless families, the academic performance of the grantee population, and any related policy recommendations.

To ensure that school districts are meeting the requirements of an approved program for homeless students, the OSPI is required to monitor the programs at least once every two years.

The program review and monitoring may be conducted concurrently with other program reviews and monitoring.

In its review, the OSPI must monitor program components that include the process used by the district to identify and reach out to homeless students, assessment data and other indicators to determine how well the district is meeting the academic needs of homeless students, district expenditures used to expand opportunities for these students, and the academic progress of students under the program.

Building Point of Contact for Unaccompanied Youth.

The 2016 legislation also required each school district that has identified more than 10 unaccompanied youth to establish a building point of contact in each middle school and high school. These points of contact, which must be appointed by the principal of the designated school, are responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting them with the school district's homeless student liaison. The school district homeless student liaison is responsible for training the building points of contact.

Summary of Bill:

Competitive Grants to Identify Homeless Students and Increase School District Supports.

Provisions governing the competitive grants awarded by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to assist districts in identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness are modified in numerous ways, including:

- authorizing grant funds to be used in a manner that is complementary to federal funds provided for supporting homeless students, and consistent with allowable uses as determined by the OSPI;
- establishing that the grants are two years in duration;
- removing language specifically authoring grant funds to be used for homeless education liaisons; and
- establishing that grantees must reflect geographic diversity across the state, and that greater weight must be given to districts that demonstrate a commitment to partnering with local housing and community-based organizations, serving the needs of unaccompanied youth, and implementing strategies, examples of which are included, to address the opportunity gap and other systemic inequities that negatively impact homeless students and students of color.

Reporting requirements associated with the grants are also modified. Districts receiving grants are no longer required to provide the OSPI with annual information measuring the frequency of student moves during the academic year, or what services families or unaccompanied youth could access, and whether or not a family or unaccompanied youth received stable housing by the end of the school year. Instead, districts are required to annually provide information to the OSPI on the academic outcomes, which are to be determined by the OSPI, for students served by the grants. Additionally, the OSPI must review the district reports and assist districts in using the data to identify gaps and needs, and to develop sustainable strategies to improve academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

Homeless Students Housing Grant Program—Department of Commerce.

Numerous changes are made to provisions governing the competitive grant program of the Department of Commerce (Department) that links homeless students and their families with stable housing located in the student's school district. General summaries of principal changes, by category, are described below.

Program Administration/Goals. The Department is directed to provide technical assistance and support to housing providers to better implement the program. Also, an additional goal of encouraging the development of collaborative strategies between housing and education partners is established as a program goal.

Applications and Awards. Rather than awarding the grants to school districts partnered with eligible organizations, the grants are instead to be awarded to eligible organizations, a term that is expanded to include behavioral health organizations.

Provisions limiting the grant awards \$100,000 per school and \$500,000 per district are removed, as is a provision limiting the grants to 15 or fewer districts per year.

In determining which eligible organizations will receive grants, the Department must ensure that selected grantees reflect geographic diversity across the state. Greater weight must be given to eligible organizations that demonstrate a commitment to:

- partnering with local schools or school districts; and
- developing and implementing strategies to address racial inequities, examples of which are included.

Applications for the grant program must include memoranda of understandings, rather than contractual agreements, between the housing providers and the school districts. The memorandum must include provisions specifying:

- how housing providers will partner with school districts to address gaps and needs, and develop sustainable strategies to help students experiencing homelessness; and
- how data on homeless students and their families will be collected and shared in accordance with privacy protections under applicable federal and state laws.

Eligible Activities. The list of activities that are eligible for assistance under the grant program is expanded to include other collaborative housing strategies, including prevention and strength-based safety and housing approaches.

Beneficiaries. The eligible beneficiaries of funds from the grant program are no longer required to be unaccompanied youth or from very low-income households, but instead must be from households that include at least one homeless student as defined as a child or youth without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as set forth in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Reporting and Accountability. Grantee organizations must satisfy compilation and reporting duties, including tracking and reporting on the following measures:

- length of time enrolled in the grant program;
- housing destination at program exit;
- type of residence prior to enrollment in the grant program; and
- number of times homeless in the past three years.

Grantees are not required to provide information on the academic performance of the grantee population, but must include in their reports a narrative description discussing its partnership with school districts, and information about the kinds of supports grantees are providing students and families to support academic learning.

Program monitoring obligations of the OSPI are discontinued and transferred to the Department.

Building Point of Contact for Unaccompanied Youth.

Each kindergarten through grade 12 public school in the state, rather than each school district that has identified more than 10 unaccompanied youth, must establish a building point of contact in each elementary school, middle school, and high school. The OSPI must make available best practices for choosing and training building points of contact to each school district.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.