

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5324

C 412 L 19
Synopsis as Enacted

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).

Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
House Committee on Education
House Committee on Appropriations

Background: McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. This federal law provides grant funding to support school districts which serve students experiencing homelessness. It defines "homeless children" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Under the act, school districts are required to designate a liaison to ensure homeless children and youth are identified and served. According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) website, Washington State receives approximately \$950,000 in federal funding each year.

The Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs within the Department of Commerce (Commerce) is responsible for coordinating a spectrum of ongoing and future funding, policy, and practice efforts related to homeless youth and improving the safety, health, and welfare of these youth.

Building Point of Contact. Current state law requires each school district that has identified more than ten unaccompanied youth to establish a building point of contact in middle and high schools. These points of contact are responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting them with the school district's liaison. State law defines "unaccompanied homeless student" as a student who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, and is homeless.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction Grant Program. In 2016, OSPI created a competitive process to evaluate and award state-funded grants to school districts to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. Award criteria must be based on demonstrated need and may consider the number or overall percentage, or both, of homeless children and youth. School districts receiving grants must measure how often each student

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physically 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.

Department of Commerce Grant Program. In 2016, Commerce, in consultation with OSPI, administered a grant program that links homeless students and their families with stable housing located in the student's school district. Organizations eligible for these grants include any local government, local housing authority, regional support network, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, federally recognized Indian tribe, or regional or statewide nonprofit housing assistance organization.

Summary: Building Point of Contact. Each K-12 public school in the state must establish a building point of contact regardless of the number of unaccompanied youth. This requirement applies to elementary, middle, and high schools. OSPI must make available best practices for choosing and training building points of contact.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction Grant Program. State funding provided through this grant program may be used in a manner complementary to federal McKinney-Vento funding and is consistent with allowable uses as determined by OSPI. Additional award criteria for this grant program specifies the grantees must reflect geographic diversity and greater weight be given to school districts demonstrating a commitment to:

- partnering with local housing and community-based organizations with experience serving the needs of students experiencing homelessness or students of color;
- serving the needs of unaccompanied youth; and
- implementing evidence-informed strategies to address the opportunity gap and other systemic inequities that negatively impact students experiencing homelessness and students of color.

Examples of specific strategies are listed. These grants may be for two years.

The reporting requirements for school districts receiving grants are changed. School districts must monitor and report on the academic outcomes for students served by the grants. OSPI must review the reports and assist school districts in using the data to identify gaps and needs, and develop sustainable strategies to improve academic outcomes.

Department of Commerce Grant Program. An added goal of this grant program is to encourage developing collaborative strategies between housing and education partners.

To ensure that innovative strategies between housing and education partners are developed and implemented, Commerce may contract and consult with a designated vendor to provide technical assistance and program evaluation, and assist with making grant awards.

Behavioral health organizations are added as a type of organization eligible for this grant program. Applications for the grant program must include a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the housing providers and school districts. The MOU must include how they will address gaps and needs, develop sustainable strategies, and collect data.

Additional award criteria for this grant program specifies the grantees must reflect geographic diversity and greater weight be given to eligible organizations that demonstrate a commitment to:

- partnering with local schools or districts; and
- developing and implementing evidence-informed strategies to address racial inequities.

Examples of specific strategies are listed. All beneficiaries of the grant program must be from households that include at least one homeless student, which includes unaccompanied homeless youth.

Eligible organizations receiving grants must track and report the length of time beneficiaries are enrolled in the grant program, housing destination at program exit, type of residence prior to enrollment, number of times the beneficiary was homeless in the past three years, and a narrative description of the partnership with the school district.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	46	1	
House	96	0	(House amended)
Senate	47	0	(Senate concurred)

Effective: July 28, 2019