

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 1175

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, APRIL 2, 1993

Brief Description: Regarding the study of American Indian languages and cultures in the common schools.

SPONSORS: Representatives Jacobsen, Dellwo, Dorn, J. Kohl, Brumsickle, Linville, Dunshee, Pruitt, Johanson, Wood, Leonard and Basich

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Pelz, Chairman; McAuliffe, Vice Chairman; Gaspard, Moyer, Nelson, M. Rasmussen, Rinehart, Skratek, A. Smith, and Winsley.

Staff: Larry Davis (786-7422)

Hearing Dates: March 31, 1993; April 2, 1993

BACKGROUND:

American Indians have expressed concern that their children are no longer learning the Indian languages. Part of the reason is that Indian languages are rarely taught in schools. In addition, it is thought that the term "foreign language" is often used inappropriately. As the original inhabitants of North America, American Indians think English is the foreign language.

A concern also exists that history classes in the state's schools do not provide enough information regarding the culture, governance and history of American Indian peoples.

The dropout rate of American Indian students in the state's public schools is more than twice the overall state dropout average. The lack of accurate instruction and perspective about American Indians contributes to the perpetuation of poor self image and low retention of American Indian students.

SUMMARY:

References to "foreign" languages in the education code are changed to "languages other than English." When references to "languages other than English" are made relative to course offerings and high school graduation requirements, it is clarified that American Indian languages qualify as languages other than English.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED SENATE AMENDMENT:

Any course in Washington State history and government used to fulfill high school graduation requirements is encouraged to include information on the culture, history, and government of the American Indian peoples who were the first inhabitants of the state. Changes in the term "foreign languages" to "languages other than English" are deleted.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

TESTIMONY FOR:

The bill is important to help keep alive and pass along an important cultural heritage that is part of the state's history. Indian languages are very important to Indian people as language and cultural identity go hand-in-hand. Cultural spirit cannot be translated but is acquired through instruction about the culture in the language of the culture. Native Americans regard English as a foreign language since American Indians were the first inhabitants of the state and continent. The bill will help foster greater understanding and appreciation among groups and may help reduce incidents of racism.

Lack of respect for and knowledge about their cultural identity is a problem for many Indian children. Too many Indian students attend schools that do not give adequate instruction on Indian culture, history, and government. This is a contributing factor in the number of Indian students who drop out of school. There is some evidence indicating that Indian students who receive culturally relevant curriculum and instruction are twice as likely to graduate from school. The state needs to at least encourage instruction in Indian culture and languages. The state is on the verge of losing a native culture and way of life.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Rep. Ken Jacobsen, Sponsor; Marion Boushie, Suquamish Tribe and Washington State Indian Education Association; Michelle PenOziequah Aguilar, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Indian Affairs; Mary Marchand, Gloria Picard, Colville Confederated Tribes; Terri Tavenner, Roger Jackson, Quileute Tribal School; Randy Scott, Quinault Indian Nation; Dawn Vyvyan, Yakima Indian Nation and Upper Skagit Tribe; Valerie Calac, Yakima Indian Nation; Chief Johnny Jackson, Yakima Indian Nation, Klickitat Band