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**Children & Family Services  
Committee**

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**HB 2356**

**Brief Description:** Requiring school age children in foster care to attend the same school after placement in foster care.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Kagi, McIntire, Santos, Dickerson, Tokuda, Darneille, Clements, Schual-Berke and Wood.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires a school age child in foster care fewer than sixty days to attend the school where the child was enrolled before entering foster care.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the school where the child is enrolled and the school serving the foster home to negotiate a plan to transport the child.
- Requires the DSHS to pay the transportation costs for the first five school days, and requires the schools to pay the costs thereafter.

**Hearing Date:** 1/21/02

**Staff:** Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

**Background:**

Each year in Washington, over 12,000 school age children enter state custody and the foster care system because of abuse, neglect, abandonment or family conflict. Approximately half of these children leave state custody within 60 days.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) completed a statutorily required study in November, 2001, entitled "Educational Attainment of Foster Youth". The study included a review of previous research in this area, and a statewide analysis of foster youth in the Washington public schools.

Among the study findings, researchers found that compared to their peers not in foster care:

- foster youth score 15-20 points below non-foster youth in statewide achievement tests;

- 59 percent of foster youth in 11<sup>th</sup> grade complete high school on time, compared with 86 percent of non-foster youth;
- twice as many foster youth repeat a grade, change schools in a school year, or enroll in special education, compared with non-foster youth; and,
- a youth's length of stay in foster care does not appear to be relate to educational attainment.

The study report identifies a number of factors that influence academic achievement for all youth. Of the five most important predictors of on-time high school graduation, the second most important factor was the number of times a child changes school during the school year. The study found that twice as many foster youth changed schools once during the school year, and three times as many foster youth changed schools twice, when compared to non-foster youth.

**Summary of Bill:**

A school age child in foster care fewer than sixty days is required to attend the child's "home school". The definition of home school is "where the child was enrolled before entering foster care".

This requirement applies unless the court determines, at any shelter care hearing, that this arrangement is not in the best interest of the child.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the home school, and the school serving the child's foster home are required to negotiate a plan to transport the child to the home school.

The DSHS is required to pay the transportation costs for the first five school days of the foster care placement. After five school days, the cost must be borne by one or both of the affected schools.

The DSHS is required to notify the home school if it is determined that the child will not continue to attend.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on 1/15/02.

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