

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5097

As Passed House:

April 18, 2007

Title: An act relating to safe schools.

Brief Description: Regarding safe schools.

Sponsors: By Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Rockefeller, McAuliffe, Swecker, Kastama, Regala, Weinstein, Eide, Oemig, Pridemore, Kohl-Welles, Keiser, Shin, Berkey, Murray, Kline and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/27/07 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/18/07, 97-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires school districts to adopt and implement safe school plans.
- Requires school districts to annually perform specified safety-related activities.
- Creates a gang task force to examine gang activities that are affecting school safety.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Barlow, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haigh, McDermott, Roach, Santos and P. Sullivan.

Staff: Andrew Colvin (786-7304).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Under current law, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must establish time lines for school districts to develop individual comprehensive safe school plans. School districts are required to report progress on their comprehensive safe school plans to the OSPI on a periodic but undefined basis. The OSPI is given authority to adopt rules for implementation.

The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) is required to create and operate a statewide first responder building and mapping information system. Beginning in 2003, the Washington Legislature has provided funding through the WASPC to map and assess the security of schools in Washington.

In 2003, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 called for the establishment of a single, comprehensive National Incident Management System (NIMS). Federal preparedness assistance funding for state and local governments is dependent on the NIMS compliance. A school district is considered local government. One of the NIMS implementation requirements is to use the Incident Command System (ICS), which provides a common organizational structure for the immediate response to emergencies and coordination of personnel and equipment at the site of an incident. Currently, the Association of Washington School Principals, the Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD), and the OSPI are providing the NIMS and the ICS training to school administrators.

Summary of Bill:

Schools and school districts are required to adopt, by September 1, 2008, and implement a safe school plan, consistent with the school mapping information system. Each plan must include required school safety policies and procedures; address emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery; include provisions for assisting and communicating with students and staff; comply with training guidance provided by the EMD; require the building principal to be ICS certified; consider how schools can be used in the event of a community-wide emergency; and set guidelines for requesting local emergency management agencies to meet with school districts annually.

On an annual basis, school districts are to: update their safe school plans; inventory hazardous materials; update the school mapping information system, which includes identifying staff members trained on the NIMS or the ICS and identifying school transportation emergency procedures; inventory emergency supplies; and provide information to all staff on the use of emergency supplies and alert procedures. This information must be reported to the WASPC.

Schools are required to conduct no less than one safety-related drill each month, which includes a drill using the school mapping information system, a drill for lock downs, and a drill for shelter-in-place. Schools should consider additional drills for high-risk local events, and such drills should be documented. Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are encouraged to apply for federal emergency response and crisis management grants.

A task force on gangs in schools is created to examine adult and youth gang activities that are affecting school safety. The task force will annually report its findings and recommendations to the education committees of the Legislature starting December 1, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Legislation passed several years ago called for schools to adopt safe school plans, but left it up to the OSPI to establish a deadline. That deadline was never established, and this bill puts one in place. It is important for schools to have safety plans, and to update those plans. Requirements for drills are updated to reflect possibilities other than fire situations. The school mapping system is almost complete, and if done well from the beginning, updates should not be costly. Collaboration with fire and emergency management response agencies is critical.

Gang activity is a serious and growing problem in our schools, and this bill establishes a task force to look at those issues and make recommendations to address the safety related issues associated with this problem.

Federal safety planning requirements often change, making safety planning more complicated for individual school districts. The pilot project for training in the federal National Incident Management System/Incident Command System is going very well. This bill provides permanency to the framework for providing the training and planning necessary for compliance with federal laws.

The grant program under this bill may help with training costs at the district level.

(With concerns) The Legislature needs to make sure that the planning requirements are funded to avoid unfunded mandates.

(Opposed) This bill creates too many potential unfunded mandates for school districts. A null and void clause should be added to the bill.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Rockefeller, prime sponsor; Craig Apperson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Joe Pope, Association of Washington School Principals.

(With concerns) Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators.

(Opposed) Mitch Denning, Alliance of Educational Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.