

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 6743

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Education

**Title:** An act relating to autism awareness instruction for teachers of students with autism.

**Brief Description:** Regarding training and guidelines for teachers of students with autism.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Rasmussen, McAuliffe, Tom and Shin).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Education: 2/26/08, 2/28/08 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill  
(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Department of Health, and the Department of Social and Health Services to make the autism manual available to school districts and families, and identifies guidelines addressing the needs of students with autism that must be included in the manual.
- Requires the distribution of information and posters regarding autism, the identification and diagnosis of autism, and available services.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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

**Staff:** Cece Clynch (786-7195).

**Background:**

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).* Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is characterized by

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impairments in social interactions, language and communication, and repetitive behaviors and preoccupations. Across the spectrum, there is a wide variability in symptoms and severity. In Washington, ASD is estimated to affect between two and six children per 1,000.

*Educator Training and Certification.* The 20-member Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) has responsibility and authority for policy and oversight of Washington's system of educator preparation certification, continuing education, and assignment. This body establishes certification and endorsement requirements for teachers, administrators, and educational staff associates. These certification and endorsement requirements do not apply to classified staff.

For an endorsement in special education, course work regarding "exceptionality," defined as an overview of all disabling conditions, including low to high incidence disabling conditions, is required. Course work in alternative delivery systems and strategies, and instructional methods, for special education is also required. There is no requirement in statute or rule that teachers receive instruction specific to ASD or any other particular disabling condition.

*Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force.* In 2005 the Legislature created the Caring for Washington Individuals with Autism Task Force (Task Force). The 2007 Legislation extended and funded the Task Force through June 30, 2008. One of its tasks is to create an autism services guidebook relevant to educators, families, medical professionals, and others.

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### **Summary of Amended Bill:**

By September 1, 2008, and subject to funding, the following shall occur:

- (1) The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Department of Health (DOH), and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) shall make available, through agency websites and other methods, the autism manual for school districts and families, as developed by the Task Force. This manual must include several specified guidelines which address the unique needs of students with autism. These guidelines include extended education programs, positive behavior supports, structured schedules, and teaching strategies.
- (2) The OSPI, the DOH, the DSHS, Educational Service Districts, school districts, and others must distribute information on "child find" responsibilities under Part B and Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended. Targeted recipients include agencies, districts, and schools who participate in the location, evaluation, and identification of children who may be eligible for early intervention services or special education services.
- (3) The OSPI, in collaboration with the DOH and the DSHS, must develop posters to be distributed to medical offices, grocery stores, and other public places. These posters are to include information on autism and how parents can gain access to the diagnosis and

identification of autism, as well as contact information for services and support, and must be available online for ease of distribution.

**Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:**

Rather than requiring specific training in autism for purposes of educator certification, autism specific guidelines and information about teaching children with autism are to be developed, disseminated, and made broadly available to districts and families. In addition, information and posters regarding the identification and diagnosis of children with autism are to be distributed.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available on original bill.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Just about every family is touched by autism. Ten years ago, the incidence of autism was thought to be 1/10,000. Today, it is 1/150. When there are properly trained teachers and staff, and appropriate services are provided, children with autism can be successful. All school staff should be educated and trained to work with children with autism. Other states, such as Texas and New Jersey, have guidelines for autism which enable parents to know what to ask for in terms of services and support for their children with autism. These guidelines provide an alternative to resorting to litigation. It is important to make sure that children with autism are provided with the opportunity to learn and thrive. With proper support and services, children with autism can progress. Without it, regression can be dramatic and, therefore, when the schools are lacking, parents may have to homeschool their children with autism. Some school districts seem to have properly trained personnel, while others do not. Ill-trained teachers can escalate the behaviors. Perhaps there should be requirements that school districts with the best practices share their knowledge and experience with other districts. Teachers are asking for this training, including training with respect to what should be included in individualized education programs (IEPs). These children need more than academics, they also need to be taught social skills. School districts care about children and want to provide support and educational services. Districts also need to be provided with the financial resources to provide what is required.

(Concerns) Three issues rise to the surface when Senate Bill 6743 is looked at together with 6742 and 6388: (1) teacher awareness and training; (2) early identification of autism; and (3) parent access to information so that they can be more effective advocates for their children. The OSPI would like to work with other stakeholders on these issues. Teachers should be provided with instruction in a whole range of disabilities, including autism. There is a need for more funding in this area, including federal funding.

(Opposed to autism-specific IEPs) The whole idea behind an IEP is that it be individualized to the student. Each student should be treated as an individual, and an individual's unique needs be taken into consideration. An autism-specific IEP would be redundant at best and at worst it could be harmful. Such a requirement could also be very expensive and greatly increase the paperwork just when both the federal and state regulations call for a reduction of paperwork.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Arzu Forough, Autism Speaks; Diana Stadden, Autism Society of Washington; Therese Holliday; Nasue Nishida, Professional Educator Standards Board; and Haim Strasbourger.

(Concerns) Bob Cooper, Washington Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; Kathy Bartlett, Franklin Pierce School District; and Brian Jeffries, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(Opposed to autism-specific IEPs) Sean Whalen.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.