

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1623

As Reported by House Committee On: Education

Title: An act relating to improving the availability and quality of sign language interpreting provided to public school students and other persons.

Brief Description: Concerning sign language interpreting in public schools.

Sponsors: Representatives Dolan, Frame, Appleton, Doglio, Kloba, Lovick, Ortiz-Self, Ryu, Senn, Stokesbary, Valdez, Stanford and Leavitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/14/19, 2/19/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to award grants to qualifying institutions of higher education to establish programs of study that prepare students to become educational interpreters and sign language interpreters in other employment sectors.
- Directs the OSPI to develop or expand a mentoring program for persons employed as educational interpreters in public schools.
- Directs the Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness and the OSPI to examine options for developing, expanding, supporting, and coordinating regionally delivered educational services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, and to provide a report on their examination by November 15, 2020.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Steele, Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Callan, Corry, Harris, Kilduff, Kraft, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Stonier, Thai, Valdez and Ybarra.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

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.

Background:

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matter pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and its office has numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute, including:

- making rules and regulations necessary for the administration of public education requirements;
- fulfilling financial responsibilities, including distributing legislatively allocated funds to districts for the operation of the public school system, and awarding numerous state and federally funded grants;
- maintaining and revising, in consultation with the State Board of Education, a statewide academic assessment system to measure student knowledge and skills on state learning standards and for purposes of state and federal accountability; and
- satisfying numerous reporting and other duties assigned by the Legislature.

Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss.

The Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss (CDHL) provides statewide leadership and support for the coordination of regionally delivered deaf education services in the full range of communication modalities. The CDHL also manages and supervises the Washington State School for the Deaf, and collaborates with public and private partners in developing training and professional development for educators serving children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Educational Interpreters.

Educational interpreters are school district employees who provide sign language interpretation, transliteration, or both, and further explanation of concepts introduced by the teacher, for students who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing.

The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) adopts standards for educational interpreters. The PESB also identifies and publicizes educational interpreter assessments that meet specified requirements, and establishes related performance standards, including defining what constitutes a minimum assessment result.

Summary of Bill:

Grants for Sign Language Interpreter Programs of Study.

Subject to legislative funding requirements, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must develop an application process and award grants to Washington's public universities, The Evergreen State College, and community and technical colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees to establish programs of study that prepare students to become:

- educational interpreters that meet the applicable performance standards of the PESB; and
- sign language interpreters in other employment sectors.

In awarding the grants, the OSPI must seek to increase the number and geographic diversity of applicable programs of study and to have those programs available to students beginning with the 2021-22 academic year.

Expanding Mentoring Programs for Educational Interpreters.

Subject to legislative funding requirements, the OSPI must develop or expand a mentoring program for persons employed as educational interpreters in public schools. Provided funds must be used for recruiting, hiring, and training persons to be employed by the CDHL who will provide mentoring services in different geographic regions of the state, with the dual goals of:

- providing services, beginning with the 2019-20 school year, to any requesting school district; and
- assisting persons in the timely and successful achievement of performance standards for educational interpreters established by the PESB.

The mentoring program funds may also be used for periodic professional development for those providing and receiving mentoring services.

Study of Regionally Delivered Education Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children.

Subject to legislative funding requirements, the CDHL and the OSPI must examine options for developing, expanding, supporting, and coordinating regionally delivered educational services in the full range of communication modalities for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. In completing the examination, the CDHL and the OSPI must, at a minimum, consult with students, parents, teachers, principals, district administrators, and an association representing educational service districts.

The examination must explore:

- options for delivering programs and services to students and school district staff through a regional framework based on educational service districts or other appropriate regions;
- student and professional development programs and services, by type and priority, that can be effectively delivered and supported through a regional framework;
- options for replicating current or proposed regional programs; and
- options for establishing or expanding summer learning programs, family learning programs, and other programs intended to create peer-oriented learning experiences for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

By November 15, 2020, the CDHL and the OSPI must submit a report of the examination to the Governor and the education committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The report must reflect an inclusive development process that considers suggestions and other comments offered by persons or entities consulted during the examination process. The report must also include a plan for implementing findings and recommendations, segmented into short, medium, and long-range actions and goals.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Washington does not have enough American Sign Language (ALS) interpreters because the state is largely devoid of the education program content to teach them. Teaching ASL interpreters requires a four-year institution, and the grant program in this bill will help with that. The state currently has 1.5 full-time-equivalent mentors to help people become educational interpreters, but at least six more are needed to serve different parts of the state. The state also needs mechanisms for getting deaf and hard of hearing students together regionally for the purpose of enabling them to develop student communities. The Washington State School for the Deaf does this, and this bill will help to develop regional communities in other parts of the state for the deaf students who continue to attend their local schools.

The state has worked hard to make sure that deaf and hard of hearing students get a full and inclusive education, and this bill will help with those efforts. The state does not have enough programs to meet the need for interpreters, and interpreters have said that they do not have time to drive to the state's one available program. It is important that districts have interpreters who can engage students with the language that the students use at home.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Dolan, prime sponsor; and Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.