

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5634

As Passed Senate, March 11, 1999

Title: An act relating to the retention and promotion of students.

Brief Description: Requiring school districts to adopt policies for the retention and promotion of students.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Finkbeiner, Zarelli, Hale, Oke, Deccio, Johnson, Hochstatter, Rossi, McDonald, Horn, Swecker and West).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/8/99, 3/3/99 [DPS].
Passed Senate, 3/11/99, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5634 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Bauer, Finkbeiner, Goings, Hochstatter, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen, Sellar and Swecker.

Staff: William Bridges (786-7424)

Background: There is no statewide policy concerning the promotion and retention of students. The determination of such policies is within the broad discretionary power of local school boards. A local school board must have a public hearing before it can adopt a policy on retention and promotion.

The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) has drafted sample policies for the promotion and retention of students. Under these policies, a student will be promoted to the next grade after successfully completing one year of study at a specific grade level. Retention at the same grade may be beneficial to the student if the student is not demonstrating a minimum competency in basic-skill subjects in relation to ability and grade level. Retention should not be considered except when there is a strong likelihood that the student will benefit with minimum social and emotional disruption.

Under the WSSDA sample policies, parents or guardians must be notified at least one quarter in advance of any retention decision. When possible, before the end of the third quarter, the teacher and principal will confer regarding any student who should be retained. The teacher and principal must invite parents and guardians to explain a student's progress. The parents or guardians must be advised on how they might assist the student. At least two weeks before the end of the school year, the parents or guardians must meet the teacher and principal to review the student's progress and decide if the student would best be served by promotion or retention. If the parents or guardians want their student to be promoted despite

the school's recommendation, the school will ask the parents or guardians to complete a form reflecting that decision.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that promoting students "without mastering the material does no service to our children."

Beginning with the 1999-2000 school year, in addition to any existing policies, all local school boards must adopt promotion and retention policies.

A school district's promotion and retention policy must include the following: (1) notification to parents and guardians when a student is identified as being at risk of retention; (2) the notice must be provided as early in the school year, and as early in the student's school career, as practicable; (3) an opportunity for parents and guardians to consult with teachers who are responsible for the decision to retain or promote; and (4) a description of the remedial opportunities which are available to a student who is recommended to be retained or is at risk of being retained.

The promotion and retention policy must be adopted at a public meeting.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: The bill complements local control because it gives local school districts the power to develop their own promotion and retention policies. The phrase "mastering the material" is too broad and controversial; it should be changed to "demonstrating appropriate competencies." The bill should be changed so that school boards are required to amend a policy if they have one. To prevent the social problems that may arise when older students mix with younger students, the grade designations in the bill should be eliminated and left to local discretion. The provision concerning remedial instruction should be amended so that school officials will explain the opportunities for remedial instruction that are available. As the bill currently reads, school officials must indicate the manner in which opportunities for remedial instruction will be provided.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Dwayne Slate, Washington State School Directors' Association (concerns); Joe Willhoft, Tacoma School District (concerns).

House Amendment(s): The House amendment makes the following changes: (1) a separate intent section is created; (2) school boards are required to adopt or amend promotion and retention policies by the beginning of the 2000-01 school year; (3) child- and pupil- are changed to student;- and (4) school districts are required to amend existing retention and promotion policies only if necessary.