

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5291

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 27, 1991

Brief Description: Assisting low-income students.

SPONSORS: Senators Erwin, Bailey, Rinehart, Talmadge, Oke, Pelz, Johnson, A. Smith, Murray and Bauer.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5291 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chairman; Erwin, Vice Chairman; Murray, Oke, Pelz, Rinehart, and Talmadge.

Staff: Susan Mosborg (786-7439)

Hearing Dates: February 12, 1991; February 27, 1991

BACKGROUND:

Fees for school supplies and summer school classes can prevent low-income students from participating in educational activities that could help them stay at grade level or progress. Some school districts respond to this problem by obtaining scholarships through foundations or local organizations such as the PTA, and some waive fees and absorb the cost. It appears, however, that such arrangements are usually made on an informal basis and not uniformly advertised or available to all low-income students.

Currently, the state does not directly fund summer school programs. School districts that wish to provide them are authorized to charge tuition and fees. In the 1989-90 school year, 69 school districts offered summer school programs and 67 of them charged tuition and fees.

SUMMARY:

School districts that charge tuition or fees for their summer school programs must adopt policies for waiving or reducing the tuition or fees for low-income students. The policies shall at least provide tuition and fee waivers to students whose family income is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line (the current eligibility for free and reduced price lunch).

In addition, all school districts must provide school supplies necessary for required course work free of charge to students from families with incomes below the poverty line. The district must notify all students' parents or guardians each year of the availability of the free school supplies and any

waivers or reductions of school program fees for low-income students.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall grant funds to school districts to assist with the cost of the summer school tuition and fee waivers. The Superintendent shall develop guidelines for allocation of the funds, giving priority to districts in which a high percentage of students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:

Minimum provisions for school district policies regarding summer school tuition and fee waivers are changed. The policies shall at least provide tuition and fee waivers to students eligible for free and reduced price meals for the following courses: elementary school offerings in reading, language arts, and mathematics, and secondary school offerings of courses necessary to meet state or local graduation requirements.

Minimum provisions for school district policies regarding the provision of school supplies are also changed. School districts must adopt a written policy on providing school supplies to low-income students, but the obligation to provide free school supplies is removed.

The method of allocating funds to school districts to assist with the cost of summer school tuition and fee waivers is revised. SPI shall allocate available funds based on the number of students in the district's summer school program and the number of students eligible for free and reduced price meals in the district during the school year.

Funds appropriated for the 1991-93 biennium shall be allocated for summer school occurring at the end of the 1991-92 school year.

Appropriation: \$400,000 to the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available

TESTIMONY FOR:

With the bill, the Haas Foundation, which provides grants to over 600 public and private schools in the state to help low-income children with school expenses, could spend funds on other student needs. The foundation's expenditures are currently restricted to secondary schools and PTA funds are rarely adequate to cover low-income children's school expenses.

Many low-income parents do not know how to access funds for their children's school expenses. Students and their families that have been persistent in pursuing assistance have

sometimes been told that funding is available but not to let it be known. Announcing the availability of funds would help.

Many students need summer school basic skills courses to stay at grade level but cannot pay the tuition and fees. Counselors are uncomfortable having to tell a parent their child could benefit from summer remediation or enrichment, without being able to offer information about tuition assistance.

Being poor is not a crime, but low income children are punished when they cannot afford school expenses. Their self esteem suffers each time. Students have been dismissed from physical education classes for failing to have the right shoes, and dismissed from other classes for failing to have the required notebook.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Kathy Morefield, the Haas Foundation; Carmel Finch, student; Pam Wheeler, parent; Sandy McDougall, Everett School District; Marcia Costello, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Laurie Dils, Washington Alliance Concerned with School Age Parents; John Kvamme, Tacoma Public Schools