

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1078

As Passed House:

March 8, 1995

Title: An act relating to the instruction in Braille reading and writing to blind students.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to instruction in Braille.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Ogden, Carlson, Casada, Cole, Quall, Benton, Pennington, Thibaudeau, Cooke, Boldt and Huff).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/27/95, 2/16/95 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/27/95, 3/4/95 [DP2S(w/o sub ED)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/8/95, 98-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Brumsickle, Chairman; Elliot, Vice Chairman; Johnson, Vice Chairman; Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Poulsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Clements; Dickerson; G. Fisher; Hatfield; McMahan; Quall; Radcliff; Smith; Talcott; B. Thomas; Thompson and Veloria.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Fuhrman.

Staff: Robert Butts (786-7111).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Education. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Silver, Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Huff, Vice Chairman; Pelesky, Vice Chairman; Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Valle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Beeksma; Brumsickle; Carlson; Chappell; Cooke; Crouse; G. Fisher; Foreman; Grant; Hargrove; Hickel; Jacobsen; Lambert; Lisk; McMorris; Poulsen; Reams; Rust; Sehlin; Sheahan; Talcott; Thibaudeau and Wolfe.

Staff: Jack Daray (786-7178).

Background: The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that states accepting federal funds provide a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. The federal law requires that related services be provided if the services are needed to help a handicapped child benefit from special education. Handicapped children in Washington must have the opportunity for an appropriate education under state law, federal law, and the Washington State Constitution.

An individual education program must be developed for all special education students. Instruction in Braille is provided only for visually impaired or blind students if such instruction is required in the student's individual education program.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that literacy in Braille is essential for blind and visually impaired persons, and that there shall be a presumption that proficiency in reading and writing Braille is essential for the educational progress of these students. The Legislature also finds that instruction in Braille shall be sufficient to enable each student to communicate effectively and efficiently at a level commensurate with such student's sighted peers of comparable grade level and ability.

Legally blind and visually impaired students may receive instruction in Braille reading and writing as part of their individualized education program (IEP). Each student who is blind shall be assessed to determine the most appropriate learning media, including, but not limited to, Braille. No student may be denied the opportunity for instruction in Braille reading and writing solely because the student has some remaining vision.

A committee is to be formed to assist the State Board of Education in determining teacher competencies in Braille instruction. The composition of the committee is specified. The competencies are to be adopted by August 31, 1997.

Effective September 1, 1998, a school district may only assign a teacher responsibility for teaching Braille if the teacher has demonstrated competency in Braille. School districts may hire non-certificated teachers to teach Braille if the individual has demonstrated competency in Braille.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (Education) Braille is essential for blind and visually impaired individuals. 70 percent of the blind are under or unemployed. Of those who are employed, 70 percent read Braille. There are no substitutes for Braille. Imagine a world with no written language. Too many school districts are not providing Braille to students who need it.

(Appropriations) None.

Testimony Against: (Education) None.

(Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Education) Representative Don Carlson; Pauline Krauss; Gary Mackenstad, Denise Mackenstad, Susan Prows, National Federation of the Blind parent group; Bill Sellers, Assembly of Washington; Frank Cuta, United Blind of Tri-Cities; Cherie Tessier, People First of Washington; Sharon Keeran, Washington Council of the Blind; Sue Ammeter, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues; Kathleen Anderson, State Board of Education; and Dean Stenehjem, School for the Blind.

(Appropriations) None.