

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SSB 6509

As Reported By House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to training in reading instruction.

Brief Description: Requiring training for reading instruction.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Hochstatter, Benton, Zarelli, Rossi, Swecker, Deccio, Johnson, Oke, McCaslin, Stevens, Morton, Roach and Schow).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/19/98, 2/27/98 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Smith; Sterk; Sump and Talcott.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Quall and Veloria.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

Subcommittee on Reading Literacy

In response to widespread concern about test scores and reports of the low reading literacy rates of Washington students, the 1995 Legislature created the House Education Subcommittee on Reading Literacy. The subcommittee was directed to examine the reading literacy problem in depth and seek solutions. A report of the subcommittee, dated December 1997, summarizes its work during the ensuing three years.

The subcommittee reported that, since its initial review of reading practices in 1995, the Legislature has enacted several bills to improve reading literacy.

Legislation on Reading Instruction

- In 1996, the Legislature passed E2SHB 2909, which established a process to identify effective reading programs and directed the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning to share information about those types of programs. The legislation also provided grants to help teachers use effective reading programs and created a program to train elementary educators to use certain types of classroom-based assessments.
- In 1997, the Legislature passed ESHB 2042, which established a primary grade reading grant program to improve the use of research-proven beginning reading materials. The legislation also created a process to identify a collection of second grade reading tests and removed the requirement to develop a third grade reading assessment.
- In 1997, through the passage of ESB 6072, the Legislature changed the timelines for developing a student assessment system. In addition, it directed the Commission on Student Learning (CSL) to recommend a statewide accountability system for reading in kindergarten through fourth grade by November 1, 1997.

Fourth Grade Reading Test Results

Since the enactment of those measures, the CSL has reported the results of its first fourth grade assessment. In spring 1997, more than 270 school districts in Washington voluntarily administered the assessment. The assessment tested students in reading, writing, communication, and mathematics. Forty-eight percent of the students met or exceeded the new reading standard. On its web page, the commission reported that "in many ways, the first-year test was a test of curriculum and school programs to see where change is needed rather than a test of students." In addition to the CSL's initial results, the House Education Subcommittee on Reading Literacy reported the findings of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). The NAEP reported that 44 percent of the fourth grade students in the state read below basic levels, meaning that they exhibit "little or no mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to perform work at each grade level."

Research Results

During the summer and fall of 1997, the House Education Subcommittee on Reading Literacy reviewed research results on the basic cognitive processes underlying reading comprehension in early childhood. It also consulted a number of nationally recognized experts in reading research. The subcommittee's December 1997 report lists the key principles of effective reading instruction identified in the research:

- Begin teaching phonemic awareness directly at an early age (kindergarten);

- Teach each sound-spelling correspondence explicitly;
- Teach frequent, highly regular sound-spelling relationships systematically;
- Show children exactly how to sound out words;
- Use connected, decodable text for children to practice the sound-spelling relationships they learn; and
- Use interesting stories to develop language comprehension.

Subcommittee's Conclusions

After reviewing available research, visiting effective reading programs in a number of school districts, and consulting with parents, teachers, administrators, students, and researchers, the subcommittee reached several conclusions. According to the subcommittee's report, it found that continuing advances in research support basic reading programs that focus on:

- developing an awareness of phonemes, or letter sounds;
- understanding how sounds are connected to print;
- developing an understanding of the alphabetic principle; and
- translating these skills to applying phonics in reading and spelling.

Summary of Amended Bill: The legislation will be known as the Successful Readers Act.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) will administer two new programs designed to improve the reading abilities of elementary school students. One program will fund professional development and curriculum or related materials in beginning reading strategies. The other program will provide grants to elementary schools that wish to train teachers in ways to use volunteer tutors and mentors to help students read. School districts may apply for funding through both programs. The funding will be available by June 1, 1998. Participating teachers will receive a stipend.

Reading Instruction Funding Opportunities

Elementary schools interested in providing professional development and related curriculum and materials to help teachers, principals, and classroom volunteers with beginning reading strategies may apply for funding. SPI will prioritize funding requests.

Priority will be given first to those schools in which either fewer than 25 percent of the students met the reading standard on the fourth grade assessment or in which the average performance on the reading component of the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) was in the bottom quartile for the previous three years. Second priority will go to schools in which either fewer than one-third of the students met the reading standard on the fourth grade assessment or in which the average performance on the reading component of the CTBS was in the bottom one-third for the previous three years. Third priority will

be given to schools in which either fewer than half of the students met the reading standard on the fourth grade assessment or in which the average performance on the reading component of the CTBS was in the bottom half for the previous three years.

The application process for the funding is limited to verification of the following:

- The applicant has or will develop a comprehensive school-wide improvement plan that includes, but is not limited to, a beginning reading-language arts program for use in kindergarten through second grade. The primary elements of the beginning reading-language arts program are described and terms are defined.
- The intended professional development efforts will support the school's beginning reading-language arts program. The types of beginning reading-language arts skills that will receive primary emphasis are described.
- The funds for professional development not be used for staff development, intervention, or remediation programs.

Elementary schools who receive grants through this process may use public or private nonsectarian contractors. The schools must certify and provide documentation to SPI to show that the grants were spent appropriately. Schools and school districts that received funding from the Primary Grade Reading Grant program may not apply for funding through this program.

Grants for Volunteer Tutoring and Mentoring Programs

Elementary schools may apply for grants to train teachers in ways to use volunteer tutors and mentors to help struggling readers in kindergarten through fourth grade. The training programs must be research based and of proven effectiveness. In addition the programs must contain certain elements:

- Teacher training in program planning and in the use of volunteers;
- Established goals for a minimum number of hours that volunteers will spend with students each week and during normal school hours;
- Teacher training in recruiting and retaining tutors and mentors for reading; and
- A plan to assess each student's reading ability before the student enters and after the student finishes the program. Participants must report program results to SPI. By December 1999, SPI will report on the effectiveness of the grants to the Legislature.

Program Timelines

Schools will be notified of the opportunities provided by the programs by April 15. Funding will be available by June 1, 1998. The programs expire on July 30, 2005.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Second Substitute Bill: References are removed to summer leadership and accountability institutes, reading resource centers at the educational service districts, and a second grade norm-referenced reading test. Existing references to second grade reading tests and a second grade grant program are not repealed. The intent section is modified, principals are included in reading instruction funding opportunities, and a definition of vocabulary instruction is removed. In addition, references to students with limited English proficiency are removed and some of the components of the grant program are refined.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available on 1st substitute.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: This legislation provides teachers with discretionary grants for training in reading strategies and the use of volunteer tutors and mentors. Children of professional people come to school having heard an average of about 2,100 words per hour. Children from less educationally advantaged backgrounds come to school having heard an average of 600 words per hour. The children from less advantaged backgrounds often need extra help to learn to read successfully. This bill provides \$15 million to help those children learn to read. It is based on brain research funded by the United States Institute of Health.

Testimony Against: The components of the funding program for professional development are too prescriptive. Educational goals belong in statute. Educational practice belongs in the classroom. This bill describes educational practice and undermines local control. The Legislature should describe the outcomes it expects and leave with local districts the responsibility to decide how to meet the goals. The flag went up when the reading scores on the fourth grade assessment were posted. Schools are in the process of determining the best way to improve those scores. The legislation does not include a reading corps pilot program, or a reading center at SPI. It also repeals a successful second grade grant program. (Original bill.)

Testified: Senator Hochstatter, prime sponsor; Sue Karahalios, teacher (opposed); Jane Gutting, Superintendent of Public Instruction (opposed); Rainer Houser, Association of Washington School Principals (opposed); and Steve Brown, Washington Education Association (opposed).