

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2042

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to reading in the primary grades.

Brief Description: Providing a grant program for reading in the primary grades.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Johnson, Talcott and Hickel).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/28/97, 3/4/97 [DPS];
Appropriations: 3/8/97 [DPS(ED)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/13/97, 96-0.
Senate Amended.
House Concurred.
Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Quall; Smith; Sterk; Sump; Talcott and Veloria.

Staff: Pat Shelledy (786-7149).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Education be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Wensman, Vice Chairman; H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Benson; Carlson; Chopp; Cody; Cooke; Crouse; Dyer; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler;

Lambert; Linville; Lisk; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; Poulsen; Regala; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan; Talcott and Tokuda.

Staff: Elissa Benson (786-7191).

Background: The Legislature has emphasized the importance of learning to read for students' academic success. Students must be assessed for reading literacy skills in the third grade no later than March 31 of each year when an assessment tool is developed by the Washington Commission on Student Learning. The assessment tool must be implemented in the 1998-99 school year.

Summary of Bill: The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must identify a collection of tests that can be used to test second grade reading accuracy and fluency skills. The SPI must create a pilot project to identify which of those tests will be included in a final collection of tests. Schools and school districts may voluntarily participate in the pilot project during the 1997-98 school year. Starting in the 1998-99 school year, school districts must select a test from the final collection adopted by the SPI. The school district must administer the test at the entire school district level for at least three years. Students who fall substantially below grade level must be re-tested at least once. Schools must notify parents about the results, notify parents what actions the school will take to improve the child's reading, and provide parents with strategies to help the parents improve their child's score.

The SPI must establish a primary grade reading grant program. The purpose of the program is to train teachers in teaching methods that have proven results gathered through quantitative research and to assist all students in beginning reading. Several requirements are established under the grant program.

The SPI must report biennially to the Legislature about the grant program starting on December 1, 1999. The SPI must also disseminate to the school districts, five years after the beginning of the grant program, information regarding the results of the effectiveness of the models of teaching methods and materials and implementation strategies.

The SPI may use up to 1 percent of the funds appropriated to administer the grant program.

The provision governing the third grade reading test is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on March 5, 1997.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately. However, if specific funding for section 4 of this act is not provided in the budget sections 4 and 7 of this act are null and void.

Testimony For: (Education) Mastery of reading skills is the fundamental cornerstone of education. Far too many fourth graders are reading below basic level, which means that they will almost certainly remain behind in academics the rest of their lives. The state is embarking on a mission of establishing some of the most rigorous educational standards in the country but they will be of little value if students cannot read. The state is spending millions in remediation programs. A critical aspect of learning to read is to return to the basics and be sure that students are tested for decoding skills. The grant program will be used to help train teachers to teach reading.

(Appropriations) Mastery of reading skills is the fundamental cornerstone of education. Far too many fourth graders are reading below basic level, which means that they will almost certainly remain behind in academics the rest of their lives. Second grade tests will allow detection of children who are having difficulties at age seven instead of age 10. The test will provide an objective means of evaluating second graders. The grant program will greatly assist in getting research findings about effective beginning reading methods into the classroom and enable evaluation in a scientific manner. A critical aspect of learning to read is to return to the basics and be sure that students are tested for their ability to read single words.

Testimony Against: (Education) The proposed bill overly emphasizes the importance of decoding skills. Decoding is just one strategy for teaching reading that should be in the arsenal of teaching methods. Use of decoding tests alone could result in some children feeling unnecessarily bad because they may have difficulty decoding but they may be able to learn to read using other methods. The state should not be mandating teaching methodology.

(Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Education) Representative Johnson, prime sponsor; Representative Talcott, sponsor; Linda Lee, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (pro with concerns); Joe Welhoft, Tacoma School District (pro); Amy Richardson, teacher (con); Alice Lindemuth, Shelton School District (con); and Muffy Pickel, Superintendent, North Mason School District (pro).

(Appropriations) Alice Lindemuth, Shelton School District; Lynn Vance, Pioneer School District; Joe Welhoft, Tacoma School District; and Marcy Stein, University of Washington at Tacoma.