

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2329

As Reported By House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to kindergarten.

Brief Description: Funding full-day kindergarten programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Hickel, Johnson, Linville, Wolfe, Ogden, Appelwick, Kessler, Costa, Anderson, Constantine, Mason and Sullivan.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/15/98, 1/23/98 [DPS].

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: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background: By law, school districts are required to provide a basic education program of at least 450 hours to students in kindergarten. The basic education allocation distributed to school districts by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) funds kindergarten students based on 180 half-days of instruction or the equivalent. Each kindergarten student can be counted at a maximum of .5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) even if the school district provides a full-day kindergarten. For the 1997-98 school year, there are an estimated 36,468 FTE students enrolled in kindergarten in the public schools.

During the fall of 1997, the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) surveyed the school districts on a variety of issues. Two-hundred sixty school districts, or 88 percent of the total, responded to the survey. The survey included a series of questions about kindergarten. About 41 districts, or 16 percent of the respondents, offer a full-day kindergarten. Tuition for the additional half-day ranges from \$120 to \$240 per month. The association asked whether districts would add or expand all-day kindergarten if funding was provided through competitive grants. One-hundred twenty-seven

respondents, 49 percent of the total, said yes. Forty respondents said no, and 84 were undecided. When asked why districts would not expand to a full-day kindergarten program, 40 respondents cited lack of classroom space. Twenty-one respondents mentioned too little demand. There were other responses as well, suggesting that some respondents found competitive grants onerous, and some questioned whether full-day kindergarten classes were developmentally appropriate. The statistics described above were included in a preliminary draft of WASA's survey results. The responses of additional districts will be included in the final survey report.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Beginning in the 1998-99 school year, school districts may expand their basic education kindergarten programs from one-half day or its equivalent to a full day. The basic education kindergarten program could then expand from 450 hours to 900 hours each year. The OSPI will adopt notification requirements to ensure that districts that plan to expand kindergarten programs to a full day notify the superintendent in time to allow the appropriate allocation of funds.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: A self-study requirement in current law that was inadvertently removed in the drafting process was restored.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, section 3 of this act shall take effect September 1, 2000, unless if by that date a law is enacted stating that a school accountability and academic assessment system is not in place.

Testimony For: Numerous studies have shown that children benefit from focused, academically oriented early childhood education, including kindergarten. Children who benefit most from the programs tend to be those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, Washington's decision to limit funding for kindergarten to a half-day program has limited the ability of school districts to offer a full day of kindergarten. Few districts offer a full-day program and most of those that do must charge tuition. Some children from disadvantaged backgrounds now go from a four hour a day Head Start program at age 4 to a two and one-half hour a day kindergarten program at age 5. Many kindergarten students now spend half their day in kindergarten and the other half in a child care program. If kindergarten is expanded to a full day, teachers will be able to use the extra time to help children acquire beginning skills in reading, math, science, safety, and writing. If local districts are given an option to offer a full-day kindergarten program, many districts will not take advantage of the option immediately. So, the costs associated with the extra half-day will be phased in over several biennia.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Tim Hickel, prime sponsor; Representative Grace Cole; Tom Vander Ark, Kendy Meyer and Jan Bieber, Federal Way School District; Rainer Houser, Association of Washington School Principals; Barbara Casey, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Sam, kindergarten student; Linda Johnson, Judy Albrecht and Betty Scranton, Shoreline School District; Gail Miller, Tacoma Public Schools; and Jane Gutting, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (All in favor).