

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2419

As Reported By House Committee On:

Education
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to reading improvement.

Brief Description: Establishing reading improvement programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Johnson, Talcott, Sterk, Sump, Mulliken, Lambert, Thompson, Smith, McCune, Benson, Cooke, O'Brien and Backlund.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/20/98, 1/30/98 [DPS];
Appropriations: 2/7/98 [DP2S(w/o sub ED)].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. 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: 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.

- 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.

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."

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.
- Use interesting stories to develop language comprehension.

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 Substitute Bill:

Funding Applications: To the extent funds are appropriated, elementary schools may apply to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) for money to provide professional development and related materials to certificated instructional staff teaching students in kindergarten through second grade.

OSPI 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.

Funding will be available to schools by June 30, 1998. The schools may use some of the funding to provide professional development materials for classroom volunteers helping in K-2 classrooms.

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

- The applicant has developed a school-wide improvement plan that focuses on the improvement of reading performance throughout the school. The primary, but not sole, element of the plan will be a beginning reading-language arts program for use in kindergarten through second grade. Certain required 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.
- To the fullest extent possible, the school will use funding from the learning assistance program and other resources for the beginning reading-language arts program.
- The funds for professional development in beginning reading-language arts instruction will be spent for appropriate purposes. These purposes do not include staff development, intervention, or remediation programs.
- Representatives of K-2 teachers and reading specialists from the school will be attending a leadership and accountability institute held by OSPI.

Elementary schools who receive funds through this process must certify and provide documentation to OSPI to show that the money was spent appropriately. Schools and school districts that received funding from the Primary Grade Reading Grant program may not apply for funds.

In-service Training in Reading: The State Board of Education (SBE) must verify that in-service training in reading includes training in certain required beginning reading skills before the board can approve the use of the training for movement on the salary schedule. The SBE has the authority to audit in-service training opportunities to ensure compliance with this requirement.

Reading Center in the OSPI: OSPI will develop an independent unit within the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning. The unit's primary focus will be on scientifically validated reading instructional practices. The unit will serve as a resource for teachers and other professionals. The unit's responsibilities are described.

Educational Service Districts: Each educational service district (ESD) will establish a reading resource center. Upon request, the center may help schools receiving funds under this act to improve the reading-language arts skills of the school's students. Some of the ways that the center may assist the schools are described.

Leadership and Accountability Institutes: By September 30, 1998, OSPI will conduct institutes designed to provide teams of teachers, administrators, and school board members with information and tools to improve beginning reading instruction. Some of the areas to be covered in the institutes are described. School districts sending teams to the institutes must make a commitment to provide team members with enough time to implement the strategies learned while attending the institute.

Washington Reading Corps: OSPI will establish a reading corps pilot program to provide intensive reading instruction to elementary grade students during the summer and

other school breaks. The pilot program will last from June 1, 1998, to June 30, 1999.

Participating school districts will conduct pilots that provide at least 80 hours of instruction to participating students from certificated staff trained in research validated effective reading strategies. The teachers will be assisted by trained classified staff, tutors, and volunteers. The pilots will have at least one adult for every four students. However, if a participating district is unable to reach or maintain the adult-student ratio, the district will not be penalized financially. Pilots will include a pre-assessment and post-assessment of the reading performance of participating students.

OSPI's responsibilities are described. The agency will be assisted by a steering committee comprised of representatives of school districts, ESDs, and others. OSPI will select participating districts. In making the selections, OSPI will give a priority to districts that contain schools in which either fewer than 40 percent of students met the reading standard on the fourth grade assessment or in which more than 40 percent of students scored in the bottom quartile on the reading component of the CTBS. If funding is available, OSPI will also conduct or contract for an evaluation of the pilot program. Some of the required components of and timelines for the evaluation are described. The final evaluation will be provided to the Legislature by November 1, 1999.

Effective and Expiration Dates: The application process to fund professional development for K-2 teachers and the definition section expire on July 30, 2005. The leadership and accountability institutes expire on December 31, 1998. OSPI's authority to select schools and school districts to participate in the reading corps pilots begins on June 1, 1998, and ends June 30, 1999. An emergency clause is attached.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: An intent section is added. Schools may choose to participate in a funding application process. Requirements for that process are described. The requirement is removed that low performing schools implement a reading improvement plan. The responsibilities of the SBE are revised to include only certification and possible verification of selected in-service training opportunities. The reading resource center responsibilities of the ESDs are revised and limited. Content areas and other details for the leadership and accountability institutes are revised and clarified. Provisions governing the reading resource center at OSPI are revised and clarified. Finally, a reading corps pilot program is established and described.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. Requested on substitute bill on February 2, 1998.

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

Testimony For: Reading is a gateway skill, without it students will have virtually no chance of succeeding in an increasingly complex and technological world. The single best predictor of reading failure is the inability to decode words on a page. Ninety percent of the students who are poor readers in the first grade will be poor readers in the third grade. Seventy-five percent of the students who are poor readers in fourth grade will be poor readers in ninth grade. Students who are retained in third grade because they are reading below grade level have almost no chance of graduating from high school. Research shows that, in order to learn to read, the overwhelming majority of children need to have systematic explicit instruction in phonics. This legislation provides to all teachers and other reading professionals the research based information and instructional materials that they will need to help students improve their reading skills. However, it does not require teachers to restrict their instruction to any one method of teaching, nor does it mandate any particular curriculum. It targets extra funding and assistance to schools in which only 25 percent of the children met the reading standard on the fourth grade assessment. It provides professional development opportunities for reading instructors. Passage of this bill will help to change the culture in the classroom by sending a persistent, clear message that the Legislature supports a reading program designed around principles that have been verified by reliable and replicable research.

Testimony Against: Washington has a decentralized system of governance for its public schools. If this legislation passes, the state will be requiring some school districts to include phonics in their beginning reading programs. This type of requirement is unnecessary since most, perhaps all, districts now include phonics in their beginning reading programs. The language in this bill is overly restrictive and can be interpreted to mandate a phonics only reading program. Children have different learning styles and may need different instructional methods to learn to read. The state should not mandate any particular type of instruction or curriculum, those decisions should be left to locally elected school boards. Passage of this type of legislation could destroy ed reform in this state. The only way to change the culture in schools is to have teachers and administrators own and embrace the change. Changes of that nature need to come from the local level.

Testified: Representative Peggy Johnson, prime sponsor; Dr. Douglas Carnine, University of Oregon (pro); Virginia Mecifield, Karen Everett and Nancy Edwards, Pioneer School District (pro); Representative Lambert (pro); Richard Slettvet, citizen (pro); Karen Craig, Rhea Lewis, and Yvonne Ullas, Washington Education Association (con); Terry Bergeson and Jerry Miller, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (con); Kathryn Deierling, Susan Esfelt, Bill Ash, and Sandy Brandt, Snohomish School District, (pro); Rebecca Hahn, citizen (pro); Sandra French, parent (pro); Beverly Wolf, educator (pro); Jayni Kamin, school board member (pro); Kristie Larsen, educator (pro); Julie Rubright, educator (pro); and Lynn Fielding, Kennewick School District (pro). Due to time constraints, not everyone who signed up to testify was able to do so. The sign up sheets for the bill are available from committee staff.

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 16 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Wensman, Vice Chairman; Benson; Cooke; Crouse; Lambert; Lisk; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan and Talcott.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Carlson; Chopp; Cody; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Linville; Poulsen; Regala and Tokuda.

Staff: Jack Daray (786-7178).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee on Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee on Education: The bill is null and void unless specific funding is provided in the Omnibus Appropriations Act by June 30, 1998.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 1998.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: Reading is an important skill for the foundation of a student's education. Recent testing of student skills indicates low performance in student reading. Systematic explicit instruction in phonics is an important component of learning and needs to be part of a teacher's "toolbox" of methods to teach reading. The approach taken in this substitute version of reading legislation does not mandate phonics as the approach to reading. The bill provides an opportunity for intensive training in phonics-based approaches as well as other basic reading skills for districts that choose to revise curriculum and teaching techniques as a response to low test scores in reading. Many teachers are not good readers themselves and need to have their skills upgraded through more focused training.

Testimony Against: Phonics is an important component of learning but should not necessarily be the primary emphasis in teaching reading. The controversy resulting from emphasis on one approach is unnecessary since different approaches work in different circumstances. The emphasis on one particular approach is perceived among teachers in local school districts as too much involvement by the state in their approach to teaching. The exclusion of credits for in-service reading training on the state salary

allocation schedule unless they meet the narrow criteria of the phonics-based approach is too much control by the state of local instructional methods.

Testified: Terry Bergeson, Superintendent, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (con); Judy Hartmann, Washington Education Association (pro and con); and Eleanor Owen (concerns).