

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5508

As Passed Senate, March 15, 1997

Title: An act relating to reading accountability.

Brief Description: Enacting the third grade reading accountability act.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Hochstatter, Oke, Morton, Swecker, Finkbeiner, Horn, Stevens and Schow).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/6/97, 2/18/87 [DPS-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/27/97, 3/6/97 [DP2S, DNP].

Passed Senate, 3/15/97, 27-22.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5508 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hochstatter, Chair; Finkbeiner, Vice Chair; Johnson, Rasmussen and Zarelli.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5508 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators West, Chair; Deccio, Vice Chair; Strannigan, Vice Chair; Hochstatter, Long, McDonald, Roach, Rossi, Schow, Swecker, Winsley and Zarelli.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Bauer, Brown, Kohl, Loveland, Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel and Thibaudeau.

Staff: William Freund (786-7441)

Background: There is general agreement that reading is a fundamental basic academic skill. Research suggests that students who do not achieve reading literacy skills by third grade fall behind their classmates and are less successful in school.

Current law encourages school districts to test second grade students to help identify students in need of academic skills assistance. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) is required to annually conduct a standardized norm-referenced assessment of the academic skills, including reading skills, of fourth, eighth and 11th grade students.

Summary of Bill: A state reading goal is established. The goal is for 90 percent of all Washington's public school third graders to read at or above grade level by the spring of 2002.

Each school district is required to use classroom-based assessments to annually evaluate the reading level of students in grades K-2 for intervention and remediation purposes, beginning in the spring of 1998.

SPI is directed to annually conduct a standardized norm-referenced reading assessment of third graders. Test results must be available to school districts and parents of test takers prior to May 15.

Beginning in the spring of 1998, each school district must use the standardized reading assessment conducted by the Superintendent of Public Instruction to annually assess the reading level of its third grade students. The results of the 1998 assessment establishes a baseline for each public elementary school.

Each school is expected to make an annual incremental improvement. Annual incremental improvement is that increase in the number of third grade students, reading at or above grade level, necessary to progress from the 1998 building baseline to the state reading goal by 2002.

Seven levels of accountability are recognized as necessary to achieve the state reading goal:

Parents: Parents are recognized as a child's first and most influential teacher. Public school districts are required to encourage and support parents reading with their children at least 20 minutes a day from birth through third grade.

State-level: SPI is required to annually report to the Legislature on the progress made toward the state reading goal. SPI must report the third grade reading scores to the public. SPI must encourage buildings to develop many instructional approaches. SPI is not to adopt a specific instructional approach. The standard for instruction is to use what works. SPI is required to provide schools information on the practices of schools making or exceeding the annual incremental improvement. SPI is directed to evaluate and make available a variety of classroom-based assessments to assess the reading level of students in grades K-3.

Professional Organizations: SPI is required meet with each association on the voluntary alignment of association resources to achieve the reading goal. SPI must report annually to the Legislature on the professional associations' efforts to achieve the reading goal. SPI must also meet with the Commission on Student Learning to assure consistent approaches.

Principal: An increasing portion of each public elementary school principal's annual evaluation should result from the appraisal of the principal's leadership in achieving the reading goal.

Teacher: Each third grade teacher must annually report a student's reading level as measured by the third grade assessment to the student's parent or guardian.

School: Each public elementary school must annually report the results of the third grade reading assessment to its community.

School District: Each school district must annually report the results of the third grade reading assessment to SPI.

Beginning in the 1999-2000 school year, school districts receive \$4,000 for each elementary school achieving its annual incremental improvement, and \$2,000 for each elementary school achieving one-half of its annual incremental improvement. SPI is required to adopt rules to prorate the amount paid for elementary schools with a third grade full-time equivalent enrollment of fewer than 75 students.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Children learn to read until they reach the third grade, after third grade they read to learn. This bill establishes a reasonable goal and expects districts to make planned progress towards the goal. It establishes multiple levels of accountability to ensure that parents, principals, teachers and the community will work together to help kids read on grade level. Flexibility is one of the pluses of the bill. It does not specify how districts get their students reading on grade level. This bill is consistent with the objectives of education reform.

Testimony Against: The bill is tied to an assessment that is not yet determined by the Commission on Student Learning. The bill undermines education reform and duplicates what the CSL is doing. Teachers need more training and support to reach the goal. Having a third grade test on reading and a fourth grade test with different assessments will confuse parents.

Testified: Senator Hochstatter, prime sponsor (pro); Virginia (Ginger) Berninger, University of Washington professor; Lynn Fielding, Kennewick School District (pro); Rev. Ronnie White, minister/Pasco School District board member (pro); Nancy Kerr, TriCities Reading Foundation (pro); Marda Kirkwood, Citizens United for Responsible Education (pro); Judy Hartmann, WEA (pro); Marlene Holayter, Commission on Student Learning (pro); Terry Bergeson, Superintendent of Public Instruction (con).

House Amendment(s): The striking amendment strikes the language establishing a statewide reading goal that by 2002, 90 percent of all third grade students will read at or above grade level, providing financial rewards/incentives for making improvements toward the goal, and creating requirements at seven levels to provide accountability. Language is added requiring that the Commission on Student Learning (CSL) with the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) recommend to the Legislature a statewide accountability system for reading in the elementary grades. The administration of the standardized norm-referenced test (currently the CTBS, California Test of Basic Skills) is changed from the fourth grade to the third grade. Schools must report student scores on the CTBS test to the parents, the school board, and the SPI.

Schools must report student scores on other state-mandated tests to the school board. The act has a null and void clause.