

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1970

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to world languages.

Brief Description: Regarding world languages.

Sponsors: Representatives Schual-Berke, Cox, Talcott, Anderson, Veloria, Skinner, McDermott, Sullivan, Kagi, Quall and Haigh.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/24/03, 3/3/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to assign at least a half-time employee to world language instruction.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; McDermott, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Tom, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, Haigh, Hunter, McMahan, Rockefeller and Santos.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

According to State Board of Education (SBE) graduation requirements, students must have at least five and one-half (5.5) elective credits to graduate. Study in a world language other than English or study in a world culture may satisfy any or all of the elective requirements.

In order to enter a state college or university, a student must have at least two years of a single foreign language. Native American languages and American Sign Language will satisfy these requirements.

The Association of Departments of Foreign Languages reports that the study of a foreign language is valuable because it:

1. Offers a sense of a relevant past, both cultural and linguistic.
2. Liberalizes one's experience (helps expand one's view of the world).
3. Balances content and skills (rather than content versus skills).
4. Contributes to the creation of a student's personality.
5. Encourages critical reflection on the relation of language and culture, and language and thought; fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature.
6. Contributes to cultural awareness or literacy (such as knowledge of original texts).
7. Contributes to achievement of national goals, such as economic development or national security.
8. Expands one's opportunities for meaningful leisure activities (such as travel, reading, or viewing foreign language films).
9. Develops the intellect (includes learning how to learn).
10. Improves one's knowledge of the native language (through comparison and contrast with the foreign language).
11. Exposes the learner to modes of thought outside the native language.
12. Builds practical skills (for purposes such as travel or commerce or as a tool for other disciplines).
13. Preserves (or fosters) a country's image as a cultured nation.
14. Teaches and encourages respect for other peoples.
15. Enables the transfer of training (such as learning of a second foreign language).

Summary of Bill:

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will assign at least one-half of an existing full-time equivalent employee to help school districts in their efforts to offer world language instruction. The employee's responsibilities may include establishing and maintaining a programmatic data base, providing information and assistance to teachers and districts, and program coordination. In addition, the employee may maintain contact with business to help districts align language course offerings to the needs of the job market. Finally, the employee may offer classes to teachers on communicative language teaching.

The one-half full-time equivalent employee will be assigned from one of the existing full-time equivalent employees available to the agency on June 30, 2003.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: We live in a world in which every country is becoming increasingly interdependent. We live in a state that is an extremely trade dependent, with one out of five jobs associated with world trade. These realities mean that Washington's students need to understand the languages and cultures of people in other lands. However, the public school system is paying less attention than it did in the past to the teaching of world languages. The OSPI once had a world language specialist on staff to help coordinate language offerings and to provide technical assistance to districts that requested help in initiating or expanding world language courses. That expertise ceased to exist once the specialist retired and was not replaced. The need for a state level expert to coordinate world languages is even greater than it was when the expertise existed at the OSPI. Currently, there is a disparity in the availability of language courses throughout the state. Reinstating expertise at the state level will help diminish that disparity by making it possible to have a clearinghouse of language resources at the OSPI.

(In support with concerns) The OSPI may lose about 30 employees this year due to possible budget cuts. If that occurs, the agency cannot absorb this requirement without additional funding and employees.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Schual-Berke, prime sponsor; Dr. Sonja Hokanson, Karen Pauler, and Marianne Harvey, Washington Association for Language Teaching; and Angela Davila, Bellevue Public Schools.

(With concerns) Megan Atkinson, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.