

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5079

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to natural science, wildlife, and environmental education.

Brief Description: Promoting natural science, wildlife, and environmental education.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Finkbeiner, Kohl-Welles, Oke, Winsley, Zarelli, Benton, Swecker, Esser, Hale, Johnson, Hewitt, McAuliffe, Rasmussen and Parlette).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/27/03, 3/31/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Creates an account as a repository for state and other monies provided to support natural science, wildlife, agriculture, forestry and environmental education programs provided to schools by nonprofit organizations.
- Directs the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to distribute grants from the account on a competitive basis to eligible nonprofit organizations that provide matching funds or in-kind services and that meet additional criteria described in the legislation.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; McDermott, Vice Chair; Tom, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, Haigh, Hunter, McMahan, Rockefeller and Santos.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

Various private entities, such as Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, the Pacific Science Center, the Washington Audubon Society, and Woodland Park Zoo, have educational outreach programs available to schools. These programs are designed to help children

learn about science, wildlife, or the environment in a wide variety of ways including the development of materials for in-class curricula, field trips and out-of-school opportunities, as well as teacher training.

Under current Washington law, all schools give instruction in science with special reference to the environment. Specifically, the Washington Administrative Code requires that instruction about conservation, natural resources and the environment be provided in an interdisciplinary manner at all grade levels.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington Natural Science, Wildlife, and Environmental Education Partnership Account is established. In addition, the Natural Science, Wildlife, and Environmental Education Grant Program is created. The purpose of the account and of the grant program is to promote proven and innovative natural science, wildlife, and environmental education programs that are fully aligned with the state's essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). The grant program is subject to the availability of funds in the account. The account consists of funds provided by the Legislature or other sources. An appropriation is not required for an expenditure from the account.

Money from the account is disbursed through a competitive grant-making process to nonprofit organizations that are both tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code and can provide matching funds or in-kind services. The criteria for the grants is established by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and any expenditures from the account must be authorized by the OSPI or its designee.

The grant program may make disbursements to programs involving forestry and agriculture as well as the environment, wildlife and natural science. The criteria must be based on compliance with the EALRs and include instruction on renewable resources, responsible use of resources and conservation. Programs must use methods that encourage critical thinking and meet at least one of four additional listed features. The OSPI will involve a cross-section of stakeholder groups to develop socially, economically, and environmentally balanced funding criteria. A list of non-exclusive, eligible uses for the grants is included.

Grants may not be used for any partisan or political activities.

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: National studies prove that hands-on science education is one of the most effective ways to help children learn the discipline. This legislation will help provide that kind of science education for children in Washington by making it possible for organizations such as the Pacific Science Center and Woodland Park Zoo to maintain and expand educational outreach efforts in schools throughout the state. The science education offered through this legislation will provide students with exciting experiences that cannot be easily duplicated by school districts. In addition, the legislation is supported by an unprecedented coalition of organizations interested in the preservation and wise use of natural resources.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Kohl-Welles, sponsor (original bill); and Heath Packard, Audubon Washington.