

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1951

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to vision exams for school-aged children.

Brief Description: Regarding vision exams for school-aged children.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Quall, Talcott, Haler, Morrell, Campbell, O'Brien, Hankins, Kagi and McDermott).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/23/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/11/05, 93-0.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 4/6/05, 48-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires an eye examination be completed for a student diagnosed with a learning disability beginning in September 2006.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to disseminate to school districts information regarding resources for no-cost or low-cost eye examinations.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

Rules adopted by the Washington Department of Health require school districts to provide screenings for the visual acuity of all children in kindergarten, and grades one, two, three, five, and seven. In addition, visual acuity screenings must be provided for any child showing signs of possible vision loss referred to the school or district by a parent, guardian or school

employee. If resources permit, schools are directed to screen children at other grade levels. Screening must be performed by persons competent to administer the screening procedures as a function of their professional background and training or as a function of their special training and demonstrated competence under supervision.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Beginning September 1, 2006, a parent must provide proof that a comprehensive eye examination has been completed for a child diagnosed with a learning disability. The examination must be performed by a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist and consideration should be given to testing binocular vision, accommodation, and convergence. An eye examination completed within the previous 12 months of the diagnosis of the learning disability is sufficient.

School districts must inform parents of the requirement for the eye examination and, to the extent practical, must provide informational resources for low-cost or no-cost eye examinations to the parents of uninsured or under-insured children. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must collect and distribute to school districts information regarding resources for low-cost or no-cost examinations, including contact phone numbers for the Optometric Physicians of Washington and the Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons.

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S):

Removes the requirement that parents provide proof of any eye examination for children diagnosed with a learning disability, and that the OSPI provide school district with information regarding low-cost or no-cost eye examinations.

Requires the Department of Health to convene a work group for the purpose of reevaluating and making recommendations for changes to the procedures for visual screening of students in public schools. Directs the work group to consider the benefits of complete eye examinations for all children; when visual screening, complete eye exams, or both should be done; and what screening techniques are most appropriate. Requires the work group to consult with the Office of the Superintendent of Pubic Instruction (OSPI), the State Board of Health, the Optometric Physicians of Washington, and the Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons. Requires a preliminary report by December 1, 22005, and final recommendations by December 1, 2006. Includes a null and void clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Many times we may have students who have vision difficulty that is not identified until later in their life, and had the difficulty been diagnosed earlier it would have made a difference in the child's learning. The current vision screening is primarily for distance acuity and the vision required to read includes a different set of vision skills. At a minimum, before we place a student in special education we should make sure it is not just a vision problem that can be corrected. We want to make sure, when we are spending money on special education that we are not incorrectly putting someone with a vision problem in that group. This could result in a potential savings to the state when a child is provided proper vision services and is not placed for years in special education.

The goal of this bill is to improve the capture rate for children with vision problems and to make the necessary corrections that are so important with young children's learning ability. Our belief is that most families would have the resources to have the examination done. It was not intended that the school districts or the state would pay for all the exams. Children who are low-income should have state resources to pay for exams. The working poor who do not have either insurance or state services can be covered at least in part by the philanthropic organization, Vision USA.

Testimony Against: As written we oppose some aspects of the bill, but we support the overall goal. We support the current vision screening and we would like to see the process improved so that fewer kids slip through the cracks. There is arguably a dispute between optometrists and the ophthalmologists regarding the specific tests defined in the bill. We also would like to see the findings in the intent section revised.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Quall, prime sponsor; and Brad Tower and Karen Preston, Optometric Physicians of Washington.

(Opposed) Aaron Weingeist, Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.