

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5664

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, February 16, 2005

Title: An act relating to improving teachers' skills in teaching children with learning differences.

Brief Description: Improving teachers' skills with regard to children with learning differences.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Eide, Brandland, Regala, Thibaudeau, Stevens, Keiser, Kline and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 2/2/05, 2/16/05 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5664 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair; Weinstein, Vice Chair; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Berkey, Carrell, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Mulliken, Pflug, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Staff: Brian Jeffries (786-7422)

Background: Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability, which results in students having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia may experience difficulties in other language skills such as spelling, writing, and speaking. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can have an adverse affect on student academic performance.

Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder manifested in a difficulty with handwriting. There are several different kinds of dysgraphia. Some people with dysgraphia have handwriting that is often illegible and shows irregular and inconsistent letter formations. Others write legibly, but very slowly and/or very small. When these individuals revert to printing, as they often do, their writing is often a random mixture of upper- and lowercase letters. In all cases of dysgraphia, writing requires inordinate amounts of energy, stamina, and time.

The International Dyslexia Association has estimated that 15 to 20 percent of the population has a reading disability and that 85 percent of those with a reading disability have dyslexia. Under current state administrative rules, a student with dyslexia may qualify for special education services as a student with a specific learning disability. To qualify for special education services, the student's dyslexia must adversely affect the student's educational performance and cannot be addressed exclusively through general education environment with or without individual accommodations. The prevalence of dysgraphia is indeterminate due to general reports of under-diagnosis, mis-diagnosis, and co-existence with other learning disabilities. Some students with dysgraphia receive special education services when other

disabilities exist. Other students may receive occupational therapy to address dysgraphia but usually in connection with other fine and gross motor skills difficulties.

Summary of Substitute Bill: For approved in-service, continuing education, or internship credits to be applied to movement along the state teacher salary schedule, the course content of such credits must, along with other criteria, be consistent with a school-based plan for mastery of the state learning goals as referenced under RCW 28A.655.110. This school-based plan must include the knowledge of the use of research-based assessments and instructional strategies for students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and language learning disabilities when mastery of state learning goal one is addressed.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The section requiring that teachers who receive initial certification demonstrate knowledge of teaching students with learning differences including the use of research-based assessment and instructional strategies for students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and language learning disabilities was eliminated. The requirement that the State Board of Education adopt rules to address this initial certification requirement was also eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 1, 2005.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Given the prevalence of dyslexia, dysgraphia and other language disabilities in the student population and the potential adverse affect these disabilities have on student performance, the intent of this bill is to provide support to teachers in the delivery of effective practices in addressing the needs of students with these disabilities. Though there are research-based practices identified, teachers are too often unaware of or do not use these practices in their classrooms. Stakeholders and agencies are willing to work with the legislature to meet the intent of the bill, though there may already be laws or agency rules that address the intent of the bill.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Rosemary McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Larry Davis, State Board of Education; Donna Obermeyer, Washington State Special Education Coalition; Lin Douglas, Professional Educator Standards Board; Gary King, Washington Education Association.