

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5897

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As of March 3, 2005

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

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

**Sponsors:** Senators McAuliffe, Kastama, Schmidt, Kohl-Welles, Berkey and Rasmussen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 2/28/05.

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

**Staff:** Ingrid Mungia (786-7423)

**Background:** School districts are required 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 Bill:** A workgroup is convened by the Department of Health to re-evaluate current rules and regulations on visual screening of children in public schools. In developing its recommendations, the work group must:

- consider the benefits of complete vision exams on public school children;
- consider whether visual screening and/or complete vision exams should take place in pre-school or kindergarten through high school;
- consider if all students, or only those students with learning difficulties, should have vision exams;
- consider if a students' parents or school districts should pay for additional exams, if necessary, after the first initial screening; and
- consider what should be included in complete vision exams if such exams are warranted.

The Department of Health must consult with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Health in developing recommendations and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2006.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** If vision issues are caught early, it is easier to intervene and correct. If we wait too long on some vision problems, it is too late to correct. There are many links between students vision and their ability to read and learn in school. Eye exams are used to find and potentially fix vision problems before they become learning and behavioral problems. This is an excellent bill, talking about both exams and screening.

**Testimony Against:** None.

Other: Supportive of bill, but concerned about who, when, and where to screen.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Brad Tower, Optometric Physicians of Washington. OTHER: Susie Tracy, Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons.