

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2597

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Children's Services

Title: An act relating to creating a kindergarten readiness assessment.

Brief Description: Requiring the department of early learning and the office of the superintendent of public instruction to develop a kindergarten readiness assessment.

Sponsors: Representatives Sullivan, Pedersen, Hasegawa, Ormsby, Haigh, Chase, Green and Simpson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 1/22/08, 1/25/08 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Early Learning and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with Thrive by Five and other stakeholders, to submit a report on recommendations for implementing a kindergarten readiness assessment.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Goodman and Pettigrew.

Staff: Brian Considine (786-7290).

Background:

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) sponsored a survey of *Student Readiness for Kindergarten* in Washington during the fall of 2004. A total of 398 kindergarten teachers responded to an invitation to participate in an online survey about student preparedness, the characteristics of their classes, and other information about incoming students. Through the survey, teachers reported that 44 percent of the incoming students in

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

2004 were adequately prepared for kindergarten. Additionally, 79 percent of teachers reported that they routinely screen or assess incoming kindergarten students in order to inform instruction.

In June 2005 Early Learning and Development Benchmarks (benchmarks) were published for the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks Advisory Panel. The benchmarks broadly defined a set of statements that reflect expectations for children's knowledge and behavior. The benchmarks were designed to support the growth and development of young children from birth to kindergarten entry, whether the children are in their own homes, others' homes, in licensed child care, early intervention programs, Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), or in private or public school preschools. The benchmarks covered five domains: physical well-being, health, and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; cognition and general knowledge; and language, literacy, and communication.

In 2006 The Department of Early Learning (DEL) was established as an executive branch agency whose primary duties are to implement early learning policy and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs to promote an efficient use of funds.

Although a statewide standardized readiness assessment for kindergartners does not yet exist for Washington school districts, most districts utilize some type of kindergarten entry assessment. According to the OSPI, most districts and schools assess letter recognition, and many districts and schools assess knowledge of numbers or sounds. However, readiness assessments vary in terms of what is assessed, the types of tools used, and how the assessments are administered.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The DEL and the OSPI, in consultation with Thrive by Five and other stakeholders are required to develop recommendations for a kindergarten readiness assessment (assessment).

Development of the Recommendations

In developing the assessment, the DEL and the OSPI must:

- examine research on critical knowledge and skills, including social skills, for successful entry and progress in kindergarten;
- examine examples of assessments used by schools and providers in Washington and around the country;
- address letters, sounds, numbers, number concepts, and social skills for a school environment;
- specify a plan for use of the assessment in a pilot phase and a voluntary use phase, and a time certain when school districts must offer the assessment;
- describe a process for reporting results of the assessment to parents, the OSPI, and the DEL in a common format; and

- propose a plan for communicating with early learning providers and parents about the knowledge and skills covered by the entry assessment.

Consideration must be given to:

- how the assessment can be responsive in directing instruction to the needs and strengths of individual students entering kindergarten;
- how the results can be used to improve the early learning and K-12 education systems; and
- costs of the assessment, including the time required to administer the assessment.

Any assessment selected must be sensitive to cultural and socio-economic differences that influence the development of children. The assessment cannot be used to screen or preclude children from entering kindergarten.

The DEL must submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature by October 15, 2009.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill requires the OSPI and the DEL to come up with joint recommendations on an assessment, instead of the DEL developing an assessment in consultation with the OSPI. More stakeholder input is required during the process. Also, a timeline for the voluntary test of the assessment and the implementation of an assessment is eliminated and replaced with a new report date on recommendations by October 15, 2009.

The substitute includes social skills in the examination of essential skills for successful progress and entry in kindergarten. More recommendations are added to the report, and the OSPI and the DEL are to include: a plan on how best to implement the assessment; methodology for conducting the assessment; a process for reporting the results to parents, the OSPI, and the DEL; and a plan on how to communicate to parents and providers the knowledge and skills covered by the assessment.

The substitute bill requires consideration to be given to how the assessment can be responsive in directing instruction to the needs and strengths of individual students entering kindergarten; and how the results can be used to improve the early learning and K-12 education systems, including costs of the assessment, along with the time required to administer the assessment must be considered.

The substitute bill also requires that any assessment selected must be sensitive to cultural and socio-economic differences that influence the development of children, and the assessment cannot be used to screen or preclude children from entering kindergarten.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support of original bill) This bill is based on a trip to Kennewick. If students are on track by third grade, then they are more likely to be successful in high school. The idea is to figure out the most efficient way to allocate resources, and an assessment will help determine a student's needs when they enter school. This knowledge will allow teachers to help the student reach benchmarks and get the student to graduation. The timelines in the bill are aggressive on purpose; it is meant to keep the discussion going. In Kent there is the Performance Learning/Alternative School and each student and parent said the program was good because it created individualized programs for those with specific needs. If education is focused to the individual, then the student will be more successful. This is a good practice for early learning and K-12 education. All stakeholders should be involved in talking through this process and this is not a preschool Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Any assessment is meant to measure how well a student is prepared academically, socially, and emotionally for school. This can only be done through a uniform assessment. However, this is not a high-stakes test. An assessment is necessary because schools have no way to know if what they are doing is working if they cannot measure where the child is supposed to be at.

(In support of original bill with concerns) In order to have an effective educational system, there must be a way to look at curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluations. The strength of this bill is that DEL, OSPI, and stakeholders will get together to discuss this process; the communication about the assessment to parents and providers; professional development; and a whole-child assessment are all important pieces in this bill. There is concern about how this assessment will align with the 2005 benchmarks without knowing the status of the redraft of the benchmarks. Also, it is important to look at cultural and linguistic differences, and there is concern about how the assessment will be used.

(Opposed) There is caution and concern from tribes in Washington because assessments disproportionately place Native American students into special education classes, and Native American students disproportionately fail the WASL. Any policy should create an inclusive system for all children in the state. Education policy can have unintended, negative, and harmful consequences for children when no harm should be done. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) calls for a meaningful consultation and fully-funded research on the psycho-cultural development of American Indian children in contrast to children's development under the pedagogy and curriculum of "kindergarten readiness." The NCAI would also like a policy review process designed to assess the long-term impacts of all education policy on American Indian students before any policy can be enacted. The 2005 benchmarks are a problem because it does not have cultural awareness built into it, and any policy must be culturally sensitive.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Suzanne Quigley, Lake Stevens Education Foundation.

(In support of original bill with concerns) Agda Burchard, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children.

(Opposed) Ben Kodama, Equitable Opportunity Caucus; and Suzanne Wright, Tulalip Tribes.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.