

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6535

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, January 31, 2008

Title: An act relating to teachers of visually impaired and blind birth to age twenty-one public school students.

Brief Description: Requiring an assessment of the need for teacher preparation programs for teachers of visually impaired and blind public school students.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Tom, Hobbs, Rasmussen and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/28/08, 1/31/08 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6535 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Tom, Vice Chair; King, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Hobbs, Holmquist, Kauffman, McDermott, Oemig, Rasmussen and Weinstein.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) establishes certification requirements for teachers. Teachers must be endorsed in a particular area of expertise from a list adopted by rule by the PESB. Special Education is one of the endorsements available to teachers. The PESB recently created a category of specialty endorsements that provide enhanced preparation for existing teachers. Proposed specialty endorsements will be approved by the PESB through a two-phase process. Currently, the only specialty endorsement available is for educators of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. An endorsement in the specialty area of education designed exclusively for visually impaired and blind students is not currently available.

Under current law, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) must have an ongoing process to analyze the need for additional degrees and programs at the in-state public four-year institutions. But it is the PESB that has approval authority for courses, requirements, and other activities leading to educator certification. Currently, there are no in-state teacher preparation programs specifically for teachers of visually impaired and blind students. The closest program is at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon.

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.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The PESB must consider approving out-of-state institutions of higher education for providing specialty endorsements. By December 15, 2008, the PESB must report to the Legislature on the process used by the board to consider out-of-state institutions and whether the board supports approval of out-of-state institutions of higher education for the purposes of establishing a specialty endorsement program.

As part of the state needs assessment conducted by the HECB, the HECB must assess the need for baccalaureate and post-graduate degree programs in Washington that specialize in teacher preparation programs for teachers of visually impaired and blind students and orientation/mobility teachers. If the HECB determines that there is a need for one or more programs in Washington, then the HECB must encourage the appropriate entity to create such a program. By August 31, 2008, the board must report to the Legislature on the needs assessment. The report must also include a recommendation on the appropriate level of one-time or start-up funding to support the educator preparation program. Additionally, the report must indicate which institutions or institutional sectors demonstrate an interest or could be successful in building and sustaining a high quality program. The report must also include which institutions demonstrate the capacity to make a long-term commitment of resources to build and sustain a program and can readily engage faculty appropriately qualified to develop and deliver a high quality curriculum at the baccalaureate or post-graduate level.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): The HECB must consult with interested parties who are knowledgeable about training programs for teachers of visually impaired and blind students when conducting the needs assessment for an in-state teacher preparation programs. The date for the HECB needs assessment report is changed from August 31, 2008 to November 30, 2008.

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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: Washington students who are visually impaired are under-served and often forgotten in our public schools. There is a severe lack of trained teachers to serve them. This is occurring because Washington is one of the last states in the nation to approve a specialty endorsement for teachers of the visually impaired. Washington's specialty endorsement process requires an in-state higher education institution to provide training before the endorsement is authorized but no in-state institution wants to offer a program without a state endorsement available. The PESB supports this bill. The PESB is currently discussing access issues and the bill and timeline will help us to address the issues.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Rosemary McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Jamie Baggett, John Glenn, Committee for Education Reform of the Visually Impaired; Emily Stevenson, student; Nasue Nishida, PESB.