

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1865

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to visual screening in schools.

Brief Description: Concerning visual screening in schools.

Sponsors: Representatives Magendanz, Ortiz-Self, McCaslin, Hayes and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/10/15, 2/19/15 [DP], 1/11/16, 1/14/16 [DP].

Appropriations: 2/27/15 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires every board of school directors to provide for screening for both distance and near visual acuity.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 21 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Ortiz-Self, Vice Chair; Reykdal, Vice Chair; Magendanz, Ranking Minority Member; Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stambaugh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Griffey, Hargrove, Harris, Hayes, S. Hunt, Kilduff, Klippert, Kuderer, McCaslin, Orwall, Pollet, Rossetti and Springer.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Every board of school directors has the duty to provide for and require screening for the visual and auditory acuity of all children attending schools in their districts. The screening must be made in accordance with procedures and standards adopted by rule of the Board of Health (BOH). Prior to the adoption or revision of rules, the BOH must seek the recommendations of the Superintendent of Public Instruction regarding administration of the screening and the qualifications of persons competent to administer the screening.

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.

The BOH rules regarding visual screening are as follows:

- Schools must conduct screening in kindergarten, and in grades 1, 2, 3, and 7. In addition, schools must conduct screening for any child showing symptoms of possible loss in visual acuity referred to the district by parents, guardians, or school staff. If resources permit, schools must annually screen children at other grade levels.
- Personnel conducting the screening must use a properly illuminated and glare free Snellen test chart, or an approved alternative, for screening for distance central vision acuity. Students having a visual acuity of 20/40 or less in either eye as determined by the Snellen test must be rescreened within two weeks or as soon as possible after the original screening. Schools must inform parents or guardians of students failing the second screening of the need and importance for the child to receive professional care.
- Schools must screen children with corrective lenses for distance viewing with their corrective lenses on.
- If school personnel observe a child with other signs or symptoms related to eye problems and if the signs or symptoms negatively influence the child in his or her studies, school personnel must refer the child to the parents or guardians for professional care.
- Screening must be performed by persons competent to administer screening procedures as a function of their professional training and background or special training and demonstrated competence under supervision. Technicians and nonprofessional volunteers must have adequate preparation and a thorough understanding of the tests as demonstrated by their performance under supervision. Supervision, training, reporting, and referral must be the responsibility of a professional person, designated by the school administration, who may be a school nurse, or public health nurse, a special educator, teacher, or administrator who possesses basic knowledge of the objectives and methods of visual acuity screening.

The rules do not require routine screening for near visual acuity.

Summary of Bill:

Every board of school directors has the duty to provide for and require screening for both distance and near visual acuity.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Schools already screen for distance vision, but this process can miss up to 40 percent of vision problems, including farsightedness. There are vision-related causes for illiteracy, as 25 percent of students cannot read because of vision deficits, and the percentages are higher for adults and prison inmates.

School nurses check vision to see if students can see at a distance of 20 feet, but children do not read at a 20 foot distance. About 25 percent of elementary school students cannot see properly at near vision. The people of Washington need to help the children with visual problems, as they spend a significant amount of time looking at near print.

Between 2005 and 2008, personal visual examinations of about 300 children at the King County Juvenile Detention Center revealed that about 80 percent of those examined had general farsightedness that was uncorrected. About 75 to 80 percent of those children would have benefited greatly and immediately from glasses, but glasses could not be provided. Eighty percent of learning by children and adults comes through vision. Kids spend about seven and a half hours per day on an electronic screen, and eye muscles start to spasm from close work. If you can detect farsightedness quickly, you can correct the problem and make a real difference for children in their schools and lives. This bill needs to be passed.

A child's near vision issues were identified in the first week of first grade by an experienced teacher who noted that he was struggling with school work and reading. This was surprising because a pediatrician's review indicated that the boy's eyesight was fine. An optometrist subsequently verified that he had near vision deficiencies, and through corrective measures, his near vision issues were corrected and he was able access his education as a healthy child. If undetected, this issue could have impacted his schooling. Schools and pediatricians screen only for distance vision, but students are falling in the cracks. Schools can be the place where near vision issues are detected. Pass this bill so that Washington's more than 1 million students can be screened.

Last year, a \$14,000 proviso was in the budget for the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to oversee visual screenings, but the proviso was eliminated at the last minute. Passionate advocates for this bill have offered to personally pay the OSPI for this \$14,000 expense. Support continues for this bill and it is a small ask for providing equity and opportunity to Washington students.

The law requires school districts to screen children to find visual deficiencies that would impede them in their studies. The 20 foot visual screening test is not sufficient in determining whether children have visual deficiencies that would make it difficult for them to read and learn. There is a distinct difference between screening and examinations. Schools and districts already have the mechanisms and volunteers for distance screening, and those can be used for near vision screening.

Tribal councils are supportive of this bill.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Magendanz, prime sponsor; Katie Johnson; Edward Larry Jones; Sam Ames; Jene Jones, League of Education Voters; Brad Tower, Optometrist Physicians of Washington; and Dawn Vyvyan, Yakama Nation

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.