

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6245

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to visual screening in schools.

Brief Description: Concerning visual screening in schools.

Sponsors: Senators Litzow, Hill, Fain, Rolfes, McAuliffe and Mullet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/22/16, 2/25/16 [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 20 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, 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, 5, 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) The Optometric Physicians of Washington support this bill.

The League of Education Voters strongly supports this bill. There is broad support for assuring that students can see the letters and numbers on their pages. Top Washington optometrists have volunteered to coordinate statewide near vision protocol training for school nurses, free of charge, and local eye-care professionals cannot wait to partner with districts on visual screening efforts. This is an equity issue and policymakers should ensure that students can see properly.

This bill is a step toward ending intergenerational poverty and enhancing circumstances for our youth. Educators and policymakers need to understand the obstacles that youth face, including obstacles related to an inability to read or see a chalkboard.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Brad Tower, Optometric Physicians of Washington; Jene Jones, League of Education Voters; and Asa Washines, Yakama Nation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.