

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5714

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to instruction in Spanish and Chinese languages.

Brief Description: Creating a pilot program of Spanish and Chinese language instruction.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Roach, Prentice, Rasmussen, Oemig, Clements, Rockefeller, Tom, Fairley, Hobbs, Shin, Swecker, Holmquist, Benton, Stevens, Parlette, Delvin and Kline).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/26/08, 2/28/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Creates a pilot program for Spanish and Chinese language instruction in elementary schools.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Barlow, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haigh, Lias, Roach, Santos and Sullivan.

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

Currently there is no requirement for elementary, middle, or high school students to receive instruction in languages other than English. High school students must have at least five and one-half elective credits to graduate. The study of a world language, or the study of a world culture, may satisfy the elective requirements. Washington's four-year public institutions of higher education require that entering students have at least two years of the same foreign language, Native American language, or American Sign Language.

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.

Washington's Essential Academic Learning Requirements do not cover world languages. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has, however, endorsed for voluntary use the standards for world language instruction adopted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Although not required, there are some elementary schools in Washington that provide foreign language instruction. Some provide dual language instruction in Spanish and English. The John Stanford International Elementary School in Seattle offers dual language programs in Spanish and Japanese.

Summary of Bill:

A pilot program is created for two school districts to provide Spanish and Chinese language instruction in elementary schools. Interested districts must apply for a grant by May 15, 2008. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must determine the grant recipients by June 15, 2008. For purposes of the pilot project, school districts are authorized to employ people of unusual competence who are not certificated to work under the general supervision of a certificated instructional staff person.

Participating school districts must inform parents of the availability of the pilot program and participate in the program's evaluation. The OSPI must report to the Governor and the Legislature regarding the effectiveness of the pilot program, and recommend whether or not to continue, modify, or expand the program, which is set to expire on July 1, 2010.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Foreign language instruction, especially Spanish and Chinese, is very important in our global economy. Young children should have the opportunity to learn a foreign language. Currently, few children except those with parents who speak a language other than English have this opportunity. Educating children in foreign languages not only benefits our country's economic development and security, but instruction in a foreign language also helps develop student's cognitive abilities. A recent inventory of foreign language instruction at the elementary level revealed that only 37 of the 296 school districts in the state had formal elementary foreign language instruction programs.

(Neutral) Care should be taken with respect to the timelines for the pilot project so that due dates do not occur before the bill actually goes into effect.

(Opposed) While it is an excellent idea to teach foreign languages at a young age, a pilot program such as this is a bit premature.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Roach, prime sponsor.

(Neutral) Isabel Munoz-Colon, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(Opposed) Bob Cooper, Washington Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.