

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2909

As Reported By House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to improving reading literacy.

Brief Description: Improving reading literacy.

Sponsors: Representatives Johnson, Brumsickle, Cole, Talcott, Quall, Radcliff, McMahan, Hymes, Smith, Lambert, Thompson, Hatfield, Stevens, Boldt, Koster, McMorris, Elliot, Silver, Pelesky, Clements, Cooke, Benton, Carrell, Sheldon, Basich, Linville, Skinner, Robertson, Blanton, Huff, Hickel, Goldsmith, Campbell and Casada.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/30/96, 2/1/96 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Brumsickle, Chairman; Elliot, Vice Chairman; Johnson, Vice Chairman; Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Clements; Fuhrman; Hatfield; Linville; McMahan; Pelesky; Poulsen; Quall; Radcliff; Smith; Talcott; B. Thomas; Thompson and Veloria.

Staff: Cheri Keller (786-7093).

Background: The Subcommittee on Reading Literacy was established in the summer of 1995 with a threefold purpose: to gather information from throughout the state and country on what works when teaching reading; to get input from parents, communities, and educators on the teaching and learning of reading; and to present legislation in January 1996 on the teaching of reading.

Six meetings were held around the state between September 1995 and January 1996. These meetings were well attended and provided the committee with valuable information about the state of reading instruction in Washington; the challenges facing students, educators, parents, and community members with regard to the teaching of reading; and existing programs that are working well.

The committee discovered that a number of good programs exist. The programs use a variety of methods, and teachers have a growing desire for information on what works. Teachers are asking for specific programs that are field-tested or proven effective for the teaching of reading, but there is no avenue for teachers to share their successful programs and methods. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction currently has information to send to teachers, but lacks adequate staff for consultation.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Center for the Improvement of Student Learning, or its designee, is directed to develop and implement a process for identifying programs that have been proven to be effective, using scientifically valid research, in teaching elementary students to read. The initial identification of effective reading programs should be prepared by December 15, 1996. The identification process should be designed to continue until December 31, 2000, so that it allows additional programs to be reviewed after the initial identification of programs is complete.

The Center for the Improvement of Student Learning, or its designee, is to consult primary education teachers, state-wide reading organizations, institutions of higher education, the commission on student learning, legislators, parents, and other appropriate individuals and organizations when identifying effective reading programs. The following criteria are to be used when identifying effective reading programs: whether the program has achieved documented results that have been replicated at other locations; whether the requirements for implementing the program are clear; whether the program is cost-effective and addresses differing student populations; and other appropriate criteria and considerations.

The Legislative Budget Committee, or its designee, must evaluate the effectiveness of the identification process and the impact of the identified programs, and report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 1999.

Once such programs are identified, the list and any future changes are to be reviewed and approved by the House of Representatives and Senate education committees or their designees. After such approval, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is to establish a grant program to provide incentives for teachers, schools, and school districts to use the identified programs on the approved list in grades kindergarten through four. Schools, school districts, and educational service districts may apply for the grants, which are to be used for in-service training and instructional material. Priority is to be given to schools and school districts that have the lowest reading scores. Grants are to be awarded no later than July 1, 1997.

After effective programs have been identified, the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning, or its designee, is to provide information and take other appropriate steps to inform elementary school teachers, principals, curriculum directors, superintendents, school board members, college and university reading instruction

faculty, and others of its findings. The center is to develop and implement strategies to improve reading instruction in the state, with a special emphasis on the instruction of reading in the primary grades utilizing the effective reading programs that have been identified. The strategies may include, but should not be limited to, expanding and improving reading instruction in teacher preparation programs, expanding in-service training, the training of paraprofessionals and volunteers, improving classroom-based assessment of reading, and increasing statewide and regional technical assistance.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Parents are added to the list of persons or organizations that are to be consulted when identifying effective reading programs. Criteria used to identify effective reading programs are expanded to include whether the program addresses differing student populations. The House of Representatives and Senate education committees may appoint designees to review and approve the list of effective reading programs. When awarding grants, priority is to be given to schools and districts with the lowest reading scores. Other technical changes were made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Reading is a basic life skill and the foundation for all learning, and we need to focus on it. Bringing literacy to the forefront of the public policy debate is a good idea. Teaching all people to read is the single most important thing we can do. Many people are caught in the web of illiteracy, and many are angry and humiliated. We know that illiteracy aggravates juvenile crime and that the cost of incarcerating people is high. If we fail in our effort, we'll create an underculture in the state that will translate into more tax dollars spent and more crime. We can do what we need to do now to prevent this. We can make sure our children learn to read. Sharing best practices is a great idea. Focusing on elementary school students is an important element of the bill. The grants provided in the bill are important. We need to address how we deal with our first grade children to make sure they're developmentally ready to be in school.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Johnson, prime sponsor; Leo Francis, Read Right Systems (pro); John Stanford, Superintendent Seattle School District (pro); Larry Davis, state Board of Education (pro); Judy Hartmann, Washington Education Association (pro); and Roy Maier, teacher (pro).