

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HCR 4423

As Passed Legislature

Brief Description: Requesting the governor to declare the Year of the Reader.

Sponsors: Representatives Johnson, Brumsickle, Radcliff, Cole, Quall, Talcott, McMahan, Hatfield, Thompson, Mulliken, Sheldon, Smith, Stevens, Clements, Hargrove, Sterk, Beeksma, H. Sommers, Wolfe, Kessler, Elliot, K. Schmidt, Lambert, Silver, Casada, Carrell, Chandler, Sherstad, B. Thomas, Crouse, Buck, Pelesky, Cooke, McMorris, D. Schmidt, Hymes, Mastin, Mitchell, Huff, Fuhrman, Goldsmith, Blanton, Delvin, Cairnes, Hankins, Sehlin, L. Thomas, Honeyford, Carlson, Backlund, Mason, Linville, Conway, D. Sommers, Scheuerman, Romero, Ogden, Brown, R. Fisher, Cody, Murray, Costa, Tokuda, Regala, Dickerson, Robertson, Keiser, Chopp, Skinner and Dyer.

Brief History:

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/7/96.

Passed Legislature.

Staff: Doug Ruth (786-7134)

Background: Educators, psychologists, and the findings of academic research all stress the importance of a person's reading ability as a predictor for later achievement. Reading early in life is often cited by these sources as a major criterion for academic success, employability, and affluence. These sources also note that the reverse, early illiteracy, may result in delinquent or criminal behavior.

Of all age groups, good reading habits are most crucial for the very young. Reading is cited across disciplines as essential to forming critical thinking skills. Because critical thinking is crucial for higher level learning, success with reading as a child frequently predicts academic success as an adult. Children who are proficient readers upon entering school often complete their schooling in the top portion of their class. On the other hand, children who watch the most television rank lowest in critical subjects at school.

The reading proficiency of children has been declining since 1980. Students in grades K-12 spend an average of just seven minutes a day reading literature based books. Forty percent of all fourth-graders have "below basic" reading skills. Twenty-five percent of high school seniors are deemed functionally illiterate, and only 36 percent

are considered "proficient readers." Educators warn that statistics such as these provide a stark warning to us all as our society and economy become more complex and information based. They note that in the future, poor readers may find it difficult to participate effectively in a world requiring increasingly sophisticated skills. Consequently, these individuals are more likely to end up in our unemployment lines or in our jails.

One of the most effective ways to reverse this trend and to establish firm reading habits in young children is for their caretakers to read to them. According to research data, children read better if they are read to at home. Specifically, a study by the Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina concluded that children who are read to at an early age become literate sooner and are higher-level achievers when they do enter school. Mike Haworth, an educational psychologist and director of a national literacy campaign, places these academic finding into perspective when he states, "Reading with children is one of the single most important ways that parents can help with a child's education . . . even five minutes a day with your child and a book can make a huge difference."

Summary: The Legislature requests that the Governor declare 1997 the "Year of the Reader."