

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2042

As Reported By House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to reading in the primary grades.

Brief Description: Providing a grant program for reading in the primary grades.

Sponsors: Representatives Johnson, Talcott and Hickel.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/28/97, 3/4/97 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Quall; Smith; Sterk; Sump; Talcott and Veloria.

Staff: Pat Shelledy (786-7149).

Background: The Legislature has emphasized the importance of learning to read for students' academic success. Students must be assessed for reading literacy skills in the third grade no later than March 31 of each year when an assessment tool is developed by the Washington Commission on Student Learning. The assessment tool must be implemented in the 1998-99 school year.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must identify a collection of tests that can be used to test second grade reading accuracy and fluency skills. The superintendent must create a pilot project to identify which second grade reading tests selected will be included in a final collection of tests. Schools and school districts may voluntarily participate in the pilot project during the 1997-98 school year. Starting in the 1998-99 school year, school districts must select a test from the collection adopted by the superintendent. The school district must administer the test at the entire school district level for at least three years. Students who fall substantially below grade level must be re-tested at least once. Schools must notify parents about the results and provide parents with strategies to help the parents improve their child's score.

The superintendent must establish a second grade reading grant program. The purpose of the program is to train teachers in teaching methods that have proven results gathered through quantitative research, to assist all students in beginning reading, and to contribute to applied research on beginning reading. Grants are available to students voluntarily participating in the pilot project in 1997-98 and thereafter subject to available funds. The SPI must coordinate the grant program with other grant programs.

The superintendent must report biennially to the Legislature about the grant program starting on December 1, 1999. The superintendent must also disseminate to the school districts, five years after the beginning of the grant program, information regarding the results of the effectiveness of the models of teaching methods and materials and implementation strategies.

The superintendent may use up to 1 percent of the funds appropriated to administer the grant program.

The provision governing the third grade reading test is repealed.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The underlying bill was just an intent section. The substitute replaces it with substantive provisions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on March 5, 1997.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately. However, if specific funding for section 4 of this act is not provided in the budget sections 4 and 7 of this act are null and void.

Testimony For: Mastery of reading skills is the fundamental cornerstone of education. Far too many fourth graders are reading below basic level, which means that they will almost certainly remain behind in academics the rest of their lives. The state is embarking on a mission of establishing some of the most rigorous educational standards in the country but they will be of little value if students cannot read. The state is spending millions in remediation programs. A critical aspect of learning to read is to return to the basics and be sure that students are tested for decoding skills. The grant program will be used to help train teachers to teach reading.

Testimony Against: The proposed bill overly emphasizes the importance of decoding skills. Decoding is just one strategy for teaching reading that should be in the arsenal of teaching methods. Use of decoding tests alone could result in some children feeling unnecessarily bad because they may have difficulty decoding but they may be able to learn to read using other methods. The state should not be mandating teaching methodology.

Testified: Representative Johnson, prime sponsor; Representative Talcott, sponsor; Linda Lee, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (pro with concerns); Joe Welhoft, Tacoma School District (pro); Amy Richardson, teacher (con); Alice Lindemuth, Shelton School District (con); and Muffy Pickel, Superintendent, North Mason School District (pro).