

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6598

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to natural science and wildlife education.

Brief Description: Creating the Washington natural science and wildlife education partnership fund.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Horn, Jacobsen, Winsley, Johnson, Prentice, Rossi, Hewitt, Eide, McAuliffe, Rasmussen and Finkbeiner).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/26/02, 2/27/02 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a trust fund as a repository for state monies provided to support natural science and wildlife education programs delivered by nonprofit organizations to students and teachers.
- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to distribute money in the fund on a competitive basis to eligible nonprofit organizations that provide matching funds or in-kind services and that meet additional criteria described in the legislation.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Haigh, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Cox, McDermott, Rockefeller, Santos, Schmidt and Upthegrove.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Schindler.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

Various nonprofit organizations, such as the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, the Pacific Science Center, the Washington Audubon Society, and the Woodland Park Zoo have educational outreach programs available for schools. These programs are designed to help children learn about science, wildlife, and the environment in a wide variety of ways including the development of materials for in-class curricula, field trips, other out-of-school opportunities, and professional development.

Under current Washington law, all schools give instruction in science with special reference to the environment. Specifically, instruction about conservation, natural resources, and the environment is provided at all grade levels and in an interdisciplinary manner.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The natural science and wildlife education partnership trust fund is established. The trust fund's purpose is to provide for teachers and students natural science and wildlife education that incorporates the state's essential academic learning requirements. The fund, which will be administered by the State Treasurer, is intended to be a repository for state appropriations for eligible wildlife education and natural science programs. The trust fund is subject to the allotment process, but no appropriation is required for expenditures.

Money from the fund will be disbursed through a competitive grant-making process to eligible nonprofit organizations that can provide matching funds or in-kind services. The grants may be used for in-service and preservice training, proven programs that teach the essential academic learning requirements in an integrated fashion, and support and equipment needed for the programs.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction will establish and distribute funding criteria for the grants. Programs that receive the grants must include one or more of the following features:

1. Methods to encourage critical thinking;
2. Integrated, interdisciplinary approaches to natural science and wildlife conservation;
3. Targeting students deemed to be underserved, disadvantaged, or from multicultural backgrounds; and
4. Service to schools that would not otherwise have access to specialized programs in these fields.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Organizations such as the Woodland Park Zoo and the Pacific Science Center provide exciting, hands-on, and scientifically accurate programs that help students and teachers learn the principles of math, science, nature, wildlife, and the environment. These programs are aligned to the state's essential academic learning requirements and offer children an opportunity to learn through active participation as well as sight and hearing. They provide a contextual form of education that give children a chance to connect with nature and the outdoors. This legislation would help expand these programs and increase their visibility. Through partnerships with school districts, foundations, and other organizations, these public service organizations have leveraged enough money to reach students and teachers that might otherwise never have access to stimulating, hands-on science lessons. However, the money they raise is never enough to reach all children or to fund expenses such as transportation and equipment. The programs need additional funds and this legislation will provide one means of obtaining those funds, through an active partnership with the state.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; Martin Flynn, Melinda Williams, and Frank Hein, Woodland Park Zoo Society; Nina Carter, Audubon Society of Washington; Katrina Weihs, Tahoma Audubon Center; Lynne Ferguson, Washington Forest Protection Association; Karen Lippy and Lee Boad, Hood Canal Watershed Project, North Mason School District, and Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group; Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Mike Ryherd, Puget Sound Environmental Learning Center and Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.