

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5687

As Passed Senate, January 26, 1996

Title: An act relating to the instruction in Braille reading and writing to blind students.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to instruction in Braille.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Long, Rasmussen, Johnson, Bauer, Kohl, Finkbeiner, Fairley, C. Anderson, Hochstatter, Gaspard, Pelz, Prince and Winsley).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/23/95, 2/28/95 [DPS-WM]; 1/16/96 [DP2S].
Passed Senate, 1/26/96, 44-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5687 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Goings, Vice Chair; Finkbeiner, Hochstatter, Johnson, Pelz and Rasmussen.

Staff: Leslie Goldstein (786-7424)

Background: The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (originally enacted in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) requires that states accepting federal funds provide a free and appropriate public education for all children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The federal law requires that related services be provided if the services are needed to help a child with a disability benefit from special education. Children with disabilities in Washington must have the opportunity for an appropriate education under state law, federal law, and the Washington State Constitution.

An individual education program must be developed for all special education students. Instruction in Braille is provided only for visually impaired or blind students if such instruction is required in the student's individual education program.

Summary of Bill: It is a stated goal that students who are legally blind or visually impaired be given the opportunity to learn Braille to communicate effectively and efficiently.

A student who must be assessed to determine if Braille is needed includes a student who:

- Has specified limited visual acuity;
- Is unable to read printed material at a competitive rate due to functional visual impairment or lack of visual acuity; or

- Has physical conditions with a medical prognosis of significant visual deterioration leading to reduced visual acuity or the inability to read print at a competitive rate.

If a student has the specified visual conditions or medical prognosis of visual deterioration, the student must be assessed individually to determine the appropriate learning media including but not limited to Braille.

Even if the student has some remaining vision, the student cannot be denied access to Braille. Braille is not required to be used exclusively. If Braille is provided, it must be part of the student's education curriculum and individual education program, if applicable.

If Braille is not provided, the reason must be documented in the individual education program or in the student's file. A parent or guardian's signature is required.

Teachers of visually impaired students must be qualified according to rules adopted by the State Board of Education.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This legislation was developed through a collaborative process over the interim. This will promote literacy among students who are blind and have visual impairments. It will increase the ability to provide a quality education for these students.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Long, prime sponsor; Noel Nightingale, National Federation of the Blind; Dean Stenehjem, Washington State School for the Blind; Joan Christensen, Washington Instructional Resource Center; Stephen Smith, Governor's Policy Office; Denise Collry, Washington Council of the Blind.