

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 3124

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Education, February 27, 1998

Title: An act relating to reading improvement.

Brief Description: Establishing reading improvement programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Johnson, Talcott, Smith, Hickel, Sterk, Sump, Mastin, Radcliff, Benson, Mielke, Sherstad, Backlund, Delvin and Thompson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/26/98, 2/27/98 [DPA-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
Signed by Senators Hochstatter, Chair; Finkbeiner, Vice Chair; Johnson, Rasmussen and Zarelli.

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: In 1995, the Legislature passed the first of three bills to improve student learning by focusing on reading (E2SHB 1941). The Commission on Student Learning (CSL) was required to develop a reading assessment for third grade students to evaluate instructional practice and initiate support for students who have not mastered the essential academic learning requirements for reading. In 1996, the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL) was required to identify effective reading programs and provide reading instruction and assessment training for primary educators. Funds for reading instruction grants were provided (E2SHB 2909). In 1997, the Legislature created a pilot project to identify a collection of tests to assess second grade students' reading accuracy and fluency; and created a grant program to improve beginning reading teaching methods (ESHB 2042).

Summary of Amended Bill: The Successful Readers Act is created.

A funding program is created to provide teacher training and curriculum in beginning reading instruction for kindergarten through second grade teachers, and to provide teacher training in the use of volunteer tutors and mentors for kindergarten through fourth grade teachers. SPI must notify all school districts by April 15, 1998, that the funds are available. Funding must be provided no later than June 1, 1998. Teachers participating in the training receive a stipend.

Teacher training in beginning reading instruction and curriculum program: To the extent funds are appropriated, elementary schools may apply to SPI for funds to provide professional development and related materials to certificated instructional staff teaching

students in kindergarten through second grade. The funds may also be used to provide professional development materials for school principals and classroom volunteers helping in K-2 classrooms who are interested in participating in the professional development.

The application to receive the funds is limited to verification of the following:

- The applicant has developed a comprehensive school-wide improvement plan that includes, but is not limited to, a beginning reading-language arts program for use in kindergarten through second grade. The primary, but not the sole, components of the beginning reading-language arts program are described and certain terms are defined.
- The intended professional development and curriculum has a primary emphasis on specified reading skills.
- The funds for professional development and curriculum not used for staff development, intervention, or remediation programs.

Public or private nonsectarian contractors may provide the training. Priority for the funding is given to schools with students scoring the lowest in reading on statewide tests. Elementary schools who receive funds through this process must certify and provide documentation to SPI to show that the money was spent appropriately. Schools and school districts that received funding under the 1997 second grade test collection pilot and grant program may not apply for funds under this program.

Teacher training in the use of volunteer tutors and mentors: To the extent funds are appropriated, elementary schools may apply to SPI for funds to provide teacher training in the use of volunteer tutors and mentors to assist struggling readers in kindergarten through fourth grade. The programs must be research based and have proven effectiveness in improving student reading performance. The programs must include the following elements:

- Teacher training in volunteer program planning, recruiting, using, and retaining tutor and mentor volunteers for reading instruction.
- Training for the volunteer tutors and mentors.
- Goals for a minimum number of volunteer contact hours per week with individual students.
- A plan to pre- and post-test students participating in the program. The results must be reported to SPI. SPI submits a preliminary report to the Legislature on the effectiveness of the various programs by March 1, 1999, and a final report by December 1999.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The striking amendment provides a stipend for teachers participating in the funding programs. Public and private nonsectarian contractors will provide the teacher training in beginning reading instruction. A tutoring and mentoring grant program is established. The other provisions in the original bill are eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This bill provides money to help teachers in our state to add a tool to their teaching tool box. Reading is an essential skill and we need to provide teachers with training in effective reading methods. Research shows teaching children to read using phonetic methods helps them to be better readers. This bill does not just advocate phonics, it also addresses spelling and reading comprehension.

Testimony Against: The message of this bill is that one method of teaching reading fits all children. It does not. Teachers currently use phonics, and children currently learn phonics. The true challenge for children is making meaning of the words they can sound out. Teachers should make the decision of which approach to use to teach their students based on the needs of their students. The money should go to add all the tools to help children to read, not just one.

Testified: Rep. Johnson, prime sponsor (pro); Kathryn Deierling, Bill Ash, Susan Esvelt, Sandy Brandt, Snohomish SSD 201 (pro); Connie Ramsey, Mead School District (con); Babs Brownell, Bainbridge Island School District (con).