

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1677

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to outdoor education and recreation.

Brief Description: Creating the outdoor education and recreation grant program for schools and others.

Sponsors: Representatives Quall, Rodne, Dunshee, Ormsby, B. Sullivan, Hurst, Chase, Hunt, P. Sullivan, Pettigrew, Lovick, Jarrett, McCoy, Anderson, Upthegrove, Santos, Sells, Conway and Rolfes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/15/07, 2/23/07 [DPS];

Appropriations: 3/3/07, 3/5/07 [DP2S(w/o sub ED)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program under the authority of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Barlow, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haigh, McDermott, Roach, Santos and P. Sullivan.

Staff: Andrew Colvin (786-7304).

Background:

The common schools in Washington are required to provide instruction in a variety of subject areas, including science. Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and Grade Level Expectations for science have been established, and beginning with the graduating class

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of 2010, students must pass the science content area of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning to graduate from high school. In addition, instruction is required at all grade levels about conservation, natural resources, and the environment.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) currently administers a Natural Science, Wildlife, and Environmental Education Partnership Account and Grant Program (Program). The Program's purpose is to promote proven and innovative natural science, wildlife, and environmental education programs that are fully aligned with the EALRs. In 2006, legislation was enacted requiring OSPI to conduct an environmental education study in partnership with public and private entities that promote quality environmental education experiences. The study must be completed by October 1, 2007.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is responsible for the acquisition, operation, enhancement, and protection of recreational, cultural, historical, and natural sites. These sites include 120 developed parks, as well as recreation programs, such as trails, boating safety, and winter recreation.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Legislature intends to establish an outdoor education and recreation program. The purpose of this is to improve students' performance on the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EARLs) for science through participation in outdoor educational and recreational opportunities.

The Outdoor Education and Recreation Program Account (Account) is created in the custody of the State Treasurer, and the Account may receive funds from any source, including gifts, grants, and donations. Subject to the availability of funds in the Account, the Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program (Grant Program) is created within the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission). The Commission shall establish and implement the Grant Program by rule, with the objective of involving public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, formal school programs, non-formal after school programs, and community-based programs in efforts to provide outdoor education and recreation programs for students.

Beginning with schools that are most in need in suburban, rural, and urban areas, the Grant Program should focus on low income students, and those in danger of failing academically or dropping out of school. The Director of the Commission (Director) shall set priorities and develop criteria for awarding grants to programs. In doing so, the Director shall consider certain specified characteristics of the applying programs, and shall consider state parks as venues and use of the Commission's personnel as a resource.

The Director must create an advisory committee with representatives from various specified agencies, the business community, outdoor organizations with an interest in education, and any others the Commission deems appropriate. The advisory committee shall assist and advise the Commission in the development and administration of the Grant Program.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The intent section reflects a broader range of benefits intended for students through the Grant Program, e.g., improve students' overall academic performance, as opposed to improving performance on the science EALRs. With respect to the types of programs and organizations that shall be provided opportunities to receive a grant, it replaces "private organizations and individuals" with "private nonprofit organizations, formal school programs, non-formal after school programs, and community based programs." Finally, there are two additions to the list of criteria to be considered by the Director when awarding grants.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: (In support) Exposure to nature and the outdoors provides many benefits to children. It gives them a different perspective and a deeper understanding of our world and how our actions affect it. By seeing how their individual actions can affect the natural environment, it helps children to see that their actions matter, and this can lead to the belief that they can make a difference in the world. Outdoor programs also provide physical benefits. Increasingly, many children do not have opportunities to experience nature and receive these benefits. Outdoor programs through schools can help provide students with these opportunities and this bill is a step in the right direction to support and increase these types of programs. This bill will not only allow the creation of new programs, but it will also enable broader financial support of existing programs. In addition, it is targeted to help the least-served students. This bill could build on existing programs and create a model for the rest of the nation. The environment is serious business. What happens to our environment can have significant impacts on our economy. People are more likely to consider careers related to the natural environment if they are exposed to it at a younger age. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) already operates two education programs, and would encourage including DNR within the framework of this bill. This program will also fit well with the Governor's plan to improve our state parks, as well as existing school programs under the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The goal of the program is to allow local programs to determine the best way to get kids outside and involved with nature.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Doug Sutherland, Department of Natural Resources; Craig Engelking and Martin LeBlanc, Sierra Club; Majorie Lamarre, Seattle School District; Frank Hein, Woodland Park Zoo; Abby Rusbey, Environmental Education Association of Washington; Jim King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation; Fred Romero, State Parks; Heath Packard, Audubon Washington; Gilda Wheeler, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Margaret Tudor and Lynne Ferguson,

Pacific Education Institute; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals; and Steve Robinson, North West Indian Fisheries Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Education. Signed by 34 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Dunshee, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Buri, Chandler, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunn, Ericks, Fromhold, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Kretz, Linville, McDermott, McDonald, McIntire, Morrell, Pettigrew, Priest, Schual-Berke, Seaquist, P. Sullivan and Walsh.

Staff: Alicia Dunkin (786-7178).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Education:

The second substitute bill adds a specific description of the types of programs to be considered for grants under the Outdoor Education and Research Program, to include outdoor educational, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based education.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date of Second Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) We are a bi-partisan advocacy coalition of hunters and nature conservancy groups that work together to provide environmental education. There is a lack of resources in existing programs that have been established and we support this addition of state support. Children are not getting outside like they used to which has an impact on their health as well as their performance in school. This bill would focus on at-risk kids. A study showed a 27 percent increase to science scores when at-risk kids participated in outdoor education. We have good programs now but there are problems getting funding to transport kids to the opportunities for learning and when school districts are low on funds they often cut field trips. We anticipate that we can partner with other programs, with funds from this bill, to provide opportunities for field trips and outdoor education.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Craig Engelking, Sierra Club; and Heath Packard, Audubon Society of Washington and Environmental Education Association of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.