

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2899

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to adult literacy education.

Brief Description: Promoting and providing resources for adult literacy education.

Sponsors: Representatives Darneille, Santos, Roberts, Williams, Green, Kagi, Simpson and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/24/08, 1/31/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to study and report on the status of adult literacy education.
- Specifies that the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) shall conduct a media campaign to increase public awareness about adult literacy education, and permits the SBCTC to subcontract all or a part of associated activities to a nonprofit organization.
- Requires the SBCTC to convene a one-day summit regarding the status of adult literacy and adult literacy education as reported by the WSIPP, and allows the SBCTC to subcontract all or a part of associated activities to a nonprofit organization.
- Requires the SBCTC to submit a status report on literacy every two years.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts, Schmick and Sommers.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

According to data from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau cited by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), 17 percent of Washington adults lacked high school credentials. Seven percent of the population of the state was non-English speaking and the number is growing. Other data shows that over 40 percent of American workers have low literacy skills and Washington employers report having had a difficult time finding qualified applicants for openings. Even low wage jobs require literacy. Low literate adults have the most difficult time getting a job and they are the people who are the first to be laid off.

Washington has in place various literacy programs and initiatives. The SBCTC has general supervision and control over the state system of community and technical colleges and one of the responsibilities of the SBCTC is to ensure that each college district offers adult education, including basic skills and general, family, and workforce literacy programs and services. The SBCTC personnel administering state and federally funded programs for adult basic skills and literacy education are known as the State Office for Adult Literacy.

There are various adult education providers offering learning options and the SBCTC distributes funds, through a competitive process, to support these programs. As of June 30, 2007, there were 34 community and technical colleges and 15 community organizations within this network of providers. Programs offered include:

- Adult Basic Education;
- English as a Second Language;
- English Literacy/Civics Education;
- Adult Secondary Education;
- Family Literacy;
- Workplace Basic Skills;
- Voluntary Literacy Programs; and
- Corrections Education.

Early literacy activities for young children and their families are also available through the Department of Early Learning and its partner, Thrive by Five Washington, which has recently awarded grants to 14 different projects around the state. The grants will primarily serve children from circumstances which place them at risk of beginning kindergarten without adequate literacy skills.

Summary of Bill:

By December 1, 2008, the WSIPP is to study and report to the Governor, the appropriate legislative committees, and the SBCTC on the status of adult literacy education. This study shall include:

- a review of literacy rates nationally, in the state as a whole, and by county;

- a review of the literature on adult literacy;
- a description of the literacy-related services currently available; and
- an analysis of data regarding literacy levels including, but not limited to, data relating to clients served by the Department of Social and Health Services, students enrolled in the public K-12 schools, students at the community and technical colleges, and incarcerated individuals under the supervision of the Department of Corrections.

The SBCTC is to conduct a media campaign to increase public awareness about the availability of literacy services and resources and to publicize the benefits from literacy which result to the individual, the family, the community, and the workforce. The SBCTC may subcontract all or part of the media campaign to qualified private nonprofit organizations.

After the WSIPP submits its report, the SBCTC is to convene a one-day literacy summit. The goal of the summit is to provide information regarding adult literacy and adult literacy education as found and reported by the WSIPP.

Two years after the due date for the WSIPP report, and every two years thereafter, the SBCTC is to prepare and submit a status report on literacy to the Governor and the appropriate legislative policy committees. These status reports must include:

- a summary of local, state, and national literacy initiatives;
- a description of the literacy programs offered in the state;
- a description of efforts aimed at advertising literacy programs and services and making them more available and affordable;
- performance measures and targets, as well as whether and how these were met and will be met;
- current information about proven and effective means for improving outcomes; and
- strategies and recommendations for professional development for adult literacy instructional personnel.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) People who are illiterate or have low literacy skills are being left behind. Awareness of the problem, as well as the resources and the volunteer opportunities, needs to be increased. These activities will build upon partnerships that are already in place. There is a need for a single, coherent document which can be used at the state and local levels. A sustained media campaign is also needed to reach more people, particularly since the data show there are many people in need of literacy services who are not now being reached. There is a need to know why so many without high school degrees do not avail themselves of literacy

resources. Any study should also include outcomes, both at the workforce and the post-secondary levels. Literacy matters at many levels, such as voting, reading loan documents, reading advertising for available jobs, and taking medication.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Darneille, prime sponsor; Kathy Cooper, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Mark McLean, Council for Basic Skills; Maddy Thompson, Workforce Board; and Lisa Schubert and Lee Jewtt, Literacy Now.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.