

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1865

As of March 26, 2015

Title: An act relating to visual screening in schools.

Brief Description: Concerning visual screening in schools.

Sponsors: Representatives Magendanz, Ortiz-Self, McCaslin, Hayes and Pollet.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/04/15, 93-3.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/17/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Matthew Lemon (786-7405)

Background: In current law, every board of school directors must provide for and require screening for the visual and auditory acuity of all children attending schools in their districts. The screening must be made in accordance with procedures and standards adopted by rule of the state Board of Health (BOH). Prior to the adoption or revision of the rules, the BOH must seek recommendations from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) regarding the administration of the screening and the qualifications of persons performing the screening.

The BOH rules require that schools must conduct screening of students in grades kindergarten through three, five, and seven, as well as any child showing symptoms of possible loss in visual acuity referred to the district by parents, guardians, or school staff. Schools are encouraged to screen children at other grade levels if resources permit.

Under BOH rules, students must be screened for distance central vision acuity using a Snellen test chart; however, the rules do not require routine screening for near visual acuity.

Summary of Bill: Every board of school directors must provide for and require screening for both distance and near visual acuity.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is correcting an oversight in visual screening for students. Currently, schools screen for distance vision but about 40 percent of vision issues are not detected through distance screening. Parents receive a notification that their children were screened and are within normal range but do not always understand that only distance vision has been tested and they consequently may not seek out near vision screening. This is an opportunity gap issue and studies have shown that high poverty areas tend not to provide vision screening as routinely as other areas and have higher failure rates for screenings. Providing an opportunity to screen for near vision as part of regular education will help catch things that may be overlooked. The assumptions in the fiscal note may be flawed and there is capacity to add this screening using current nursing staff. Near-vision screening can be added at a low cost and with little additional time needed.

A large portion of children's learning comes through vision and near vision screening is critical for literacy. Some children have trouble reading due to vision skills and an inability to see their textbooks properly. Children do not read from 20 feet away so distance screening alone is inadequate. The way children learn has changed dramatically and children are spending an increasing amount of time reading and using technology. Teachers are not trained to think about how a student sees a page of text. Screening for near vision is a physiological issue we can address rather than trying to figure out new methods of instruction.

Studies have found that large percentages of illiterate adults and individuals in the criminal justice system have vision issues and that recidivism rates decline when vision issues are corrected. A recent study found that about 80 percent of children in King County's juvenile justice system had vision issues and many of these issues would not have been detected through standard distance screening. A high percentage of these vision issues can be easily addressed.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Magendanz, prime sponsor; Jene Jones, League of Education Voters; Katie Johnson, www.educatingyoungeyes.xyz; Brad Tower, Optometric Physicians of WA; Rhonda Stone, Parent Advocate, After-School Programs Director; Kathy Lambert, Dr. Edward Lawrence Jones, citizens

Persons Signed in to Testify But Not Testifying: No one.