

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1945

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Education*

Title: An act relating to opportunities for instruction in braille.

Brief Description: Providing opportunities for instruction in braille.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Ogden, Casada, Edmondson, Peery, Basich, H. Myers, R. Meyers, Orr, Cooper, R. Johnson, Winsley, Wang, Mitchell, Cantwell and Brekke.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Education, March 6, 1991, DP.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 19 members: Representatives Peery, Chair; G. Fisher, Vice Chair; Brough, Ranking Minority Member; Vance, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Betrozoff; Broback; Brumsickle; Cole; Dorn; Holland; P. Johnson; Jones; Neher; Orr; Phillips; Rasmussen; Roland; H. Sommers; and Valle.

Staff: Susan Kirkpatrick (786-7291).

Background: School districts are currently required to provide a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. An appropriate education is defined as: "An education directed to the unique needs, abilities, and limitations of the handicapped children." The education program to be offered to each handicapped child is set forth in an individual education plan (IEP) developed by school personnel and the child's parents.

According to figures provided by the Special Education Clearing House and Depository (SEMCAD), only 10 percent of the legally blind students in Washington are currently receiving Braille instruction. The rest of the legally blind students are taught through the use of large-print materials and various technical alternatives, such as print-

enlarging closed-circuit television devices, magnifiers and tape recorders.

Summary of Bill: Each school district and the Washington State School for the Blind shall provide blind students with the opportunity to receive instruction in Braille. A blind student is defined as a student that has certain specified vision impairments.

Within two years after the effective date of the act, certificated instructional staff holding certificates or endorsements qualifying them to provide special education services who are providing instruction to blind students in reading or writing shall demonstrate competency in Braille. Competency in Braille may be demonstrated by written proof of successful completion of: 1) the course in literary Braille for Braille transcribers administered by the United States Library of Congress; 2) any test created or endorsed by the United States Library of Congress to certify proficiency of educational personnel in Braille; 3) a course for Braille transcribers administered by the Washington State Regional Library for the Blind; or 4) a course approved by the State Board of Education equivalent to any of the described courses.

Fiscal Note: Requested March 2, 1991.

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

Testimony For: All children are entitled to have access to an education. At this time, only 10 percent of blind children are taught Braille. Some think that Braille is unnecessary because of technology. However, watching TV and reading are two different things. Braille is reading and is necessary to make blind students literate. Blind students are not forced to take Braille. It is voluntary. The fiscal impact of requiring Braille has been exaggerated. Regardless of the fiscal impact, blind students should be getting the opportunity to learn Braille and they are not getting it.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Representative Ogden, prime sponsor; Representative Casada; Michael Freeman, National Federation of the Blind; and Stewart Martin and Maris Peach, parents of a blind child.