

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5079

As Passed Senate, March 6, 2003

Title: An act relating to natural science, wildlife, and environmental education.

Brief Description: Promoting natural science, wildlife, and environmental education.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Finkbeiner, Kohl-Welles, Oke, Winsley, Zarelli, Benton, Swecker, Esser, Hale, Johnson, Hewitt, McAuliffe, Rasmussen and Parlette).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 1/31/03, 2/4/03 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 3/6/03, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5079 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Johnson, Chair; Zarelli, Vice Chair; Carlson, Eide, Finkbeiner, McAuliffe, Rasmussen and Schmidt.

Staff: Heather Lewis-Lechner (786-7448)

Background: Various private entities, such as Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, the Pacific Science Center, the Washington Audubon Society, and Woodland Park Zoo, have educational outreach programs available to schools. These programs are designed to help children learn about science, wildlife, or the environment in a wide variety of ways including the development of materials for in-class curricula, field trips and out-of-school opportunities, as well as teacher training.

Under current Washington law, all schools give instruction in science with special reference to the environment. Specifically, the Washington Administrative Code requires that instruction about conservation, natural resources and the environment be provided at all grade levels and in an interdisciplinary manner.

Summary of Bill: The natural science, wildlife, and environmental education partnership account and grant program are established. The purpose of the account and of the grant program is to promote proven and innovative natural science, wildlife, and environmental education programs that are fully aligned with the state's essential academic learning requirements (EALRs) and that include instruction about renewable resources, responsible use of resources, and conservation. The grant program is subject to the availability of funds in the partnership account. The partnership account consists of funds provided by the Legislature or other sources. An appropriation is not required for an expenditure from the account.

Money from the account is disbursed through a competitive grant-making process to nonprofit organizations that are tax exempt under section 501 (c) of the federal Internal Revenue Code and that can provide matching funds or in-kind services. The criteria for the grants is established by the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and any expenditures from the fund must be authorized by SPI or its designee. When determining the funding criteria, SPI will involve a cross-section of stakeholder groups and the criteria must be socially, economically, and environmentally balanced. The criteria must be based on compliance with the EALRs, use methods that encourage critical thinking, and programs must meet at least one of the five features listed. A list of non-exclusive, eligible uses for the grants is included.

Grants may not be used for any partisan or political activities.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: There are many innovative programs already serving schools that would benefit from this bill. The Woodland Park Zoo currently funds these programs through corporate sponsors and the possibility of state funds and a collaborative partnership would allow expansion of the programs. Collaborative partnerships are an important tool and will help increase the opportunities available for the schools and make the programs better. There is no risk to the state because only programs that are proven, effective and aligned with state standards are eligible for the grants. This is a good time for this bill with the coming of science EALR's.

Testimony Against: While there is value in environmentalism, environmental education can get carried away. Environmental education must be balanced with equal emphasis on the value of our natural resources for use or else future generations of children will not understand the importance of using our resources in reasonable manners. The wildlife and nature over humans philosophy is already widespread and without balanced education, it will become overwhelming.

Testified: PRO: Erin Walker, Woodland Park Zoo Society; Nina Carter, WA Audubon; Lynne Feruson, WFPA; Brenda Hood, OSPI; Bob McMullen, AWSP. CON: Maxine Keesling, citizen.