

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1951

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to vision exams for school-aged children.

Brief Description: Regarding vision exams for school-aged children.

Sponsors: Representatives Quall, Talcott, Haler, Morrell, Campbell, O'Brien, Hankins, Kagi and McDermott.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/23/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires an eye examination be completed for a student diagnosed with a learning disability beginning in September 2006.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to disseminate to school districts information regarding resources for no-cost or low-cost eye examinations.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

School districts are required to provide screenings for the visual acuity of all children in kindergarten, and grades one, two, three, five, and seven. In addition, visual acuity screenings must be provided for any child showing signs of possible vision loss referred to the school or district by a parent, guardian or school employee. If resources permit, schools are directed to screen children at other grade levels. Screening must be performed by persons competent to administer the screening procedures as a function of their professional background and

training or as a function of their special training and demonstrated competence under supervision.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Beginning September 1, 2006, a parent must provide proof that a comprehensive eye examination has been completed for a child diagnosed with a learning disability. The examination must be performed by a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist and consideration should be given to testing binocular vision, accommodation, and convergence. An eye examination completed within the previous 12 months of the diagnosis of the learning disability is sufficient.

School districts must inform parents of the requirement for the eye examination and, to the extent practical, must provide informational resources for low-cost or no-cost eye examinations to the parents of uninsured or under-insured children. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must collect and distribute to school districts information regarding resources for low-cost or no-cost examinations, including contact phone numbers for the Optometric Physicians of Washington and the Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill directed the OSPI to require an eye examination for all students diagnosed with a learning disability and students who exhibit a reluctance or inability to keep pace with peers. The substitute bill requires a parent to provide proof of an eye examination for a child diagnosed with a learning disability after September 1, 2006.

The original bill required specific tests be included in the eye examination. The substitute bill requires a comprehensive eye examination and suggests consideration of tests in three areas.

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.

Testimony For: Many times we may have students who have vision difficulty that is not identified until later in their life, and had the difficulty been diagnosed earlier it would have made a difference in the child's learning. The current vision screening is primarily for distance acuity and the vision required to read includes a different set of vision skills. At a minimum, before we place a student in special education we should make sure it is not just a vision problem that can be corrected. We want to make sure, when we are spending money on special education that we are not incorrectly putting someone with a vision problem in that

group. This could result in a potential savings to the state when a child is provided proper vision services and is not placed for years in special education.

The goal of this bill is to improve the capture rate for children with vision problems and to make the necessary corrections that are so important with young children's learning ability. Our belief is that most families would have the resources to have the examination done. It was not intended that the school districts or the state would pay for all the exams. Children who are low-income should have state resources to pay for exams. The working poor who do not have either insurance or state services can be covered at least in part by the philanthropic organization, Vision USA.

Testimony Against: As written we oppose some aspects of the bill, but we support the overall goal. We support the current vision screening and we would like to see the process improved so that fewer kids slip through the cracks. There is arguably a dispute between optometrists and the ophthalmologists regarding the specific tests defined in the bill. We also would like to see the findings in the intent section revised.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Quall, prime sponsor; and Brad Tower and Karen Preston, Optometric Physicians of Washington.

(Opposed) Aaron Weingeist, Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.