

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1951

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, March 30, 2005

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

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

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Quall, Talcott, Haler, Morrell, Campbell, O'Brien, Hankins, Kagi and McDermott).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/11/05, 93-0.

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 3/25/05, 3/30/05 [DPA].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair; Weinstein, Vice Chair; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Carrell, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Mulliken, Pflug, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

**Staff:** Ingrid Mungia (786-7423)

**Background:** Rules adopted by the Washington Department of Health require school districts 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 Amended 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.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:** Requires the Department of Health to convene a work group to re-evaluate current visual screening rules of children in public schools. The workgroup must consider the benefits of complete eye exams; when visual screening, complete eye exams, or both should take place; and what screening techniques would be appropriate. The Department of Health must consult with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board of Health, the Optometric Physicians of Washington and the Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons. The Department of Health must use existing resources to accomplish the goals of the workgroup.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** There is a current problem with childhood vision care that requires treatment as soon as possible. Vision problems that are caught late are beyond correcting and it has ramifications on a child's education. This bill helps children with a high incidence of vision problems, mainly children with learning disabilities. Need to step back a look at the important issues to insure children with special needs receive eye exams. Currently, there is inconsistent quality eye exams in schools. Vision problems are linked to academic problems and low self-esteem for students.

Other: Access for parents to have quality vision care is a concern. Some parents have access to insurance and transportation and some parents do not have such access. What happens if the parents do not want to do the eye exam? What happens after the eye exam? There are language problems in the bill and too much weight is on the parents shoulders. Parents would not necessarily be able to identify who the students are for special services. Maybe a brochure for parents including eye exam resources would be better than the bill. A study process would work better, to evaluate the current situation and look at what other states are doing with student eye exams in schools.

**Testimony Against:** None

**Who Testified:** PRO: Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Karen Preston, Optometric Physicians of Washington; Mary Kinfield, PTA; Brad Tower, Optometric Physicians of Washington; Greg Williamson, OSPI; Christie Perkins, Washington Special Education Coalition.