

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5265

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 26, 2007

Title: An act relating to outdoor education and recreation.

Brief Description: Creating the outdoor education and recreation grant program for schools and others.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, Fairley, Eide, Kohl-Welles and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/15/07, 2/26/07 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/01/07.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5265 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Tom, Vice Chair; Holmquist, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Clements, Eide, Hewitt, Hobbs, Kauffman, Oemig, Rasmussen, Weinstein and Zarelli.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: Studies conducted by the State Education and Environment Roundtable (SEER) show that outdoor classrooms produce student gains in a variety of areas, including science test scores. Washington's Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) provide an overview of what students should know and be able to do in grades K-10. Science is one of the content areas addressed by the EALRs.

Under current Washington law, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers a natural science, wildlife, and environmental education partnership account and grant program. The purpose of the program is to promote proven and innovative natural science, wildlife, and environmental education programs that are fully aligned with the state's EALRs and that include instruction about renewable resources, responsible use of resources, and conservation. In 2006, legislation was passed requiring OSPI to conduct an environmental

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education study in partnership with public and private entities that promote quality environmental education experiences. The study must be completed by October 1, 2007.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is responsible for the long-term care and protection of Washington's state parks. The Commission must also maintain policies that increase the number of people who have access to free or low-cost recreational opportunities for physical activity.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission must establish an outdoor education and recreation grant program, subject to the availability of funds in the outdoor education and recreation account. The program will provide funding for existing and new outdoor education programs. Any school programs that participate must be fully aligned with the state's EALRs for science. The program will be phased in beginning with the schools and students with the greatest academic needs.

The Director of the Commission must set priorities and develop criteria for awarding grants. When selecting grantees, the Director should consider Washington State parks and personnel as resources as well as programs that contribute to the reduction of academic failure and dropout rates, make use of nationally accredited environmental education curriculum, contribute to healthy life styles, maximize the number of participants, commit matching and in-kind resources, and create public-private partnerships.

The Director must create an advisory committee to help develop and administer the program. The committee should include representatives from OSPI, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the business community, outdoor organizations with an interest in education, and other necessary stakeholders.

The outdoor education and recreation program account is created in the custody of the State Treasurer. Funds deposited in this account, which may include funds from any source, must be transferred to the Commission solely for the outdoor education and recreation program. An appropriation is not required for expenditures.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED SUBSTITUTE AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Early Learning & K-12 Education): The intent of the outdoor education and recreation program is clarified and it is specified that, in addition to public agencies, private non-profit organizations, formal school programs, nonformal after-school programs, and community-based programs can receive grants from the outdoor education and recreation account. The Director must additionally consider the following program criteria when awarding grants to outdoor environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural research-based education and recreation programs: programs that (1) make use of research-based, effective environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based education curriculum; (2) provide children with opportunities to directly experience and understand nature and the natural world; and (3) include ongoing program evaluation, assessment, and reporting of their effectiveness. Programs that make use of nationally accredited environmental education curriculum are no longer criteria the Director must consider.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Washington agencies can work together to ensure that children have an outdoor experience that is also a learning experience. Too many children do not have access to the outdoors. This bill will help underserved communities engage their children in the outside and empower a wide range of local community programs. The public-private partnership component is very important. Exposing children to nature helps children develop a passion for the outdoors, a sense of stewardship, and an understanding of their impact on the environment. Currently, we have a generation of individuals who understand fisheries and ecology, all of whom got their start by spending time outdoors as children; we must create similar opportunities for the next generation. Field experiences help children learn better in science. OSPI's existing grant program successfully gives depth to environmental education and is complemented by this bill, which focuses on after-school, weekend, and family programs. Improving health and education go hand in hand. A healthy Washington is dependent on connecting people with nature.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Craig Engelking and Martin LeBlanc, Sierra Club; Marjarie Lamare, John Muir Elementary School; Ryan Spiller, Washington Health Foundation; Frank Hein, Woodland Park Zoo; Lynne Ferguson and Margaret Tuder, Pacific Education Institute; Gilda Wheeler, OSPI; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals; Abby Ruskey, Environmental Education Association of Washington; Heath Packard, Audubon Washington.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This supports communities across the state to implement high quality outdoor education programs. The world has changed and kids today are spending too much time in sedentary activities. This bill is about providing youth the opportunity to reconnect to the outdoors. This grant program will support, expand, and provide more stable funding for existing programs as well as allow for the development of new programs. Based on \$2.5 million funding level, it is estimated that the program will serve 100,000 kids. By having the money deposited into a new account, this ensures that it will not take away from the other responsibilities of the State Park's Commission.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Craig Engelking, Sierra Club; Heath Packard, Audubon Washington.