

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1920

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to education for children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Brief Description: Providing for a spectrum of education services for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Sponsors: Representatives McDermott and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

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

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires school districts, by September 1, 2007, to be prepared to offer, for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, a spectrum of services that include both oral and sign language-based programs and a professional with expertise in hearing impairment on any team preparing an individualized education plan.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos and Shabro.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis and Tom.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

During 2003, the House Children and Family Services Committee assembled a work group on deaf education in Washington. The work group's purpose was to consider the respective roles of and relationships among the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD), local school districts, educational service districts, community services, and community resources in the delivery of effective education to hearing impaired children throughout the state. In addition, the work group considered different appropriate service delivery models for hearing impaired children.

The work group included representation from parents and teachers of hearing impaired children, the Governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), educators, the Board of Trustees of the Washington School for the Deaf, the Washington Sensory Disabilities Services, and the Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program. In addition, four members of the Senate, a member of the House Education Committee, and the members of the House Children and Family Services Committee served on the work group.

The work group held three meetings over the course of the interim to discuss a range of issues, including service delivery in the state from newborn hearing screening and early intervention services through the P-12 system, technological advances relating to hearing impairment, and research on outcomes and costs related to hearing impairment. At its final meeting, the members developed consensus statements that reflected the basic principles agreed upon by all of the members of the work group. They also adopted goals and policy recommendations based upon those consensus statements.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that the quality of education for and expectations of children who are deaf or hard of hearing should be equivalent to the education provided for all children. The Legislature also finds that no single educational approach can meet the needs of all students who are hearing impaired and that these students should be educated in the least restrictive environment. In addition, services for hearing impaired students should be guided by research, span the spectrum of available options, and respect the choices of families. Finally, the Legislature finds that unbiased and comprehensive information about the spectrum of communication and educational options should be made available to families when a child is enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and when education plan transition services are available to a hearing impaired individual at age 14.

By September 1, 2007, each school district must be prepared to offer a spectrum of services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The services must include both sign language and oral language based programming and must correspond to the educational approach selected for the child by the child's parents or guardian. The district may contract with an outside entity for the services.

School districts must include a professional with expertise in hearing impairment on any team that is preparing an individualized instruction plan for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing.

The SPI will provide school districts with information on advances in research, technology, and education for children with hearing impairments. The SPI will also provide professional development for educational professionals throughout the state on the educational needs of students with hearing impairments.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Students who are deaf or hard of hearing need to be given a chance to meet the state's academic standards in the least restrictive setting possible. However, they will need the types of accommodations in this legislation to accomplish that goal. Some of these services are readily available, but others are not, especially in rural and isolated communities.

(With concerns) The SPI doesn't have the staff in place to provide the research included in the legislation, but there are other organizations that do. It may not be realistic to expect each school district to support the breadth of services included in the legislation.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative McDermott, prime sponsor.

(With concerns) Lynn Maier and Jan Sorenson, Washington Public Employees Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.