

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1677

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, March 22, 2007
Ways & Means, March 30, 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: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Quall, Rodne, Dunshee, Ormsby, B. Sullivan, Hurst, Chase, Hunt, P. Sullivan, Pettigrew, Lovick, Jarrett, McCoy, Anderson, Upthegrove, Santos, Sells, Conway and Rolfes).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/09/07, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/15/07, 3/22/07 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/30/07 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to the Committee on Ways & Means.

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

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Fairley, Hatfield, Hewitt, Hobbs, Honeyford, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Oemig, Parlette, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Tom.

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

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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 the 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 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 Second Substitute 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 opportunities for public agencies, private non-profit organizations, formal school programs, nonformal after-school programs, and community-based programs to receive funds from the account. Programs that provide outdoor education opportunities to schools 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 research-based, effective environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based education curriculum; contribute to healthy life styles; maximize the number of participants; commit matching and in-kind resources; create public-private partnerships; provide children with opportunities to directly experience and understand nature and the natural world; and include ongoing program evaluation, assessment, and reporting of their effectiveness.

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.

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: This bill passed out of the House unanimously and is identical to Substitute Senate Bill 5265. Children are not as connected with nature as they used to be; this grant program will reconnect children to the outdoors. It is good policy to target students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and those who are potential dropouts.

OTHER: The Washington State Parks can provide the venue and personnel for this program.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Craig Engelking, Sierra Club; Heath Packard, Audubon and Environmental Education Association of Washington; Mitch Denning, Alliance of Educational Associations.

OTHER: Fred Romero, Washington State Parks.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): None.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.