

SPEAKER WITHEM: Senator McKenzie.

SENATOR MCKENZIE: Thank you, Mr Speaker and members of the body. I, too, rise to maybe fill in a couple of gaps related to the issue before us with Senator Schimek's amendment. Braille as literacy has been an issue that's been slower to catch on than other forms of literacy for handicapped children, and, in fact, because for many years people believed children with some limited vision should still try to read, even though the letters had to be four to five and six times larger, literacy for a child who has a very limited visual ability and/or child who, at some point in life, may be completely blind, is an important tool for them to be able to read at a speed that most visually capable people can. And while we've talked and spent a lot of time, I think, at the department and in schools working with sign as literacy for hearing impairment, braille has been slower to pick up. Senator Bohlke explained to you the reasons the committee killed the bill. It really goes to an issue of a mandate at a time when we are in a very deep review and reform effort. I visited with members of the group, Visually Impaired Commission, who were supporting the bill, and indicated that I think their point is very important, that we need to be sure and include that in the rewrite of the special education statutes and rules and regulations next year. But the other issue that Senator Wehrbein talked about with the School for the Visually Impaired is the other thing that's changed. More and more, for children with disabling impairments, our focus has been not to remove those children from the school setting of their home and place them somewhere to learn, it has been to keep those children within their home community, within their home classroom, and to provide necessary support to keep them there, inclusion versus the School for the Visually Handicapped. That's been the other part of the problem. Senator Schimek's amendment to the appropriations bill attempts to get at the beginning of a system that allows us to keep those children in place, to provide the materials the district needs to keep the child there, and to provide training for teachers who can then provide that support, delivering services to the system rather than pulling children out of their school and separating them on the side. I rise in support of the Schimek amendment, and I would ask for your support as well. Thank you.

SPEAKER WITHEM: Senator Wehrbein, on the Schimek amendment.