
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5350

AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXPANSION OF THE PILOT STUDY OF BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY AND CLOSING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS.

SUMMARY:

This bill expands an existing early literacy pilot study and creates a method for determining which school districts are eligible to have their schools participate. It also requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to:

1. develop or approve new K through third grade reading assessments,
2. monitor school districts that over-identify minority students for special education, and
3. establish a teacher professional development program in reading instruction.

It also makes conforming and technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2012

§ 1 -- EARLY LITERACY PILOT EXPANSION

Under PA 11-85, the education commissioner is authorized to (1) conduct a pilot study to promote best practices in early literacy and closing academic achievement gaps and (2) identify schools to participate in the study. The bill authorizes the commissioner, for the school year starting July 1, 2012 and each following year, to select additional schools to participate in the pilot, but they must be located in educational reform districts.

The bill defines an “educational reform district” as a school district in a town that is among the 10 lowest district performance indices

(DPI) when all towns are ranked highest to lowest in DPI scores. The bill defines how DPI is calculated.

By law, the pilot study can use various assessment tools, including those used in the summer reading program and the reading assessments SDE develops or approves under the bill (see below). The study may also assess students more frequently than otherwise required.

By law and unchanged by the bill, “achievement gaps” mean a significant disparity in the academic performance of students among and between (1) racial groups, (2) ethnic groups, (3) socioeconomic groups, (4) genders, and (5) English language learners and students whose primary language is English.

District Performance Index

A town’s DPI is its students’ weighted performance on the statewide mastery tests in reading, writing, and mathematics given in grades three through eight and 10, and science in grades five, eight, and 10. The index is calculated by:

1. weighting student scores in each of these subjects as follows: zero for below basic (the lowest score), 25% for basic, 50% for proficient, 75% for goal, and 100% for advanced;
2. adding the weighted student scores for each subject;
3. multiplying the aggregate student results in each subject by 30% for math, reading, and writing and 10% for science; and
4. adding the weighted subject scores.

The weightings mean the districts with the lowest test scores receive the lowest DPI. A zero score means all students scored below basic and 100% means all students scored at the advanced level.

Under the bill, the test score data used for the index is either (1) the data of record on the December 31st following the tests, or (2) that data as adjusted by SDE according to a board of education’s request for an

adjustment filed by the November 30th following the test.

Under the bill's definition, it is unclear how the DPI will be applied to districts that do not have a high school and therefore do not have 10th grade scores to include in their DPI. Also, there is a similar problem for regional school districts that begin either at the middle school or high school level and therefore do not have grade school scores to include in their DPI.

§ 2 -- NEW STATEWIDE READING ASSESSMENTS

The bill requires SDE, by July 1, 2014, to develop or approve reading assessments that districts must use to identify K through third grade students who are reading deficient.

The bill requires the assessments to:

1. include frequent student screening and progress monitoring;
2. measure phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension;
3. allow for periodic formative assessment during the school year;
4. produce data that is useful for developing individual and classroom instruction; and
5. be compatible with best practices in reading instruction and research.

§ 3-- OVER-IDENTIFYING MINORITY STUDENTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

The bill requires SDE to identify school districts that disproportionately and inappropriately identify minority students as requiring special education due to reading deficiencies. It requires these districts to submit annual reports to SDE describing their plan to reduce the misidentification of minority students by improving reading assessments and interventions for students in K to third grade.

Furthermore, the bill requires SDE to study the plan and strategies

the districts use that demonstrate improvement in this area. The SDE study must examine the correlation between improvements in teacher training in the science of reading and the reduction in misidentification of students requiring special education services.

For this portion of the bill, “minority students” means those whose race is defined other than white, or whose ethnicity is defined as Hispanic or Latino by the federal Office of Management and Budget for U.S. Census use.

§ 4 – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By July 1, 2014 the bill requires the education commissioner to establish a professional development program in reading instruction for teachers.

The program must:

1. count towards continuing education requirements,
2. be based on student reading assessment data,
3. provide differentiated and intensified training in teacher reading instruction,
4. be used to identify mentor teachers who will train teachers in reading instruction, and
5. outline how model classrooms will be established in schools for reading instruction.

The bill also requires the education commissioner to annually review the continuing education training required under law for teachers with a professional certificate who hold an early childhood nursery through third grade or elementary school endorsement and hold a job requiring such endorsement. The commissioner must assess whether the training meets state goals for student academic achievement through implementation of (1) the State Board of Education-adopted common core standards, (2) research based interventions, and (3) federal special education law (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. §

1400 et seq.). He must submit his review to the Education Committee.

BACKGROUND

Related Bill

Section 3 of sSB 24 (File 416), An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness, also creates a DPI using the same method as this bill.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference
Yea 32 Nay 1 (03/14/2012)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 54 Nay 0 (04/03/2012)