



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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2012 EARLY LITERACY LEGISLATION

By: Marybeth Sullivan, Legislative Analyst II

You asked for a summary of early literary legislation enacted in 2012.

SUMMARY

In 2012, the General Assembly enacted two pieces of legislation that address early literacy education practices. These provisions are contained in either the education reform act, [PA 12-116](#), or in [PA 12-120](#). They require the development of:

1. instruction and assessment plans,
2. intervention and incentive programs,
3. information-sharing systems for kindergarten through grade three (K-3) literacy instruction,
4. teacher training requirements for early childhood education coursework and certification, and
5. literacy grant program implementation.

INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT PLANS

Statewide K-3 Reading Plan

State Department of Education (SDE) must develop a statewide reading plan for grades K-3 students by July 1, 2013.

The plan must contain research-driven strategies to produce effective reading instruction and improve student performance. Elements of the plan must accomplish several tasks:

1. align K-3 reading instruction and assessment methods with State Board of Education (SBE) common core state standards;
2. intervene with students reading below grade level, and enhance instruction with students reading at or above grade level;
3. coordinate reading instruction between home and school, creating opportunities for parent involvement;
4. instruct teachers on how to use student progress data to adjust instruction methods to improve student success and assist transition to the next grade level; and
5. train and test teachers enrolled in preparation courses and professional development.

The plan must also include school district reading plans and incentives for schools with significant reading improvement. It is not clear when the plan must be put into use ([PA 12-116, § 91](#)).

Statewide Reading Assessments

SDE must, by January 1, 2013, develop or approve reading assessments for districts to use to identify deficient K-3 readers. The education commissioner must submit these assessments to the Education Committee by February 1, 2013. Districts must use these assessments beginning July 1, 2013.

Districts must use these new reading assessments to identify deficient K-3 readers. Assessments must frequently screen and monitor students throughout the school year. Screening will measure student mastery of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Districts can then use data from these screenings to develop individualized and whole class instruction ([PA 12-116, § 5](#)).

Early Literacy Best Practices Pilot Study

The education commissioner's pilot study about early literacy best practices to close academic achievement gaps is extended through the 2013 school year. PA 11-85 originally authorized the study.

To compile this study, the commissioner may assess reading levels of students more than two times per year using various assessment tools. This may include kindergarten assessments at the end of the school year, as well as grades 1-3 assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The commissioner has discretion over assessment frequency and waiver for certain grade levels in participating schools.

The commissioner will use study findings to measure and address the achievement gap, which is the significant disparity in 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.

The Education Committee must receive the report by October 1, 2014 ([PA 12-116, § 4](#)).

INTERVENTION AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Intensive Early Reading Program

The education commissioner must create an intensive grade K-3 reading program and select five low-achieving schools to participate each year, beginning July 1, 2012. The overall program includes: (1) an

intensive reading instruction strategy, (2) reading intervention plans, and (3) summer school programs. SDE must develop the instruction strategy to be implemented in the participating schools by July 1, 2012.

Participating schools must either: (1) be located in an educational reform district; (2) participate in a commissioner's network; or (3) have a School Performance Index (SPI) among the lowest 5% of all schools.

The SDE-developed reading instruction strategy for participating schools must outline strategy methods, including:

1. training for teachers in the science of teaching reading,
2. collection and use of student data to support classroom needs and professional development, and
3. communication with parents about strategies, goals, and student progress.

The goal of these reading programs is to improve literacy and narrow the achievement gaps between student groups, as defined in [PA 12-116, § 4](#).

Criteria for the intensive early reading program include not only routine reading assessments for K-3 students, but also scientifically based instruction. Such instruction uses practices that demonstrate satisfactory reading progress when used with students. Practices include instruction in these areas: phonic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

Additionally, the program calls for increased communication between schools and parents. Principals must notify parents or guardians when their K-3 student has been identified as a below proficiency reader. The notice will announce that an intervention plan will be developed and will provide strategies the parent can use at home with the student.

The program also assigns each participating school state-funded staff of one reading coach and four reading interventionists. The literary coach observes classes and supervises the reading interventionists. The reading interventionists conduct assessments, develop remediation plans for below-proficient student readers, and provide extra reading instruction during regular school hours.

Remediation plans must include several elements. For instance, instructional strategies using research-based materials must be used by teachers trained in reading instruction. Also, parental involvement and regular progress reports on the student must be integrated into the plans.

At the end of the school year, below-proficient students must enroll in a summer school program. This program continues the use of scientifically based reading instruction strategies. Instructors complete weekly assessments of monitored students.

The principals of participating schools must submit to SDE the reading progress of each student below proficiency, along with the interventions used.

Beginning October 1, 2013, SDE must report annually on the program to the Education Committee about elements that can be replicated in other school districts ([PA 12-116, § 89](#)).

Incentive Program to Improve Reading

The education commissioner must establish, by July 1, 2014, an incentive program to increase the number of students who meet reading goals on Connecticut mastery tests. This incentive program will demonstrate instruction methods that schools can use to increase the number of students meeting mastery test reading goals by 10%.

The commissioner may use the following incentives, among others, to reward participating, successful schools: public recognition, financial rewards, enhanced autonomy, and operational flexibility ([PA 12-116, § 94](#)).

LITERACY INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Oral Language and Pre-Literacy Information-Sharing System

SDE, in conjunction with the Governor's Early Care and Education Cabinet, must develop an early literacy information-sharing system. This system will share information about children's proficiency in oral language, as well as about pre-literacy between preschool and school and readiness programs and kindergarten.

The deadline for development of the system is not clear ([PA 12-116, § 96](#)).

TEACHER TRAINING

Pre-Literacy Coursework

SBE, in consultation with the Board of Regents for Higher Education, must design and approve a pre-literacy course for bachelor's degree programs by July 1, 2013.

This pre-literacy course will be offered in bachelor's degree programs with an early childhood education concentration. The course will be practice-based, as well as specific to pre-literacy and language skills instruction for early child education teachers.

It is unclear when the course will be offered at higher education institutions ([PA 12-116, § 95](#)).

Reading Instruction Tests for Teachers

Teachers certified in comprehensive special education or remedial reading and language arts must pass the SBE reading instruction test beginning July 1, 2013.

This reading instruction test was approved by SBE on April 1, 2009. Teachers must receive a satisfactory score on the test in order for their teaching endorsement to be valid for grades K-6 and K-12.

Additionally, K-3 teachers and local boards of education employees who hold certificates with nursery-3 or elementary endorsements must take the practice version of the SBE reading instruction test beginning July 1, 2014. Employees holding initial, provisional, or professional educator certificates must comply.

This reading instruction practice test was approved by SBE on April 1, 2009. Local and regional boards of education must annually report the results of these practice tests to SDE.

It is unclear if each affected teacher must take the above tests once or yearly ([PA 12-116, §§ 6, 92, and 93](#)).

LITERACY GRANTS

Even Start Family Literacy Program Grants

SDE must administer an Even Start program, which was once a federal program of the same name under the No Child Left Behind Act. (The federal program is no longer funded.)

Using available appropriations, SDE will use the program to provide grants for new or expanded local family literacy programs. These local programs provide literacy services for children and their parents.

Local programs will be eligible for Even Start grants if they integrate the following projects, among others: early childhood education, parenting education, and interactive parent-child literacy activities for low income families with children from birth to age seven. Local literacy projects that are open to needy families and teen parents are also eligible for Even Start grants.

SDE may administer these grants immediately ([PA 12-120, § 12](#)).

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