Bill No.: SB-1019
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LITERACY.
Vote Date: 3/25/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations
PH Date: 3/13/2019
File No.: 

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill aims to establish research based intensive reading instruction programs. This bill comes in response to low literacy rates and the staggering effects illiteracy has on students.

Substitute Language LCO No. 6579:
Sections 1-4: Expands reading initiatives such as 1) read assessments, 2) intensive reading instruction program, 3) coordinated statewide reading instruction program, and 4) reading readiness programs from grades K-3 to grades K-5. Substitute language directs reading assessments and intensive reading instruction programs to Alliance Districts or districts chosen by the Commissioner, as opposed to every district. Section 4 allows all districts to participate in the reading readiness program, as opposed to only Alliance or Commissioner's Network Schools.

Section 5: Requires SDE to establish the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, not UConn. Substitute language removes the requirement that this center be a part of UConn’s Neag School of Education and includes the Neag School's Dean on the Reading Leadership Advisory Council.

Section 6: Substitute language establishes a working group to study evidence based reading research and instruction.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education: Commissioner Wentzell and the Department are very supportive of the legislature’s focus on early childhood literacy but they have fiscal concerns with this bill. They support the initiative but cannot divert funds from the Department.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

Darci Burns, Ph.D., Executive Director, HILL for Literacy: Dr. Burns strongly supports this bill. She states that multi-tiered systems (MTSS) are evidence based practices that are proven successful in increasing literacy rates. However, MTSS models require financial support and maintenance structures in order to succeed, and this bill would provide that.

Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN: Ms. Gordon states that in Connecticut less than 6 in 10 students are on track for college or career in reading, and in some communities the number is less than 1 in 10. She supports this bill in hopes that it can “address the gap between policy and implementation through technical support and coordination”.

Dr. Margie B. Gillis, President of Literacy How and Research Affiliate at Haskins Laboratories: Dr. Gillis supports SB 1019. She addresses how difficult it is for students who are not at grade reading level to catch up later in life and how important it is to create a multi-tiered support systems in early literacy. She also believes increasing educators in how to teach reading is essential for the success of their students.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

Gladis Kersaint, Dean, UConn Neag School of Education: The University is supportive of the goals and concepts in this bill but have major concerns. Currently UConn does not have the funds in their budget to create a Center of Literacy Research and Reading Success, however SDE does. They propose that SDE create this center, not UConn. This change is reflected in substitute language. They are also concerned that this would increase their curriculum requirement of 12 clock hours training in the science of reading to 12 credit hours, which would be four courses. That amount is nearly half of the 30 credit hour requirement and the University feels that is excessive. They are also concerned with the testing requirement for faculty members as it would subject current tenured faculty to training and assessment at their own expense, of a subject they already have expertise in. They are also concerned with section 6 which requires retention of third graders not at grade reading level, but this section was removed in substitute language.

Bob Hannafin, Dean, Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions, Fairfield University: Mr. Hannafin supports the spirit of the bill but has three major concerns: 1) The financial burden that 12 additional credit hours will create for future teachers; 2) New requirements for current faculty members in teacher prep programs; and 3) setting a deadline for literacy proficiency.

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS): CAPSS supports the expansion of reading assessment for students K-3, they have strong objections to section 6 which would retain all third grade students who have not met reading proficiency. This directive disadvantages a number of students who may be learning English as a second language, have a learning impairment, or...
students who have lacked literacy support in early grades. CAPSS also asserts retention does not help students achieve higher literacy rates. Section 6 is struck from the Substitute Language.

Louise Spear-Sterling, Ph.D., Department of Special Education & Reading, Southern Connecticut State University: Dr. Spear-Sterling feels that while much of the bill supports early literacy, she cannot support retention of students who do not reach reading level in the third grade. Third grade is too late for retention or early intervention strategies. Retention does not help students reach appropriate reading levels and is also detrimental to their social-emotional learning.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc: CABE strongly urges the committee to strike section 6 regarding retention.

The Education Committee received close to 70 pieces of testimony from concerned parents and educators specifically regarding section 6 which would require retention of third grade students who are not at reading level. This section was struck from the bill in substitute language.

Reported by: Garnet McLaughlin 4/1/2019