
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6517 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE TO ANALYZE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAWS GOVERNING DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING.

SUMMARY

This bill makes the following changes in state laws governing teacher preparation programs, teacher certification, and elementary student reading proficiency assessments:

1. establishes an Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities (hereafter "the office") in the State Department of Education (SDE) to verify whether teacher preparation programs and teacher certification applicants comply with requirements in state law relating to dyslexia instruction and training (§§ 1-4);
2. bars the State Board of Education (SBE) from approving any teacher preparation programs, beginning September 1, 2022, until the office verifies that the program complies with state law relating to dyslexia instruction and training (§ 3);
3. requires SDE to issue a teaching certificate to any level of applicant (initial, provisional, or professional), beginning September 1, 2023, if the office verifies that he or she has fulfilled certain literacy training and education requirements (§ 4);
4. allows applicants for certain teaching certification endorsements to substitute student teaching experience for supervised practicum hours (§ 5);
5. requires the office to provide guidance to higher education institutions and other teacher preparation program providers about how to verify whether practicum hour supervisors have

- obtained certain qualifications (§ 6);
6. requires SDE to revise previously-developed reading assessments for grades kindergarten through three to include new methodologies for measuring reading proficiency (§ 7);
 7. allows SDE to partner with a public college or university to establish a data center to guide the department and boards of education in the use and effectiveness of reading assessments (§ 7);
 8. requires each local or regional board of education to develop a voluntary family history questionnaire to help identify students who are at risk of reading proficiency challenges (§ 8); and
 9. requires SDE to report to legislative committees about the (a) progress of the office's establishment and staffing, (b) results of the verification of teacher preparation programs' and teacher certificate applicants' compliance with state law, and (c) guidance given to boards of education about the administration of reading assessments (§§ 9 & 10).

The bill also makes various minor, technical, and conforming changes.

*House Amendment "A":

1. renames the new "Office of Training Compliance" the "Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities" and establishes qualification requirements and duties for its leader (§ 1);
2. extends several deadlines by which the new office, SBE, and SDE must complete specified duties (§§ 1-4 & 7);
3. reduces the number of qualifications for supervisors of practicum hours (§ 6);
4. revises the new methodologies that must be employed in the updated K-3 reading assessments (§ 7); and

5. creates new legislative reporting requirements for SDE (§§ 9 & 10).

The amendment also removes provisions about proof of teacher preparation program compliance and makes other minor and technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021

§§ 1-4 — OFFICE OF DYSLEXIA AND READING DISABILITIES

The bill establishes the office in SDE, managed by a chief who is qualified to perform the office's duties by training and experience, including expertise in higher education, dyslexia, and structured literacy. It tasks the office with performing the following duties:

1. verifying whether teacher preparation programs and teacher certification applicants (a) fulfill existing law's requirements about dyslexia instruction and training and (b) meet compliance standards relating to dyslexia instruction and training established by the bill and
2. relating to these compliance standards, (a) reviewing and recommending changes, as necessary, to SBE's approval process for teacher preparation programs and (b) providing guidance to and consulting with SDE's Talent Office.

Under the bill, the office's chief must appoint full-time staff necessary for operations, which must at least include (1) staff with expertise in education preparation program (a) accreditation analysis, (b) approval, and (c) curriculum analysis related to structured literacy and dyslexia and (2) support staff.

Development of Compliance Measures and Audit Procedures (§ 1)

The bill requires the office to develop compliance measures and audit procedures by July 1, 2022, for determining whether teacher preparation programs fulfill requirements in state law about (1) instruction in literacy skills and processes (see BACKGROUND) and (2) whether these programs include supervised practicum hours or

student teaching experience and instruction in the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with dyslexia in any programs of study in the diagnosis and remediation of reading and language arts. The office must consider the recommendations in Appendices D and E of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training's final report (see BACKGROUND). The office must submit these compliance measures and procedures to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement and the Education committees by that same date.

Additionally, the bill requires the office to develop the following items by July 1, 2022, and update them as necessary, with consideration given to the recommendations in Appendix F of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training's final report (see BACKGROUND):

1. structured literacy competency targets to identify structured literacy competencies an educator should achieve based on certification level and endorsement type;
2. a list of sample course assignments and evaluations for higher education institutions and other teacher preparation programs to review and consider that align with the structured literacy competency targets and compliance measures the office developed; and
3. model dyslexia in-service training programs for local and regional boards of education to use that also align with the structured literacy competency targets.

Teacher Preparation Program Compliance Measures and Verification (§ 2)

Under the bill, beginning on September 1, 2022, the office must use the compliance measures and audit procedures it develops to verify whether any teacher preparation program that submits an initial or continued approval application to SBE is complying with existing law about the following:

1. instruction in dyslexia detection and recognition and evidence-based structured literacy interventions and
2. inclusion of supervised practicum hours or student teaching experience and instruction in evidence-based structured literacy interventions for students with dyslexia in programs of study for remedial reading, remedial language arts, and reading consultants or special education.

Additionally, the bill allows the office to complete the compliance verification by reviewing the information gathered by a national accrediting agency that accredits teacher preparation programs for SDE, so long as the agency uses the compliance measures and audit procedures developed by the office under the bill.

Under the bill, the office must report annually on the compliance verification results to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement and Education committees, with an initial reporting deadline of January 1, 2023.

Additionally, by that same initial date, the bill requires the office to do the following, annually:

1. review and request updates about webinar modules and trainings developed or endorsed by SDE to align the modules with the office's compliance measures and
2. submit status reports on the compliance of these modules and trainings to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement and Education committees.

Approval of New Teacher Preparation Programs (§ 3)

Beginning September 1, 2022, the bill prohibits SBE from approving any teacher preparation programs until the office completes the verification of compliance described above (§ 2), using the compliance measures and audit procedures it develops as required by the bill.

Teacher Certification Applicant Compliance Measures and Verification (§ 4)

Beginning September 1, 2023, the bill requires SBE to issue any appropriate level of teaching certificate (initial, provisional, or professional) to an applicant who meets specified requirements in state teacher certification law, as verified by the office in consultation with SDE's Talent Office and Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification. The bill establishes two verification requirements specific to the level of teaching certificate that the applicant seeks.

First, if the applicant is seeking an initial certificate and has graduated from a Connecticut teacher preparation program, the bill requires the office to certify that he or she has completed at least 12 clock hours of instruction in detection and recognition of, and evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with dyslexia.

Second, if the applicant is seeking an initial certificate with an endorsement in comprehensive special education or integrated early childhood and special education, the bill requires the office to certify that he or she has complied with the requirements in state law about completing a program of study in the diagnosis of remediation of reading and language arts that includes supervised practicum hours and instruction in the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with dyslexia.

§ 5 — APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTAIN TEACHING CERTIFICATE ENDORSEMENTS

Beginning on July 1, 2021, the bill allows the following applicants to complete a student teaching experience as an alternative to completing supervised practicum hours:

1. any certified employees applying for a comprehensive special education or integrated early childhood and special education endorsement or
2. applicants for an initial, provisional, or professional teaching certificate and a comprehensive special education or integrated early childhood and special education endorsement.

§ 6 — SUPERVISORS OF PRACTICUM HOURS

Beginning January 1, 2022, the bill requires the office to provide guidance to higher education institutions and other teacher preparation program providers about how to verify whether practicum hour supervisors have obtained at least four of the following qualifications:

1. a satisfactory score on the SBE-approved reading instruction exam or a comparable reading instruction exam;
2. a valid initial, provisional, or professional SBE-issued teaching certificate;
3. a master's degree in remedial reading or a closely related field;
4. specific and documented knowledge about structured literacy principles and practices;
5. training for practicum supervision, coaching, and evaluation of a reading interventionist; or
6. at least three years' work experience providing structured literacy interventions for students with remedial reading needs, including students with dyslexia.

Under the bill, higher education institutions and other teacher preparation program providers must give preference to practicum supervisor candidates who meet the above six qualifications and also have (1) experience in the design, implementation, or monitoring of structured literacy interventions or (2) previous practicum supervisor experience. Current law is silent regarding qualifications for practicum supervisors.

§ 7 — KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 3 READING ASSESSMENTS

Under the bill, SDE must revisit the reading assessments for grades kindergarten through three that it previously developed and approved by January 1, 2016. The department must now reconsider these assessments by July 1, 2022, in light of the recommendations made in

Appendix G of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training's final report (see BACKGROUND). Local and regional boards of education must begin using these assessments in the 2023-24 school year to identify K-3 students who are below proficiency in reading.

Additionally, the bill makes changes to the assessments' methodology for identifying these students. In addition to the requirements in current law, it specifically requires that the assessments also:

1. be evidence-based, as defined in federal law (see BACKGROUND), be brief, and have proven psychometrics for validity;
2. measure oral language, phonics, rapid automatic name or letter name fluency, and reading comprehension, in addition to the methods in current law (i.e., phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary); and
3. be given at least three times each school year in fall, winter, and spring, rather than periodically at unspecified times during the school year as required under current law.

The bill also requires SDE to provide guidance to local and regional boards of education by January 1, 2023, about administering the approved reading assessments. This guidance must address the following topics at a minimum:

1. appropriate grade levels for each reading assessment;
2. combining approved reading assessments when needed to ensure each ability is measured during each school year using one or more grade level-appropriate reading assessments;
3. advice on how each board's goals, student body characteristics, and resources should inform the choice of reading assessments used by each board;

4. advice on how aggregate data derived from reading assessments should guide each board's prevention and early intervention initiatives; and
5. the requirement that approved reading assessments be administered in both English and a student's native language, if available, for any student receiving literacy instruction in her or her native language.

Under the bill, the SDE commissioner must submit the revised reading assessments and the newly developed or approved guidance to school boards to the Education Committee by February 1, 2023.

Data Center

The bill allows SDE to partner with a public college or university to establish a data center to guide SDE and boards of education in the use and effectiveness of reading assessments. The center may track, but is not limited to tracking, the following types of data:

1. which reading assessment is used by each board of education and
2. student information, disaggregated by categories to keep it personally nonidentifiable (presumably, to protect student identities), including (a) student demographic background, (b) school district, (c) reading assessment dates, and (d) scores on reading assessment.

§ 8 — VOLUNTARY FAMILY HISTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

The bill requires SDE to develop or approve a voluntary family history questionnaire by January 1, 2022. This questionnaire must be distributed annually, beginning with the 2022-23 school year, to help identify, in whole or in part, students who are at risk of reading proficiency challenges.

§§ 9 & 10 — SDE REPORTS TO THE LEGISLATURE

The bill requires SDE to make two types of reports to the Higher Education and Education committees.

First, the department must submit status reports on the establishment and staffing of the Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities. This report is initially due by January 1, 2022, followed by annual updates until the office is fully staffed.

Second, the department must submit a report outlining the (1) outcomes of the compliance verification it has conducted as required by the bill and (2) reading assessments it has developed or approved and the related guidance it has provided to boards of education about their administration.

BACKGROUND

Literacy Skills and Processes Instruction in Teacher Preparation Programs

Any teacher preparation program that leads to professional teacher certification must include in its curriculum instruction in literacy skills and processes that reflects current research and best practices in the field of literacy training. The instruction must (1) be incorporated into the requirements of the student's major and concentration and (2) include at least 12 clock hours of instruction in dyslexia detection and recognition of, and evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with dyslexia (CGS § 10-145a(e)).

Final Task Force Report, Appendices D, E, F & G

The Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training, established by the legislature in Special Act 19-8, issued a final report of findings and recommendations on December 31, 2020.

Appendix D of this report contains task force-approved teacher preparation program candidate outcomes and compliance targets. Appendix E contains an audit protocol framework. Appendix F contains structured literacy educator competency standards for districts to use. Appendix G contains a "Menu of K-3 Screeners," which lists approved reading tests for students in grades K-3, the skills that each test measures, and the grades during which the tests should be administered.

Definition of “Evidence-Based”

Under federal law, “evidence-based” (in relation to a state, local education agency, or school activity) means an activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes, based on either:

1. strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study; moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
2. demonstration of a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and inclusion of ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention (20 U.S.C. § 7801(21)).

Related Bill

HB 6620 (File 650), reported favorably by the Education Committee and the Appropriations Committee, also changes the law regarding reading assessments for kindergarten through grade three students. Under HB 6620, § 5, the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, which the bill establishes, must compile a list of approved reading assessments for school districts to use beginning with the 2023-24 school year.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 22 Nay 0 (03/18/2021)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 48 Nay 0 (05/03/2021)