
OLR Bill Analysis

HB 6620

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SUMMARY

This bill makes many changes in state law regarding school reading programs and creates a new Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success (i.e., “literacy center”) with the authority to approve at least five reading curriculum models or programs that must be used by local and regional boards of education.

The bill (1) allows local boards to ask the education commissioner for more time to implement the models or programs and (2) creates a waiver process where local boards can seek approval to use a different model or program.

The State Department of Education (SDE) must establish the literacy center and the bill details the center’s responsibilities, including hiring reading coaches to be used at the local school district level.

The bill makes changes in several reading and literacy related laws and programs including:

1. adding a definition of reading to the required program of instruction at all public schools (§ 4);
2. expanding grade levels that reading assessments must be used to determine reading proficiency from kindergarten to grade 3 under current law by adding grades 4 and 5 (§ 5);
3. broadening the intensive reading instruction program by making it available to all alliance districts (§ 6); and
4. making several changes to the reading readiness program (§ 8) and the duties of the state director of reading initiatives (§ 10).

Finally, the bill makes the following changes unrelated to reading programs:

1. conforms the education anti-discrimination law to the definition of race in state human rights statute as amended by PA 21-2, thus including hair and hairstyles in the definition (§ 12);
2. requires the high school course in black and Latino studies that will be offered in the 2022-2023 school year to also be offered in each following year (§ 13);
3. allows school districts to accept donations related to professional development and in-service training for the required African-American and black studies and Puerto Rican and Latino studies curriculum (§ 14); and
4. requires the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to provide technical assistance to boards of education for their professional development and in-service training regarding the black and Latino studies course (§ 15).

The bill also replaces the term “achievement gap” with “opportunity gap” in the laws regarding the intensive reading instruction program and the reading and math curricula that SDE must develop. Under the bill, an opportunity gap has the same meaning as achievement gap under current law: the existence of 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.

Under current law, the five areas of reading for the intensive reading program are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. The bill specifies “vocabulary development,” instead of just “vocabulary.” It also keeps “fluency” and replaces “text comprehension” with “reading fluency, including oral skills and reading comprehension.” Additionally, the bill adds this definition of the five areas of reading to a curriculum waiver provision

(§ 1), the literacy center's approved reading curricula (§ 2), and the required program of instruction all school districts (§ 4).

The bill also makes numerous conforming and technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021, except the provisions regarding the anti-discrimination law (§ 12) and the black and Latino studies course (§ 13) are upon passage.

§§ 1 & 2 — REQUIRED PREKINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 5 READING CURRICULUM MODEL OR PROGRAM

Curriculum Model or Program (§ 1)

The bill requires each local and regional board of education to implement each year, beginning July 1, 2023, a reading curriculum model or program for grades prekindergarten to 5, inclusive, that has been approved by the literacy center.

It requires each board, by July 1, 2023, and biennially thereafter, to notify the education commissioner and the literacy center of which reading curriculum model or program that the board is implementing.

The bill allows boards that can demonstrate to the commissioner that they have insufficient resources or funding to request more time to implement the model or program if the board shows continued efforts to implement a reading curriculum model or program. (The bill does not specify how much additional time the commissioner may grant.)

Curriculum Requirement Waiver (§ 1)

The bill sets criteria for the commissioner to grant a waiver to the requirement for a school district to use one of the literacy center-approved curriculum models or programs. A local or regional board of education can request a waiver to use an alternative reading curriculum model or program if it is (1) evidenced-based and scientifically-based and (2) focused on competency in the five areas of reading: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary development, and (e) reading fluency, including oral skills and reading comprehension, as determined by the commissioner in

consultation with the center.

Five Approved Reading Curriculum Models or Programs (§ 2)

The bill requires the literacy center to approve, by July 1, 2022, at least five reading curriculum models or programs to be implemented by boards of education. The models or programs approved must be (1) evidence-based and scientifically-based and (2) focused on competency in same five areas of reading described above.

§ 9 — CENTER FOR LITERACY RESEARCH AND READING SUCCESS

Center Responsibilities

The bill requires SDE to create the literacy center and specifies its duties. In addition to approving at least five reading curriculum models or programs (as mentioned above), the center is responsible for:

1. receiving and publicly reporting, by September 1, 2023, and biennially thereafter, the reading curriculum model or program being implemented by each board of education as required under the bill;
2. conducting independent random reviews of school districts' implementation of (a) a reading curriculum model or program required under the bill and (b) an approved reading assessment (see § 5);
3. collaborating with SDE to implement the statewide reading plan for students in kindergarten to grade five that is amended under the bill (see § 7);
4. researching and developing, in collaboration with SDE and the Office of Early Childhood, a birth to grade 12 reading success strategy to be included in the alignment of reading instruction with the state's two-generational initiative established in statute;
5. providing direct support to schools and boards of education to improve reading outcomes for students in kindergarten to grade

- five, inclusive, and other reading initiatives;
6. supporting the community of teachers, schools, and boards engaged in improvement through coaching, leadership training, professional development, parental engagement, and technical assistance that is consistent with the existing intensive reading instruction program (see § 6) and aligned with evidence-based practices;
 7. developing and maintaining an internet website to disseminate tools and information associated with the intensive reading instruction program for student reading;
 8. serving as a collaborative center for institutions of higher education and making available to the faculty of teacher preparation programs (a) materials related to the science of teaching reading, (b) the intensive reading instruction program, and (c) samples of available reading curriculum models or programs adopted under the bill;
 9. reviewing and publicly reporting on progress made by teacher preparation programs to include reading curriculum models or programs adopted under the bill; and
 10. supporting the development of research-based, successful virtual and remote literacy development strategies.

Center Director

The bill requires the literacy center's director, in consultation with the Reading Leadership Implementation Council (see below), to be responsible for (1) overseeing the center's activities; (2) facilitating communication between the center, boards of education, SDE, and other affiliates of the center; and (3) coordinating the dissemination of information, tools, and services made available by the center.

Reading Leadership Implementation Council

The bill requires the literacy center's activities to be implemented by the Reading Leadership Implementation Council. Under the bill, the

council consists of the following members:

1. the center's director or the director's designee;
2. SDE's director of reading initiatives;
3. the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity's executive director or his designee;
4. an individual the governor chooses who has experience in literacy or education and is engaged in the development and implementation of the intensive reading instruction program;
5. two individuals the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus chairperson chooses, one of whom has experience with literacy or education and is engaged in the development and implementation of the intensive reading instruction program, as long as the individual is not a member of the General Assembly; and
6. the dean of the UConn's Neag School of Education or the dean's designee.

The council must develop and publish the annual goals for the center and meet at least once every two months. The council may establish an advisory board that consists of representatives from public, private, and philanthropic organizations, and is responsible for providing advice, guidance and resources for the center's goals and mission.

Reading Coaches

The bill requires the literacy center to hire reading coaches who have experience and expertise in the intensive reading instruction program that is amended in the bill (§ 6). (Presumably, the coaches working in the program under current law gain experience in local districts. It is otherwise unclear how coaches could have experience in the intensive reading instruction program before the center has implemented this new version of it.)

These coaches must:

1. provide training and professional development on the intensive reading instruction program, literacy leadership, and effective instruction to teachers;
2. work directly with teachers to support the implementation of the intensive reading instruction program and attend school district leadership, data, and planning meetings;
3. provide coaching to teachers; and
4. lead and participate in family engagement activities.

§ 3 — READING AND MATH CURRICULA DEVELOPED BY SDE

Current law requires SDE to approve and make available model curricula and frameworks in reading and math for prekindergarten to grade four, inclusive, to be used by school districts or individual schools that SDE has identified as having academic achievement gaps. The bill removes reading curricula and frameworks from this requirement and replaces the term “achievement gap” with “opportunity gap.”

§ 4 — DEFINING READING IN THE REQUIRED PROGRAM OF INSTRUCTION FOR SCHOOLS

By law, school districts must provide certain subjects and topics in the program of instruction they offer to their students. This includes language arts, including reading, writing, grammar, speaking, and spelling. The bill adds the definition of “reading” as evidenced-based instruction that focuses on competency in the five areas of reading as mentioned above.

§ 5 — READING ASSESSMENTS

The bill requires the literacy center, rather than SDE, to compile a list of approved reading assessments for use by boards of education to identify children reading below proficiency. On or before January 1, 2022, the literacy center must compile the list of approved reading assessments for the school year beginning July 1, 2023, and each year after. The bill eliminates SDE’s duty to develop the assessments beginning July 1, 2021. (Since the bill does not begin the requirement

for the center's assessment until July 1, 2023, it appears there will be no assessment for the 2022 school year.)

The bill also expands the grade levels for which the assessment must be used from the current kindergarten to grade 3 to kindergarten to grade 5. The bill keeps the existing requirements that the assessments, among other things, (1) measure phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; (2) provide opportunities for periodic formative assessment during the school year; (3) produce data that is useful for informing individual and classroom instruction; and (4) assist in identifying, in whole or in part, students at risk for dyslexia or other reading-related learning disabilities.

The bill also requires the commissioner to report, by January 15, 2022, the list of approved reading assessments to the Education Committee.

§ 6 — INTENSIVE READING INSTRUCTION PROGRAM

The bill broadens the intensive reading instruction program by requiring the education commissioner to provide the program to any alliance district board of education that requests it. By law the intensive reading program has several components including (1) an intensive reading intervention strategy, (2) supplemental reading instruction, and (3) a summer reading program. (It is not clear how all the components of the reading instruction program are implemented as, under the bill, the reading instruction program must be provided to alliance districts that request it; but other components, such as the supplemental reading instruction and a summer reading program, are mandatory for all alliance districts.)

Alliance districts are the 33 lowest performing school districts based on the district's accountability index (AI) score (see BACKGROUND). The commissioner may choose to include the intensive reading program in the tiered supports in early literacy provided under the reading readiness program.

Under current law the commissioner chooses five elementary schools that are (1) located in an educational reform district (the 10 school districts with the lowest AI scores), (2) participating in the commissioner's network of schools, or (3) among the lowest 5% of elementary schools AI scores for reading and mathematics. She may select five additional elementary schools each school year.

Under the bill, for the school year beginning July 1, 2021, and each year after, the commissioner must consult with the literacy center director in creating the intensive reading program, which the bill expands to cover grades 4 and 5, in addition to current law's kindergarten through grade 3.

The bill modifies the intensive reading program components including (1) the intensive reading intervention strategy for each participating school, including literacy coaches; (2) the supplemental reading instruction, including a reading remediation plan for each student identified with a reading deficiency; (3) summer school for any student whose reading level is below proficiency at the end of the school year; and (4) the required reporting to the Education Committee.

Intensive Reading Intervention Strategy

As part of the reading program, current law requires SDE to develop an intensive reading intervention strategy to ensure all students are reading proficiently by grade 3. Under the bill, SDE must consult with the literacy center to develop the strategy that will be used by an alliance district elementary school with students who are not reading at or above grade level to ensure the students are reading proficiently by grade 5.

Under current law, the strategy must include one SDE-funded external literacy coach for each school and four SDE-funded reading interventionists for each school. The bill eliminates (1) the specific number of coaches and interventionists and instead says coaches and interventionists will be made available to the schools and (2) the current law's requirement that SDE funds the coaches and reading

interventionists.

Other aspects are left unchanged, including that the strategy include:

1. rigorous assessments in reading skills,
2. scientifically-based reading research and instruction,
3. training for teachers and administrators in scientifically-based reading research and instruction, including, training for school administrators on how to assess a classroom to ensure that all children are proficient in reading.

Supplemental Reading Instruction

Starting with the school year beginning July 1, 2021, each alliance district board of education, in consultation with the literacy center director, must provide supplemental reading instruction for students in kindergarten to grade 5, inclusive, who are reading below proficiency. Under current law, only schools selected by the commissioner must provide the supplemental instruction, and only for grades kindergarten to grade 3.

The reading interventionists must develop a reading remediation plan for any student who is below proficiency and enrolled in an elementary school in an alliance district.

The bill makes conforming changes regarding notification of parents or guardians of students, grades kindergarten to 5, who have been identified as being below proficiency in reading and will receive these services.

The bill requires each alliance district board of education that provides supplemental reading instruction through the intensive reading program to report to SDE in a time and manner the agency requires on reading progress for each student and the specific reading interventions and supports that were implemented.

Intensive Summer Reading Program

Under current law, any student of a priority school district who is in the intensive reading program and is reading below proficiency at the end of the school year must be enrolled in an intensive summer school reading program that includes required components, such as a comprehensive reading intervention and scientifically-based reading research and instruction strategies. The bill expands this requirement to alliance districts, of which there are 33 compared to 15 priority school districts.

The bill requires each alliance district board of education to, in consultation with the literacy center director, provide any student in kindergarten to grade 5, who is reading below proficiency at the end of the school year, the intensive summer reading instruction program.

Reporting Requirement

The bill requires, by October 1, 2021, and each year after, SDE to report to the Education Committee on student reading levels in the intensive reading program, including recommendations on model components of the school reading intervention strategy that may be replicated in other alliance districts.

§ 7 — STATEWIDE READING PLAN

The bill expands the existing statewide reading plan that currently applies to students in kindergarten to grade 3, by adding grades 4 and 5. It requires the plan to be developed by January 1, 2021, in collaboration with the literacy center (see COMMENT). The plan must be modified to include the alignment of reading standards, instruction, and assessment for students in kindergarten to grade 5, rather than grade 3.

§ 8 — READING READINESS PROGRAM

The bill requires SDE to operate the reading readiness program, which, under existing law, provides tiered early literacy supports to alliance districts, in collaboration with the literacy center. Also, SDE must conduct reading readiness assessments for students in these districts in grades 4 and 5, in addition to current law's kindergarten to grade 3.

Under current law, SDE provides three tiers of early literacy supports and the bill requires the supports be provided in collaboration with the literacy center. Also, the bill expands the tier I supports of online professional development modules in literacy, including the reading instruction survey, to all alliance districts rather than the 10 educational reform districts.

§ 10 — DIRECTOR OF READING INITIATIVES

Under current law, the director of reading initiatives has many duties including administering the intensive reading program (§ 6) and the statewide reading plan (§ 7). The bill makes conforming changes to these duties by expanding the grade range from kindergarten to grade 3 to kindergarten to grade 5 and replacing “achievement gap” with “opportunity gap.”

The bill also gives the director the new duty of supporting development of research-based virtual and remote literacy learning models and curricula.

§ 12 — ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW AND HAIRSTYLES

The bill modifies the education anti-discrimination law to conform the definition of race to the definition in the human rights statute as amended by PA 21-2 (HB 6515). Current education law states a child has equal opportunity to participate in school and related activities without discrimination based on race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. PA 21-2 expands the definition of race to include ethnic traits historically associated with race, including hair texture and protective hairstyles. Under the act, protective hairstyles include wigs, headwraps, and hairstyles such as individual braids, cornrows, locs, twists, Bantu knots, afros, and afro puffs.

§ 13 — BLACK AND LATINO STUDIES COURSE

The bill requires the high school course in black and Latino studies, which under current law is required to be offered in the 2022-2023 school year to be also offered in each following school year.

§§ 14 & 15 — PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK AND LATINO STUDIES COURSE

For each school year, beginning with the 2021-2022 year, the bill requires the State Education Resource Center to provide technical assistance to local boards of education for their professional development and in-service training regarding the black and Latino studies course.

The bill also expands the law that allows school districts to accept gifts, grants, and donations to support the development of the required African-American and black studies and Puerto Rican and Latino studies curriculum to allow them to accept gifts, grants, and donations for the related professional development and in-service training.

BACKGROUND

Accountability Index Scores

“Accountability index” for a school district or an individual school means the score resulting from multiple weighted measures that (1) include the mastery test scores (i.e., the performance index score) and, if appropriate, high school graduation rates, and (2) may include academic growth over time, attendance and chronic absenteeism, postsecondary education and career readiness, enrollment in and graduation from institutions of higher education and postsecondary education programs, civics and arts education, and physical fitness (CGS § 10-223e(a)).

COMMENT

Date Issue

The bill requires SDE to develop a statewide reading plan (§ 7) for students in kindergarten to grade 5 by January 1, 2021, a date that has already passed.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Change of Reference - APP
Yea 35 Nay 3 (03/29/2021)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 40 Nay 10 (04/21/2021)