

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6620

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING

**Title:** OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

**Vote Date:** 3/29/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 3/17/2021

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Education Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Section 1: Requires each local and regional board of education to implement each year, beginning 2023, a reading curriculum model or program for grades pre-K to 5, that has been approved by the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, created under the bill. Boards with insufficient funds may apply for an extension of that deadline.

Section 2: Requires the literacy center to approve at least five reading curriculum models or programs to be implemented by boards of education and establishes guidelines for these models.

Sections 3-6: Alters some of SDE's roles regarding model curricula and approved reading assessments and replaces the term "achievement gap" with "opportunity gap" in statutes.

Sections 7-8: Require SDE to collaborate with the Literacy Center director on the state reading plan and the reading readiness program

Section 9: Requires SDE to create the Literacy Center and specifies its duties, and creates the Reading Leadership Implementation Council to implement the activities of the Literacy Center.

Section 12: Modifies the education anti-discrimination law to conform the definition of race to the definition in the CHRO statutes as amended by HB 6515 of 2021.

Sections 13-15: Requires the high school course in Black and Latino Studies that under current law is required to be offered in the 2022-2023 school year to be also offered in each following school year and requires SERC to provide technical assistance to local boards of education for their professional development and in-service training regarding that course.

#### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

##### **Charlene Russell-Tucker, Acting Commissioner, State Department of Education:**

SDE supports the creation of a Literacy Center, while acknowledging that funding is not currently available for this initiative. However, they strongly recommend that the Center be housed within the SDE so they may provide leadership in setting the commitment for effective literacy instruction for all CT students. They also recommend that “achievement” remain within the bill, to maintain a focus on the outputs of student performance, and “opportunity” be inserted to provide a renewed focus on the inputs to support student performance.

##### **Steven Hernández, Executive Director, CWCSEO:**

Nearly half of Connecticut public school students are not meeting grade-level expectations and Connecticut has reading attainment gaps showing vast disparities by race. This bill will identify and approve reading curricula models and programs that are based on the Science of Reading, provide professional development and coaching, leverage philanthropic resources and expand the Connecticut Literacy Initiative for intervention in high-need districts.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

##### **The HILL for Literacy: Darci Burns, Executive Director; Tera Dunn, Facilitator; Cara Dellaterra, Lead Facilitator; Jenna Gampel, Facilitator; Kelly Soule, Facilitator; Lisa Ziobron, Facilitator; Kaitlin Leonard, Research Project Coordinator**

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) have been encouraged nationally as a framework for organizing and delivering academic, social, emotional, and behavioral resources, personnel, practices, and systems. This bill will enable the current thought partners in collaboration with various state agencies to create a sustainable literacy center anchored in current research. The Literacy Center will serve as permanent technical assistance and training center to reach all school districts across the state and, the adequate support will be provided to SDE to increase the capacity to extend the training and coaching to more schools.

##### **Kymyona Burk, Early Literacy Policy Director, Foundation for Excellence in Education; Laura Heneghan; Jason Irizarry, Interim Dean, UConn Neag School; Charles E. Hewes, Director of Teaching & Learning, Colchester Public Schools;**

A comprehensive state-led early literacy policy can ensure all students enter fourth grade with the foundational reading skills they need to learn, graduate and succeed. A person’s ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success. A strong reading program, beginning in kindergarten and continuing into the third grade and beyond, gives students the best possible chance to maximize their education.

**Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.;**  
**Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, CT Association of Public School Superintendents**

SDE has been seriously understaffed for years, and that challenge grows each year. Without a commitment to sustain resources, the capacity to implement the important work on long term basis will not be available, and meaningful support for students and districts. It is also important that teacher preparation programs provide our educators with the science-based strategies needed to be effective in teaching literacy skills.

**Mario Ciccarini, Principal, Bradley School; Sandra Donnay, The Racial Equity Initiative;**  
**Michael Coyne, Head, UConn Department of Educational Psychology;**  
**Amy Dowell, State Director, Education Reform Now Connecticut;**  
**Melissa Jenkins, Executive Director of ELP, Bridgeport Public Schools;**  
**Shannon Marimón, Executive Director, ReadyCT**

CT has one of the largest reading opportunity gaps in the country, which affects thousands of students, especially poor students and students of color. The negative impact of this gap on academic, social, emotional, and economic outcomes is well documented, and the Center will provide important ongoing support, ensuring that reading efforts reflect current scientific knowledge about reading instruction and will build state-wide coaching and training capacity for assisting schools and districts implement the intensive reading support program outlined in the Act.

**Jane McBride Gates, Interim President, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities;**  
**Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN; Sharon Ware;**  
**Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director, School and State Finance Project;**  
**Literacy How, Inc.: Margie Gillis, President; Maureen Durand**

The data across the state of Connecticut proves that there are too many children reading below their grade level, particularly in communities like Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport. Students learn to read when instruction is based in the science of reading. This bill will ensure that school districts develop reading curricula and implement assessment tools that have been researched and proven to be effective ways develop reading and writing. It is crucial for our children to become confident and well-equipped readers.

**Dena Mortensen, Supervisor of ERLA, Waterbury Public Schools;**  
**George Sugai, Professor Emeritus, UConn Neag School**

The funding and support for the CT K-3 Literacy initiative has enabled us to focus our efforts on providing effective literacy instruction driven by assessment data to ensure that all students learn to read and write on grade level. The funding has supported literacy training, consultation and coaching support to all our elementary schools.

**Allison Quirion, Founder, Decoding Dyslexia-CT:**

We must also look to support ALL districts in the area of literacy. Resources for students with conditions like dyslexia are not guided by core professional standards and do not adhere to specific delivery methods or utilize standardized evaluation protocols. As we should have frameworks around screening and in-service models and programming, we should also give the same care to external literacy coaches and mentors. We would expect these individuals to meet a minimum core professional standard when providing training and would hope these qualifications would be outlined to ensure fidelity.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

### **Jonathan S. Budd, Superintendent, Woodbridge School District; Hannah Dostal; Dr. Rachael Gabriel**

While they acknowledge and support the fundamental right to read, this bill promotes that all districts need the same degree of monitoring by, auditing from, and compliance with a new Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success. Curriculum development and professional development are not best achieved through State-developed, State-prescribed methods. Mandating compliance, even with some flexibility, by every district diverts resources from the districts who really need the assistance of State-level leaders.

### **Rosanne C. Daigneault; Julie Droller, Principal, Hindley Elementary School**

Has current data shown that school districts currently implementing scientifically-based reading instructional materials have closed the opportunity gap among racial and socioeconomic groups? Which research supports the use of the proposed reading programs with English language learners? Lack of such instruction creates the opportunity gap. Comprehension needs to stand alone as a critical pillar of reading. We must concentrate on content that includes the identities and cultures of all our learners. This requires local control to be responsive to local communities.

### **Nicole Hendry; Ivelise Velazquez, Teacher**

I this bill will severely limit the options for students who need reading instruction. While the science of reading has options that support students, making it the required only option is detrimental. This reading instruction may not work for every student and to determine that will be the model of the state of CT limits schools in meeting students' needs.

**Kate Roberts:** If this bill passes, kids will not have the opportunity to engage with and talk about books they love, and figure out how words are weird, in order to become not robotic repeaters of words but readers. The future of reading instruction must be a balance between phonics, comprehension, engagement, and community.

### **Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut:**

Not opposed to the intent of this bill, but there are many changes that need to be made. For instance, this bill repeatedly emphasizes that the goal for students is reading proficiency by the end of Grade 5, increasing this from Grade 3. However, research indicates that students need to be proficient by the end of Grade 3. Much of the support in the bill is limited to Alliance districts. It needs to be expanded to include all school districts. Regarding the Center's selection of reading programs/methods, the Center must publish online what standards they are using to recommend these programs/methods.

**Janet N. Y. Zarchen:** There is nothing specific in this bill, beyond the mention of culturally relevant curricula, that would address the needs of Black and Brown students and English learners. These students do not necessarily need a different curriculum model, they need intentional, focused, and specific enhancements to the model in current use. The approach is race-neutral and colorblind. Establishing a Center and limiting the options for teaching reading will not improve outcomes for the students who need it the most.

**Reported by: Dallas Emerle**

**Date: 4/1/2021**