

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1094
AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READING MODELS OR
Title: PROGRAMS.
Vote Date: 3/24/2023
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/1/2023
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

Rep. Mitch Bolinsky, 106th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill amends existing legislation that requires boards of education to use an approved reading curriculum or apply for a waiver to use alternate curriculum. It extends the deadline for schools to complete the waiver process and extends the time given to school districts who have been granted a waiver to establish their curriculum. This is part of the ongoing effort to improve early literacy in public school education.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE

The substitute language for this bill extends the deadline for school districts with a waiver to implement the reading model from July 1, 2023 to July 1, 2025. It also directs the Center for Literacy Research to review issues relating to the implementation of the reading models.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

State Department of Education, Commissioner, Charlene M. Russell-Tucker: supports this bill stating that giving boards of education more time to implement new reading curriculum will allow for a more evidence-based approach, as schools will have more time to see what works and what does not.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), President, Liz Brown:

supports this bill stating that a delay in the implementation of the reading models will allow for a less rushed process. They specifically mention that schools who are denied waivers will have a better experience with implementation given the extension provided by this bill.

Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Teaching Fellow, Faith Sweeney: supports the delay in implementation in the reading programs as they state that it will allow more time to make sure the reading models work for all of Connecticut's students. They specifically state that they would like to see the reading models be more diverse and less scripted.

Town of Wallingford, Mayor, William Dickinson: supports the delay in implementation of the reading programs stating that it would allow their town to have more time to determine which parts of the programs are effective for their schools.

Education Reform Now CT, Executive Director, Amy Dowell: states that the proposed delay would allow school districts to effectively implement the new reading models. They state that the reading models will be more effective if they are not implemented in a rushed manner.

Simsbury Public Schools, Teacher, Melanie Meehan: states that a delay in the implementation of the reading models is necessary and that if implementation of the reading models was to proceed as is the results would be disastrous. They state that more time is needed to make sure the reading programs are inclusive of all of Connecticut's students.

The below superintendents submitted testimony in support of this bill. They express their support for the extensions provided by the bill and for science-based literacy education. Many appreciate the intent of the bill but note concern with implementation and the idea of applying a single program to address the needs of all students. They suggest creating a model curriculum rather than mandated programs and ask that training in the science of reading be provided to educators. They further request more time to develop local reading curriculum programs* and state that many districts have concerns with mandated programs in situations where waivers are denied.

**The substitute language for this bill addresses this concern.*

Darien Public Schools, Superintendent, Alan Addley

Ellington Public Schools, Assistant Superintendent, Oliver Barton

Hebron Public Schools, Superintendent, Thomas Baird

Monroe Public Schools, Superintendent, Joseph Kobza

Vernon Public Schools, Superintendent, Joseph Macary

Woodbridge Public Schools, Superintendent, Vonda Tencza

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Westport Public Schools, Literacy Coach, Jessica Carey: raises concern for the content of the learning modules. They state that, while the programs will accomplish the goal of teaching students reading skills, the strict content of the programs will limit the literature that students are exposed to. They state that the state should not be the one to control what children are allowed to be exposed to academically.

Two individuals submitted similar testimony in opposition to this bill. They state that there is no "one size fits all" approach to literacy, and they add that a mandated reading program would come at the expense of all the experience that current staff has in creating personalized instructional modes. They suggest that the control over curriculum be returned entirely to local boards of education and educators.

Literacy Specialist and Parent, Elizabeth Franco
Educator and Parent, Heather Reed

Two individuals submitted similar testimony in opposition to this bill. They state that a mandated reading program is unrealistic as no single program can meet the complex literacy needs of all students. They emphasize the importance of teachers and literacy coaches being able to monitor student progress and adjust accordingly. They further state that the mandate is unfunded and would be a large burden on school districts.

Redding Board of Education, Teacher, Elizabeth Rimkunas
Literacy Specialist, Dawn Sherriff

Special Education Paraprofessional, Peter Von Euler: opposes this bill stating that a reading curriculum mandate would require a "scientific approach to reading" that does not fit every student's strengths and needs. They state that removing educators from the process of determining curriculum would have negative effects on performance and that educators should be given the freedom to determine how their students learn best.

Debbie Esposito: submitted testimony in opposition to this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:

The below superintendents submitted testimony on this bill. They express support for strong literacy programs that would help ensure children are reading by the end of grade three but note concern with current implementation of reading programs and the idea of commercial "one size fits all" literacy programs. They ask for a model reading curriculum that districts can draw from and emphasize the importance of allowing districts to locally develop their own literacy programs tailored to their students' needs. They state that teachers and other leaders in education should be given intensive, ongoing training in science-based reading. They note that mandating programs could overburden school districts and divert funding from important professional development.

Cheshire Public Schools, Superintendent, Jeffrey Solan
Cromwell Public Schools, Superintendent, Enza Macri
Derby Public Schools, Superintendent, Matthew Conway
Groton Public Schools, Superintendent, Susan Austin
Hartland Public Schools, Superintendent, Imma Canelli
Old Saybrook Public Schools, Superintendent, Jan Peruccio

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), Legislative Chair, Andrew Feinstein: stresses the importance that SDE stick to its commitment to science-based literacy education. They note that many towns still use literacy teaching methods that are not

evidence-based and state that we must hold our districts to the highest standard if we want to improve literacy in Connecticut.

Town of Wilton, Selectwoman, Kim Healy: supports the delay in implementation because it will give the Reading Leadership Implementation Council more time to work on developing a local curriculum. As a councilmember, they note gratitude for the extra time that can be used to make sure their reading programs are as high quality as possible.

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Executive Director, Fran Rabinowitz: states that more local input is needed if reading programs are to be successful. They state that in their experience, commercial programs very rarely work. They emphasize that a curriculum built around the science of learning with input from local educators would be much more effective than a single commercial program.

Reported by: Sam Gilberti

Date: 4/3/2023