

Legislative Analysis



ELEMENTARY TEACHERS: READING TRAINING

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Senate Bill 327 (Substitute H-1)

Sponsor: Sen. Nancy Cassis

House Committee: Education

Senate Committee: Education

First Analysis (3-15-06)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would establish additional reading instruction requirements for the renewal of a teacher's provisional teaching certificate, or the advancement of a teacher's certification to professional certification, beginning July 1, 2007.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Department of Education could see increased costs in verifying that a teacher had met the new requirements. There would be no fiscal impact on local units.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Critics say that newly trained elementary teachers often are not adequately prepared to address barriers to learning that result in a student's inability to learn to read at appropriate levels.

Consequently, these barriers might not be detected until the child has reached the end of the third grade and is designated as learning disabled and in need of special education services. This results not only in the child's underachieving at school, but also in a drain on the school's special education resources.

Some people believe that if new teachers had more training in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities and in diversified instructional techniques, more students would overcome early barriers to learning and fewer would be classified as learning disabled.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to establish additional reading instruction requirements for the renewal of a teacher's provisional teaching certificate, or the advancement of a teacher's certification to professional certification, beginning July 1, 2007.

Under the code, the superintendent of public instruction may issue a teaching certificate only to a person who has met the elementary or secondary reading credit requirements established by rule. (Rules 390.1126 and 390.1127 require a person to have completed six semester hours in the teaching of reading for an elementary certificate, and three hours for a secondary certificate, respectively.)

Under the bill and beginning July 1, 2007, the state superintendent could not renew a teacher's provisional teaching certificate or advance the person's certification to professional certification unless, during the first six years of his or her employment in classroom teaching, the person successfully completed at least a three-credit course of study with appropriate field experiences in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities and differentiated instruction.

To meet this requirement, the course should include the following elements as determined by the Department of Education to be appropriate for the person's certification level and endorsements: interest inventories; English language learning screening; visual and auditory discrimination tools; language expression and processing screening; phonemics; phonics; vocabulary; fluency; comprehension; spelling and writing assessment tools; and instructional strategies.

MCL 380.1531

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:

The House Education Committee reported out an H-1 Substitute. The substitute bill differs from the Senate-passed version of the bill in two ways.

First, the requirement that a teacher successfully complete at least a 3-credit course of study in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities and differentiated instruction in order to renew or advance certification, would apply to all teachers (not only to elementary school teachers, as specified in the Senate-passed version of the bill).

Second, the Senate-passed version of the bill required a particular course of study to meet the enhanced reading requirement, whereas the H-1 substitute specifies that the course of study *should* include certain elements, *as determined by the Department of Education* to be appropriate for the person's certification level.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Barriers to early elementary learning too often result in students' failure to learn to read at appropriate grade levels. These barriers might result, for example, from visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, emotional disturbances, or social or cultural conditions, or they might be due to a neurologically based learning disability such as dyslexia or a related problem such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

New and veteran elementary and secondary teachers may not be adequately trained to recognize and distinguish between these problems and adapt their teaching techniques appropriately. Therefore, some students are improperly designated as learning disabled and in need of special education services. In other cases, learning disabilities are overlooked and the students do not receive the necessary attention.

By requiring new and advancing elementary and secondary teachers to complete a course of study and field experience in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities, the bill would equip teachers to recognize and address reading learning difficulties at every stage in the K-12 system. Following the course of study required under the bill, teachers would be better able to differentiate their instructional approach in order to ensure greater reading ability by their students. In turn, fewer students should reach the end of the third grade (or any grade) without adequate reading abilities, which would lower the number of students who must draw on special education resources.

Against:

As introduced, the bill would have beefed up teacher preparation requirements for education students at institutions of higher education by including more training in teaching reading as well as field work at schools with an above-average percentage of learning disabled students, and training in one-on-one early intervention.

Response:

The introduced version of the bill would have required teacher education colleges to lengthen their already extensive curricula, increasing the time and cost it takes to become a certified teacher. Also, the field work originally called for would have presented enormous logistical difficulties, and the one-on-one intervention training would have been modeled on programs that do not appear to exist. Potentially, these requirements could have reduced the number of new teachers in Michigan.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Education supports the bill. (3-15-06)

The Michigan Junior League supports the bill. (3-15-06)

Tecumseh Public Schools supports the bill. (3-15-06)

Fight Crime, Invest in Kids is neutral on the bill. (3-15-06)

The Michigan Education Association opposes the bill. (3-15-06)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.