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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 327 (Substitute S-2 as passed by the Senate)  
Sponsor: Senator Nancy Cassis  
Committee: Education

Date Completed: 8-24-05

### **RATIONALE**

It appears 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.

### **CONTENT**

**The bill would amend the Revised School Code to establish additional requirements regarding reading instruction for the renewal of an elementary teacher's provisional teaching certificate or the advancement of the 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, for a person holding an elementary level teaching certificate, beginning July 1, 2007, the Superintendent of Public Instruction could not renew the person'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 would have to include at least all of the following elements, as 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

### **ARGUMENTS**

*(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)*

#### **Supporting Argument**

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 elementary 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 elementary 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 an early stage. The bill also would help teachers to differentiate their instructional approach in order to impart better reading abilities to their young pupils. In turn, fewer students should reach the end of the third grade without adequate reading abilities, which would lower the number of students who must draw on special education resources.

### **Opposing Argument**

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. The original bill also would have applied to those seeking elementary or secondary teaching certificates. The Senate-passed version of the bill would mandate only continuing education requirements and would apply only to elementary teachers. Middle school and high school teachers also could benefit from training to detect reading deficiencies in their students and from learning to apply differentiated instructional techniques to help students overcome barriers to learning.

**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.

In addition, including secondary teachers would be unnecessary. The bill proposes an early intervention approach to detecting reading difficulties. By the time a student reaches middle school or high school, a reading problem should already have been detected and addressed. Further, while secondary teachers could potentially benefit from training in differentiating their instructional approach, that type of training could be given in an in-service workshop rather than a mandatory three-credit course of study.

Legislative Analyst: Patrick Affholter

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The Department of Education likely would face increased administrative costs as a result of this legislation. Since the bill would require a new verification of a teacher's successful completion of a three-credit course and appropriate field work before a teaching certificate could be renewed, staff at the Department likely would need to devote extra resources to the verification process, as well as determining what would constitute "appropriate field experiences".

The bill would have no fiscal impact on local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Kathryn Summers-Coty

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.