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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 327 (as enrolled)
Sponsor: Senator Nancy Cassis
Senate Committee: Education
House Committee: Education

PUBLIC ACT 118 of 2006

Date Completed: 5-11-06

RATIONALE

It appears that newly trained 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 for some time and the child may be 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. It was suggested that, if new teachers have more training in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities and in diversified instructional techniques, more students will overcome barriers to learning and fewer will be classified as learning disabled.

Under the bill, for a person holding a teaching certificate, beginning July 1, 2007, the Superintendent of Public Instruction may 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 completes at least a three-credit course of study with appropriate field experiences in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities and differentiated instruction.

The bill states that, 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.

CONTENT

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

MCL 380.1531

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.)

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 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 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 teachers to complete a course of study and field experience in the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities, the bill will equip teachers to recognize and address reading learning difficulties. The bill also will help teachers to differentiate their instructional approach in order to develop better reading abilities in their pupils. In turn, fewer students should advance without adequate reading skills, which should 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 enacted version of the bill mandates only continuing education requirements.

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.

Opposing Argument

Including secondary teachers in the bill is unnecessary. The Senate-passed version of the bill proposed an early intervention

approach to detecting reading difficulties by applying the reading training requirements only to new elementary teachers. By the time a student reaches middle school or high school, a reading problem should already have been detected and addressed. While secondary teachers might 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 will face increased administrative costs as a result of this legislation. Since the bill will require a new verification of a teacher's successful completion of a three-credit course and appropriate field work before a teaching certificate may be renewed, staff at the Department likely will need to devote extra resources to the verification process, as well as determining what will constitute "appropriate field experiences".

The bill will 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.