

SMART PROMOTION: 3RD GRADE READING PROFICIENCY, EARLY LITERACY COACHES, & READING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

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House Bill 4822 as passed by the House (H-5, as amended)

Sponsor: Rep. Amanda Price

Committee: Education

Complete to 2-22-15

BRIEF SUMMARY: Beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, the bill requires that a third grade student's promotion to grade four be based on reading proficiency (with retention a one-time event). The bill describes the reading assistance programs public schools must implement to ensure student success, including ongoing professional development for early elementary school teachers provided by skilled school-based early literacy coaches.

FISCAL IMPACT: House Bill 4822 could result in increased costs to the state and to local units of government. The state would incur both the increased costs of educating certain students for an additional year as well as costs of the additional responsibilities the bill would require of the MDE. Local school districts and public school academies (PSAs) would also incur additional costs associated with additional responsibilities. See **Fiscal Information** below.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) results for the 2013-2014 academic year indicate that as many as 39 percent—or 42,500 third grade students—did not meet proficiency standards in reading.

The more rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment tells a different story: there, the 2013 reading assessment demonstrates that fully 69 percent of Michigan's 4th graders have not attained proficient reading levels—nearly twice the number who fall short on Michigan's test.

The "*Third Grade Reading Workgroup Report*" presented to the governor on June 3, 2015 concurs with the NAEP assessment. It concludes: "For the past 12 years, Michigan's reading proficiency has been steadily declining, while almost every other state has improved...national test results indicate that more than two-thirds of Michigan students fail to demonstrate third grade proficiency on standardized reading tests." They note, "students who do not read proficiently by 4th grade are not likely to catch-up," because beginning in 4th grade schools shift from teaching students how to read, and rely, instead, upon students' literacy as teachers begin to focus on subject matter disciplines such as science, math, history, civics, and geography. The report continues: "When we compare Michigan to other states using this same national test, Michigan is...in 40th place, and continues to fall behind; Michigan is one of only five states to lose ground in reading proficiency from 2003 to 2013." See **Background Information** below.

During the 2013-2014 legislative session, Representative Amanda Price was joined by Representative Thomas Stallworth to introduce bills to improve the reading assessment scores of Michigan's young readers. Supporters of that legislation challenged Michigan policymakers to confront this significant public problem. They noted: "In 2012, 14 states passed legislation geared toward improving 3rd-grade literacy through identification, intervention, and/or retention initiatives. Today, a total of 32 states and the District of Columbia have policies in statute aimed at improving 3rd-grade reading proficiency. The majority of these states require early assessment and intervention, often as early as kindergarten. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia require retention of students on the basis of reading proficiency, most which require assessment and remediation for students in all K-3 grades." (Source: Education Commission of the States)

During this 2015-2016 legislative session, legislation has again been introduced to promote "smart promotion" from grade 3. This bill is designed to ensure that early elementary students are provided with diagnostic-based reading interventions, individual reading improvement plans, tutoring with reading specialists, and reading help at home and during the summer months, as they master essential reading skills. Further, the legislation provides early elementary school teachers with literacy coaches who can ably enhance the elementary school teachers' reading instruction knowledge and techniques.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4822 (H-5) would add a new section to the Revised School Code to:

- Require that beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, a third grade student's promotion to grade four be based on reading proficiency—with a possible retention in grade lasting no more than one year.
- Describe the reading assistance programs public schools must implement to ensure student success, including ongoing professional development for early elementary school teachers provided by skilled school-based early literacy coaches.

The bill would take effect 90 days after being enacted into law.

A detailed description of the bill follows.

Responsibilities of the Michigan Department of Education

Under the bill, the Michigan Department of Education would be required to do all of the following to help ensure that more students achieve a score of at least "proficient" in English language arts on the grade 3 state assessment:

- Approve three (or more) valid and reliable screening, formative, and diagnostic reading assessment systems for use by school districts and charter schools.

The bill requires that each approved assessment system provide a screening assessment, progress monitoring capabilities, and a diagnostic assessment. In determining which

assessment systems to approve, the department must consider at least the following factors: the time required to conduct the assessment (with the intention of minimizing the impact on instructional time); the level of integration of assessment results with the instructional support for teachers; and the timeliness in reporting assessment results to teachers, administrators, and parents.

- Recommend or develop a reading/literacy coach model.

The bill requires that the reading/literacy coach model support and provide initial and ongoing professional development to teachers in all of the following ways. First, the coach must provide professional development in each of the five major reading components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension--based on an analysis of student performance data. Second, the coach must provide professional development that enables administering and analyzing instructional assessments. Third, the coach must make available professional development that provides differentiated instruction and intensive intervention. And fourth, the professional development provided by the coach must use progress monitoring.

Responsibilities of the Early Literacy Coaches.

The bill requires the early literacy coach to undertake 11 separate teaching tasks:

- (1) Model effective instructional strategies for teachers;
- (2) Facilitate study groups;
- (3) Train teachers in data analysis and using data to differentiate instruction;
- (4) Coach and mentor colleagues;
- (5) Work with teachers to ensure that evidence-based reading programs (such as comprehensive core reading programs, supplemental reading programs, and comprehensive intervention reading programs) are implemented with fidelity;
- (6) Train teachers to diagnose and address reading deficiency;
- (7) Work with teachers in applying evidenced-based reading strategies;
- (8) Help increase instructional density;
- (9) Help lead and support reading leadership teams at the school;
- (10) Continue to increase his or her own knowledge base in best practices in reading instruction and intervention; and
- (11) Model and coach whole- and small-group instruction with students, for each teacher in grades K to 3.

To allow a sharp and sustained focus on reading instruction, the bill prohibits an early literacy coach from being assigned administrative functions that will confuse the coach's role for teachers. Further, the bill prohibits a coach from being assigned a regular classroom teaching assignment, and instead requires that the coach work frequently with students in whole- and small-group instruction or tutoring in the context of modeling and coaching in or outside of teachers' classrooms.

To ensure highly capable coaches, the bill requires that an early literacy coach have all of the following: *experience* as a successful classroom teacher; *sufficient knowledge* of evidenced-based reading research, special expertise in quality reading instruction (as well as infusing reading strategies into content-area instruction), and data management skills; a strong knowledge *base in working with adults*; a minimum of *a bachelor's degree and advanced coursework in reading*, or have completed professional development in research-based literacy instruction strategies.

Responsibilities of the School Boards and Charter School Boards of Directors.

Beginning in the 2016-2017 school years, the boards of public and charter schools would be required to do all of the following to ensure more students achieve a score of at least "proficient" in English language arts on the grade 3 state assessment.

- Select one valid and reliable screening, formative, and diagnostic reading assessment system for those approved by the Department of Education.

A school district or charter school would then use this assessment system in grades kindergarten to 3 to screen and diagnose difficulties, inform instruction and intervention needs, and assess progress. A student's progress would have to be assessed at least three times each school year, and the first of the assessments would have to be conducted within the first 30 days after classes began.

- For any student who exhibited a reading deficiency at any time, provide an Individual Reading Improvement Plan within 30 days.

The plan would be created by a student's teacher, school principal, and parents (or legal guardians), as well as by other pertinent school personnel. It would describe the reading intervention services the student would receive to remedy the reading deficit. Then, the school would provide intensive reading intervention for each student, in accord with the individual reading improvement plan until the student no longer had a reading deficiency.

- If a student in grades K to 3 were identified as having an early literacy delay or reading deficiency, school officials, provide written notice to the parents (or legal guardian), and provide tools to assist the parents to engage in intervention and to address or correct any barrier at home.
- Require a school principal or charter school chief administrator to (1) target specific areas of professional development based on the reading development needs data for incoming students, for each teacher in grades K to 3; (2)

differentiate and intensify professional development for teachers based on data gathered by monitoring teacher progress in improving student proficiency rates; (3) establish a collaborative system within the school to improve reading proficiency rates in grades K to 3; and (4) ensure that time was provided for teachers to meet for professional development.

- Employ early literacy coaches, using the early literacy coach model recommended or developed by the Department of Education.
- Identify how to best monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the early literacy coach model, and assure communication between the central office, school administration, and the coach throughout the school year, to address areas of concern.

School-based Reading Intervention & Read at Home.

House Bill 4822 (H-5) describes in detail the manner in which school districts and charter schools would be required to provide reading intervention programs for all students in grades K to 3. The programs, intended to ensure that students are proficient readers by the end of grade 3, would include all of the following features:

- (1) Student-specific for each K-3 student;
- (2) Screen and monitor progress at least three times each year;
- (3) Provide highly effective core reading instruction that was comprehensive and met the majority of the general education class room needs;
- (4) Provide reading intervention that, at a minimum, allowed the student to read at grade level, including intensive development in the five major reading components—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; and was implemented during regular school hours (in addition to regular classroom reading instruction);
- (5) Systematic, explicit, multisensory, and sequential; and
- (6) Provide parents, legal guardians, or other providers of care for the student with a "Read at Home" plan, including participation in parent, guardian, or care provider training workshops and regular home reading.

Further, the bill describes the reading intervention program that is intended to correct reading deficiencies for a grade 3 student who did not achieve a grade 3 reading level on the state assessment. Depending on the needs of an individual student, the intervention program would include the following features:

- (1) Be evidence-based with proven results in accelerating achievement within a single school year;

- (2) Provide more dedicated time to reading;
- (3) Provide daily targeted small-group and one-to-one reading intervention, including explicit and systematic instruction with more detailed and varied explanation, more extensive opportunities for guided practice, and more opportunities for error correction and feedback;
- (4) Provide frequent and ongoing progress monitoring assessments;
- (5) Provide supplemental evidence-based interventions delivered by a teacher, tutor or volunteer with specialized training provided before school, after school, or during school hours but outside of regular English language arts classroom time, or any combination of these; and
- (6) Provide parental involvement through a "Read at Home" plan including training workshops (as described above).

English Language Learners

House Bill 4822 (H-5) requires that students identified as English language learners by their teachers, or by the diagnostic reading assessment, have intervention services that include at least all of the following:

- Access to available instruction in the student's native language, with withdrawal of that instruction as the student improves English language skills. (A school district or charter school is encouraged to provide this support for at least students whose native language is Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, or Arabic.)
- Ongoing assessments that provide actionable data for teachers to use in interventions.
- Instruction in academic vocabulary.
- Opportunities for speech production.
- Instruction in the five major reading components—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Specific instruction connecting the student's native language and English.
- Common English language development strategies such as modeling, guided practice and comprehensive input.
- Feedback for the student, including explanations in the native language.

Reading Summer Camps.

School districts and charter schools are encouraged to offer summer reading camps staffed with highly effective reading teachers, for all students exhibiting a reading deficiency, as determined by a student's teacher through the diagnostic reading assessment system selected by the school district or charter school.

Promotion from Grade 3 to Grade 4.

Beginning with students enrolled in grade 3 during the 2019-2020 school year, the superintendent of a school district, or the chief administrator of a charter school would be required to ensure that a student did not enroll in grade 4 until one of the following occurred:

- The student achieved a reading score that is less than one grade level behind on the state English language arts assessment;¹
- The student demonstrated a grade 3 reading level through performance on an alternative standardized reading assessment approved by the state superintendent of public instruction; or
- The student demonstrated a grade 3 reading level through a student portfolio, as evidenced by demonstrating competency in all grade 3 state English language arts standards through multiple work samples.

Under the bill, if a child younger than 10 years of age sought to enroll for the first time in a school district or charter school in grade 4, school officials would be prohibited from enrolling the student in grade 4 until he or she achieved a reading score that was less than one grade level behind, demonstrated by utilizing one of the three assessment results described above.

If a student was not enrolled in grade 4, and the student had demonstrated proficiency in mathematics, science, writing, or social studies, or by the student's grade 3 reading teacher, then school officials would be required to ensure that the student was provided with instruction commensurate with the student's achievement level in that specific subject area. The bill specifies that this instruction could be given in a grade 4 class-room setting.

Further, under House Bill 4822 (H-5), if a child is not enrolled in grade 4 at the beginning of a school year, then before placing the child in grade 4, an appropriate school official would be required to notify the student's parent (or legal guardian) of the proposed placement, and obtain the parent's written consent.

House Bill 4822 (H-5) specifies that students who are not advanced to grade 4 must be provided with a reading intervention program that is intended to correct the student's reading deficiency. This program would be required to include effective instructional

¹ The Department will complete the scoring of the grade 3 state English language arts assessment, and release the result of the assessment, by June 1 of each year.

strategies necessary to assisting the student to become a successful reader, including all of the following features, as appropriate for the needs of the individual student:

- Assigning to a student one or more of the following:
 - A highly effective teacher of reading, as determined by the teacher evaluation system under Section 1249 of the act.
 - The highest evaluated grade 3 teacher in the school as determined by the teacher evaluation system.
 - A reading specialist.
- Reading programs that are evidence-based and have proven results in accelerating student reading achievement within the same school year;
- Reading instruction and intervention for the majority of student contact time each day that incorporates opportunities to master the grade 4 state standards in other core academic areas;
- Daily targeted small-group or one-to-one reading intervention that is based on student needs (determined by assessment data and reading deficiencies) that includes explicit and systematic instruction with more detailed and varied explanation, more extensive opportunities for guided practice, and more opportunities for error correction and feedback;
- Administration of ongoing progress monitoring assessments;
- Supplemental evidence-based reading intervention delivered by a teacher or tutor with specialized reading training provided before, after, or during school but outside regular English language arts classroom time, or a combination of these; and,
- Parental, guardian, and care provider involvement with a "Read at Home" plan having training workshops.

Repeat Grade 3 Only Once.

House Bill 4822 (H-5) prohibits a school district or charter school from requiring a student to repeat grade 3 more than once.

'Good Cause' Exemptions.

The bill describes ways that promotion to grade 4 would be allowed for a student without a grade 3-level reading proficiency. Specifically, if the school superintendent or charter school administrator granted a 'good cause' exemption, the student could be advanced to grade 4. However, a 'good cause' exemption could be granted only according to certain procedures, and only for one of the following reasons:

- The student has an individualized education program whose team decides to exempt the student from specified retention requirements (that a child under age 10 seeking to enroll in school for the first time in grade 4 must demonstrate ability through assessments or work samples, as described in ***Promotion from Grade 3 to Grade 4, above***) based on the team's knowledge of the student;
- The student is a limited English proficient student who has had less than three years of instruction in an English language learner program; or,
- The student has received intensive reading intervention for two or more years but still demonstrates a deficiency in reading and was previously retained in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3.

Further, the bill describes a procedure that must be followed, if a school official exempts a grade 3 student for 'good cause'. Specifically, a 'good cause' exemption could be granted at the request of a student's parent (or legal guardian), or upon the teacher's own initiative, if the student's grade 3 teacher submitted to the principal or to a charter school's chief administrator a recommendation along with documentation.

The principal would then make a determination, in writing, whether or not to recommend a 'good cause' exemption, and submit the recommendation to the school superintendent, who would accept or reject it, also in writing. The superintendent's decision would be final. For a student enrolled in a charter school, the chief administrator would review and discuss the recommendation with the student's grade 3 classroom teacher and IEP team, and then make the final determination. Finally, the bill requires the school superintendent or charter school chief administrator to notify the student's parent (or legal guardian) of the determination.

Funding.

The bill specifies that it neither requires, nor intends to require, a school district or charter school to supplant state funds with federal funds for implementing or supporting these activities, nor does it prohibit a school district or charter school from continuing to use federal funds for any of the purposes or activities described in the bill.

Definitions.

The bill defines five terms. "*Individualized education program*" is defined to mean that term as described in R 340.1721E of the Michigan Administrative Code.

"*Kindergarten*" includes a classroom for young 5-year olds, commonly referred to as "young 5s" or "developmental kindergarten."

"*Reading deficiency*" means scoring below grade level or being determined to be at risk of reading failure based on a screening assessment, diagnostic assessment, standardized summative assessment, or progress monitoring.

"*Reading leadership team*" is defined to mean a collaborative system led by a school building's principal or program director and consisting of a cross-section of faculty who are interested in working to improve literacy instruction across the curriculum.

"*Section 504 plan*" means a plan under Section 504 of Title V of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 USC 794. This section prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs that receive Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To learn about Michigan's 4th grade reading proficiency scores from the NAEP Assessment—sometimes call The Nation's Report Card—visit the following web address: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2013/pdf/2014464MI4.pdf>

To learn more about Governor Snyder's 3rd Grade Reading Initiative, please visit the following websites which describe, respectively, the scope of the problem, the proposed budget to address it in year 1, and the policy aims:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/3rd_Grade_Reading_Workgroup_Report_490977_7.pdf

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/3rdGradeReading1Pager_481105_7.pdf

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/Third-Grade-Reading-FINAL_479442_7.pdf

FISCAL INFORMATION:

House Bill 4822 could result in increased costs to the state and to local units of government. The state would incur both the increased costs of educating certain students for an additional year as well as costs of the additional responsibilities the bill would require of the MDE. Local school districts and public school academies (PSAs) would also incur additional costs associated with additional responsibilities. The fiscal impact is described in more detail below.

Additional Year of Instruction

Currently, less than 1% of all students repeat the 3rd grade. To the extent that additional students repeat 3rd grade due to provisions in the bill, it would increase the number of students in local school districts over time. The bill would apply beginning with students entering the 3rd grade for 2019-2020, which means the first students would be required to repeat 3rd grade in 2020-2021. Initially, there would be no fiscal impact as students simply would be counted in a different grade than they would have been otherwise. The bill would create a larger 3rd grade count, permanently increased by the number of retained students, and a single smaller cohort entering 4th grade. By the time that smaller cohort graduates out, and the first retained 3rd graders enter 12th grade (their 14th year of school) in 2029-2030, statewide enrollment would increase by the average number of students retained, thus increasing statewide school operating costs.

Generally, the added school operating costs associated with the additional year of instruction would be paid through the foundation allowance and would be borne by the state in the School Aid budget (because existing local operating millage revenue would be spread over a greater number of pupils, thus decreasing the local per pupil revenue and increasing the required state share per pupil necessary to fully fund foundation allowances). For FY 2015-16, the minimum foundation allowance is \$7,391 and the maximum state guaranteed foundation allowance is \$8,169. Each district's mix of state and local funding varies depending on local non-homestead property values and pupil memberships.

Given the district flexibility to decide which students would have to repeat the 3rd grade, there are not enough data to determine the increased costs. The bill would allow for several methods for promotion to grade 4: achievement of a reading score that is less than 1 grade level behind as determined by the MDE based on the grade 3 state English language arts assessment; taking a comparable standardized test; or a pupil portfolio that demonstrates competency in all grade 3 state English language arts standards through multiple work samples. There are also exemptions if the student had already been retained in a previous grade or for good cause. Both the exemptions and the increased emphasis on 3rd grade reading proficiency, that would likely result from the bill, would limit the number of actual students repeating the 3rd grade and mitigate increased costs to the state.

MDE Responsibilities

The bill would add to MDE costs through added responsibilities, including approving valid and reliable screening, formative, and diagnostic reading assessment systems for use by districts and PSAs, as well as recommending a literacy coach model for use by districts and PSAs. This would likely require redirection of existing staff time rather than the hiring of additional staff, and thus minimal cost. The bill also requires the complete scoring and release of results of the grade 3 state English language arts assessment by June 1 of each year starting in the 2019-2020 school year. While this is a short turnaround for results, which could result in a cost increase because of timeframe, the department will have several years to adjust to the results deadline. The FY 2015-16 School Aid budget did include \$900,000 to support the implementation of early literacy initiatives.

School District and PSA Responsibilities

The bill could increase costs to districts and PSAs by requiring that they provide added resources to increase the number of students achieving a score of proficient in English language arts examination on the 3rd grade state assessment including the following:

- Using a diagnostic reading assessment system to assess all students in grades K to 3 at least three times per year.
- Creating a reading improvement plan for any student with a reading deficiency.
- Providing parental tools and training workshops to assist parents, legal guardians, or other providers of care for the pupil with home interventions.
- Providing targeted professional development for K to 3 teachers.
- Providing interventions that include more dedicated reading instruction time, including targeted small group and 1-to-1 interventions.

- Providing English Language Learners with interventions and access to instruction connecting their native language to English and including feedback and explanations in their native language.

The bill could also increase costs to districts by requiring a district or PSA to provide the following for a student who is repeating the 3rd grade:

- Assigning a highly effective teacher, the highest evaluated teacher, or a reading specialist.
- Providing reading instruction and intervention for the majority of student contact time each day while also allowing for opportunities to master 4th grade standards in other academic areas, if applicable.
- Providing daily targeted small group or 1-to-1 reading intervention.

The bill could create additional district costs for pupils who were not being promoted to the 4th grade to be taught at grade level (4th grade) for subject area content in which they had demonstrated proficiency. Districts could see an indeterminate cost associated with classroom and/or teacher/staff repurposing if pupils were required to be split between grades and moved between different classrooms and multiple teachers throughout the day beyond the required reading related interventions.

The FY 2015-16 School Aid Budget added funding that could offset a portion of the costs including the following:

- \$17.5 million for added instructional time before, during, or after school.
- \$5.5 million for diagnostic and screening tools and computer adaptive tests.
- \$3.0 million to support half the cost, up to \$35,000, of at least one literacy coach per intermediate school district (ISD) plus additional coaches depending on the size and poverty concentration of the ISD.
- \$1.0 million for pilot Parent University programs.
- \$950,000 for expanded and focused professional development for K to 3 reading instruction.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Proponents of the bill note that key state representatives of both parties have worked over two legislative sessions to ensure that Michigan youngsters are better readers. These legislators have been joined by the governor, who announced his Third Grade Reading Initiative in early 2015, and who appointed a task force to assess the problem, pilot possible solutions, and offer recommendations for new directions in public policy. Now leaders in both branches of the government are intent upon making 3rd grade reading proficiency a priority for Michigan. To that end, funding for the Third Grade Reading Initiative is included in the Fiscal Year 2016 state budget. Further, leaders in government have been joined by strategic partners in the private and philanthropic sectors—most notably the Council of Michigan Foundations—all of whose 335 members confirm that research indicates "investments in young children pay off academically, emotionally, and financially."

For:

Proponents of the bill point out that "Students not proficient in reading at third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time. Further, adults without a high school diploma are far more likely to end up in prison, have difficulty finding work, receive lower wages, and live in poverty. While many of these devastating effects of student's poor literacy will fall on the students themselves (and on their children), Michigan and its citizens will be affected as well. Each high school dropout costs our state more than \$292,000 in lost revenue and higher social costs. They conclude that employers have already started and will continue to relocate to other states and countries where they can find the talent they need to grow. Source: *Third-Grade Reading Workgroup Report to Governor Rick Snyder, June 3, 2015*

For:

Those who favor the bill tout its guarantee that early literacy coaches will be on-site in schools where teachers have classrooms full of children who are reading below grade level. The legislation explicitly prohibits those reading specialists who serve as literacy coaches from splitting their time between coaching and classroom teaching. Instead, the literacy coaches' focus and time must be dedicated solely to professional development for elementary school teachers who need new knowledge and information about how children learn to read.

Response:

Some education leaders fear there are not enough highly trained early literacy coaches and reading specialists to get the job done. They point out there are 56 intermediate school districts in Michigan to serve 83 counties. Some ISDs—which are expected to serve as the base for circuit-riding literacy coaches—will be required to serve hundreds of far flung schools in multi-county ISDs.

For:

Proponents of the bill note that 3rd grade reading proficiency foretells future academic success. They know, too, that reliable early literacy interventions can guarantee most children will become able readers—a goal Michigan must realize.

According to the most recent *Kids Count Data Book*, (which ranks the 50 states based on 16 indicators related to child well-being), Michigan ranks 37th in the USA in education. The state is dead last—50th—in the Midwest for both overall child well-being and education. (Indiana ranks 25th; Minnesota 6th). Indeed, two of the four education indicators involving our youngest learners actually worsened from the last year of the Great Recession (2008): Michigan has fewer children attending preschool, and fewer 4th-graders considered proficient in reading. This legislation will help many thousands of school children learn to read—enriching their young lives inside classrooms, heightening their chance of academic success, and enhancing their future.

For:

Many proponents of the bill herald its commitment to Read-At-Home programs, and reading summer camps. Both of these early literacy strategies are an integral part of the school-based program, in recognition that a child's literacy skills are much enhanced when school teachers work together with parents, and other caring adults in a young child's life.

Against:

When youngsters are held back in school they are unable to progress with their grade level cohort of friends. All of those "repeaters" carry the stigma of failure throughout their remaining years at school. And a significant proportion of those stigmatized students drop out before high school graduation. Many academic studies confirm this fact.

Many opponents of the bill—most often those within the school community—urge that 3rd grade retention be dropped from this bill. They argue the "punishment" (retention, shaming, dropping-out, and future job uncertainty) is counter-productive and deeply unjust in relation to the "crime" (delayed reading ability, often a factor of childhood poverty and under-resourced schools).

Response:

Some proponents of early grade retention respond that a "social promotion" may protect a child's self-esteem, but it does so by advancing a lie. The child is not well-served by pretending more knowledge than is measurable. Indeed, one hears occasional reports of high school students coming to realize they read so far below grade level they have no hope of reaching their classmates' achievement levels. If these poor readers persevere they must take remedial coursework in community college. There, they discover their true learning deficits—often across all of the learning disciplines—and they know them to be profound, and much more difficult to correct at age 18 than at age 8.

Reply:

Opponents of grade retention argue that the best policy is, in effect, an early "ungraded" developmentally appropriate opportunity that gains a child access to the skills and knowledge needed to read. A teacher cannot teach what he or she does not know. Neither can a child know what he or she has not been taught. Why punish them? It is far better to educate and inform them; to allow them to teach and learn. Michigan's early reading initiative will succeed with commitment, proven literacy interventions, and adequate financial resources targeted in the early grades. Why tarnish that success with the demonstrably dire effects of 3rd grade retention?

Against:

Some who oppose the bill say it does not address the special needs of dyslexic students—numbering between 71,000 and 240,000 in Michigan, according to the National Institutes of Health—who may constitute 70-80 percent of people with reading difficulties. These opponents of the bill argue that "dyslexia is an under-recognized, underestimated root cause of reading failure...that must be explicitly acknowledged and accounted for in any plan or policy that attempts to improve reading scores." These opponents urge legislators to consider the devastating impact of a policy [the third grade reading initiative] that sets so many children up to fail by not requiring our schools to address dyslexia...and then punishing them when they do not learn."

Against:

Some opponents of the bill argue that it perpetuates a school environment filled with excessive test-taking and assessment. To measure the progress of these early literacy interventions, teachers will rely on different forms of assessment, some beginning as early as kindergarten. Just a few days after school begins, teachers will be looking to measure

what a child observes, and whether a child comprehends language, understands letter shapes and sounds, or demonstrates curiosity and motivation. All of the assessments that will follow in the first four years of school—including norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests, as well as formative- and summative-assessments, performance evaluations, and portfolios of work (to name only a few)—are high-stakes events for young learners. Some educators note that tests are now ubiquitous—so ever-present in the classroom that they often stand in the way of more authentic and genuinely intellectual inquiry and expression.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Education supports the bill, but expresses concerns about grade retention. (9-17-15)

The Council of Michigan Foundations supports the bill. (9-15-22)

West Michigan Talent Triangle supports the bill. (9-10-15)

Great Lakes Education Project supports the bill. (9-10-15)

Autocam Medical supports the bill. (9-10-15)

Grand Valley State University Charter School Office supports the bill. (9-10-15)

The Michigan League for Public Policy supports the bill. (9-17-15)

Hope Network supports the bill. (9-17-15)

Students First supports the bill. (9-17-15)

The Michigan Association of School Administrators opposes the bill as written. (9-17-15)

The Michigan Association of School Boards opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Superintendents opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals' Association opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Wayne RESA opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Macomb ISD opposes the bill as written. (9-17-15)

The ESA Legislative Group opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Freedom to Lead opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Stop Common Core-Michigan opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Decoding Dyslexia Michigan opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Middle Cities Education Association opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

The School Equity Caucus opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

South Haven American Association of University Women (AAUW) opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Genesee Intermediate School District opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

South-Central Education Policy Consortium opposes the bill. (9-17-15)

Excellent Schools Detroit is neutral on the bill. (9-17-15)

The Michigan Association of Media in Education is neutral on the bill. (9-17-15)

Reading Partners is neutral on the bill. (9-17-15)

Michigan Parents for Schools is neutral on the bill. (9-17-15)

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