
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Carol Liu, Chair
2015 - 2016 Regular

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Author: Hueso
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Consultant: Lynn Lorber
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Subject: Language arts: reading: diagnostic tools and plans

SUMMARY

This bill requires public schools with less than 50 percent of 4th grade students demonstrating proficiency on English language arts standards to ensure that each student's reading proficiency is measured throughout the school year using a formative reading diagnostic tool.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the State's assessment system as the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress and includes, beginning with the 2013-14 school year, a consortium summative assessment in English language arts for grades 3-8 and 11 that measures content standards adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE). (Education Code § 60640)
- 2) Requires, by November 1, 2014, the California Department of Education (CDE) to identify and make available to school districts information regarding existing assessments in language arts and mathematics that are aligned to the common core academic standards and appropriate for students in grade 2 for diagnostic use by classroom teachers. Existing law requires the CDE to ensure that the selected diagnostic assessments are valid for purposes of identifying particular knowledge or skills a student has or has not acquired in order to inform instruction and make educational decisions. (EC § 60644)
- 3) Requires the governing board of each school district to adopt a local control and accountability plan (LCAP) using a template adopted by the SBE. Existing law requires each LCAP, to include, for the school district and each school within the school district, both of the following:
 - a) A description of the annual goals, for all students and each subgroup, to be achieved for each of the state priorities and for any additional local priorities identified by the governing board of the school district.
 - b) A description of the specific actions the school district will take during each year to achieve the goals, including the enumeration of any specific

actions necessary for that year to correct any deficiencies in regard to the state priorities. (EC § 52060)

ANALYSIS

This bill requires public schools with less than 50 percent of 4th grade students demonstrating proficiency on English language arts standards to ensure that each student's reading proficiency is measured throughout the school year using a formative reading diagnostic tool. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires, beginning with the 2018-19 school year, public schools that serve students in grades 1-4 with less than 50 percent of 4th grade students demonstrating proficiency on English language arts standards to ensure that each student's reading proficiency is measured throughout the school year using at least one of the formative reading diagnostic tools identified pursuant to #10 below.
- 2) Provides that proficiency on English language arts standards is to be based upon the statewide assessment administered the previous school year.
- 3) Provides that the purpose of the formative reading diagnostic tools is to determine if a student has a developmental reading level for that student's grade level.
- 4) Requires a reading plan to be created for each student in grades 1-3 who is not at the appropriate developmental reading proficiency level for the student's grade, as defined by the State Board of Education pursuant to #12 below.
- 5) Requires a reading plan to include all of the following:
 - a) The student's specific, diagnosed developmental reading level that needs to be addressed in order for the student to attain reading proficiency.
 - b) The goals and benchmarks for the student's growth in attaining reading proficiency by the end of grade 3.
 - c) The type of additional instructional services and interventions the student will receive in reading as determined by the school.
 - d) The strategies the student's parent is encouraged to use in assisting their child to achieve reading proficiency that are designed to supplement the additional instructional services and interventions to be provided.
 - e) Any additional services that are deemed available and appropriate to accelerate the student's reading skill development.
- 6) Requires the plan to be created in collaboration with the student's parent and teacher if possible, and as soon as possible after the student's developmental reading level is identified.

- 7) Requires a reading plan to be reviewed at least annually by the school and updated or revised as appropriate to facilitate the student's progress in demonstrating reading proficiency.
- 8) Requires a reading plan to be implemented until the student demonstrates reading proficiency.
- 9) Requires the parent to be provided with a copy of the reading plan with the following information:
 - a) The state's goal is for all children in California to graduate from high school having attained skill levels that adequately prepare them for postsecondary studies or for the workforce, and research demonstrates that achieving reading competency by grade 3 is a critical milestone in achieving this goal.
 - b) If a student enters grade 4 without achieving reading competency, he or she is significantly more likely to fall behind in all subject areas beginning in grade 4 and continuing in later grades. If a student's reading skill deficiencies are not remediated, it is likely the student will not have the skills necessary to complete the coursework required to graduate from high school.
 - c) The parent plays a central role in supporting the student's efforts to achieve reading competency and is strongly encouraged to work with his or her child's teacher in implementing the reading plan, and the reading plan will include strategies the parent is encouraged to use at home to support the student's reading success in order to supplement the intervention instruction the student receives in school.
- 10) Requires the State Board of Education (SBE), by December 31, 2017, to identify a list of formative reading diagnostic tools that can be used to assess the developmental levels of reading proficiency of students in grades 1-3, in their ability to read proficiently by the end of grade 3.
- 11) Requires the SBE to post, by December 31, 2017, a list of these diagnostic tools on the California Department of Education's website.
- 12) Requires the SBE, to define, for a student to have an appropriate "developmental reading level" in grades 1-3, such that the student is not on track to reading proficiency by the end of grade 3, as determined by the formative reading diagnostic tools.
- 13) States legislative intent to increase the Local Control Funding Formula base rate of funding for K-3 for the purposes of this bill.
- 14) States legislative intent, that schools serving students in grades 1-3 work with parents and teachers to provide instructional programming, intervention

instruction, and support necessary to ensure that students can demonstrate reading proficiency by the completion of grade 3.

- 15) States legislative findings and declaration relative to the importance of reading proficiently by the end of grade 3.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Rationale for the bill.*** According to the author, “A student’s performance in the 4th grade is a critical benchmark that provides valuable insights into the ability of that child to go on to be successful academically and find gainful employment in the workplace. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), 60 percent of all California 4th graders do not meet the standards for reading as set by the Smarter Balanced test. Things get worse for low-income and minority students. 69 percent of all low-income 4th graders are not at grade level for reading, with 68 percent of all Hispanic 4th graders not meeting standards and 72 percent of all African American 4th graders. These deficiencies compound over time, leading to a reading gap in students that can create lifelong barriers to success. A child who is not reading at grade level by the 4th grade is four times less likely to graduate on time, and is more likely to face incarceration later in life, more prone to poverty in adulthood, and more likely to have a teenage pregnancy. The struggling reader in the 3rd grade of today is the struggling adult of tomorrow”
- 2) ***Increases testing in the era of reduced testing.*** The Legislature passed sweeping reforms to the State’s assessment system in 2013, which eliminated several assessments and eliminated the requirement that state assessments be administered to students in grade 2. The Legislature also imposed a requirement that the CDE identify and make available to school districts, information regarding existing assessments in language arts and mathematics that are aligned to the common core academic standards and appropriate for students in grade 2 for diagnostic use by classroom teachers. The CDE was required to ensure that the selected diagnostic assessments are valid for purposes of identifying particular knowledge or skills a student has or has not acquired in order to inform instruction and make educational decisions. Information regarding existing grade 2 diagnostic assessments in English language arts can be found here: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ai/gd2elatbl1.asp>

The Legislature recently acted to reduce the number of required assessments, and diagnostic assessments are currently available for schools to identify particular knowledge or skills a student has or has not acquired in order to inform instruction and make educational decisions. Should the Legislature reverse its stance by increasing required assessments?
- 3) ***Does not consider English language acquisition.*** This bill makes no provision for the consideration of a student’s level of language acquisition. It is very likely that many students who have not met English language arts standards are English learners, which is different than being a native English speaker who is struggling to read. Should reading diagnostics be administered to, and reading

plans be developed for, students who are learning English? Could the reading plans be in conflict with instruction and services provided to English learners?

- 4) **Diagnostic tools currently available.** The State's assessment system includes Smarter Balanced summative assessments (required for grades 3-8 and 11), interim assessments that are designed to inform and promote teaching and learning, and a digital library consisting of tools and practices designed to help teachers utilize formative assessment processes for improved teaching and learning. The California Department of Education has identified information regarding existing assessments in language arts and mathematics that are aligned to the common core academic standards and appropriate for students in grade 2 for diagnostic use by classroom teachers.

This bill requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to identify a list of formative reading diagnostic tools that can be used to assess the developmental levels of reading proficiency of students in grades 1-3. Are the existing diagnostic assessments, interim assessments, digital library and formative assessment tools insufficient? Is it necessary to require the identification of additional diagnostic tools?

- 5) **How many schools would be affected?** This bill requires public schools with less than 50 percent of 4th grade students demonstrating proficiency on English language arts standards to ensure that each student's reading proficiency is measured throughout the school year using a formative reading diagnostic tool. According to results of the 2015 Smarter Balanced English language arts assessment, 4,058 out of 6,035, or 67.2 percent, of schools would be affected by this bill. Is it reasonable to impose new assessment and intervention requirements based upon results of an assessment that has been administered in California only since 2014?
- 6) **Developmental reading level.** This bill requires the SBE to define what it means for a student to have an appropriate "developmental reading level" in grades 1-3, such that the student is not on track to reading proficiency by the end of grade 3, as determined by the formative reading diagnostic tools. The SBE has established cut-scores or performance levels for certain state-required assessments; the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium established the performance standards for the Smarter Balanced assessments in English language arts and mathematics. While there may be a single expectation of performance, this bill requires the SBE to establish performance levels for each identified formative reading diagnostic tool. Is this a reasonable expectation? Would SBE establish developmental reading levels via regulation, or by vote of the SBE?
- 7) **Reading plans.** This bill requires a reading plan to be created for a student in grades 1-3 who is not at the appropriate developmental reading level for that student's grade level, as determined by the SBE. This bill requires a reading plan to include, among other things, the type of additional instructional services and interventions the student *will receive* in reading as determined by the school.

This provision appears to require the development of an individualized education program (IEP)-like document that describes instruction and services that *must be provided* by the local educational agency.

This bill requires the reading plan to be created in collaboration with the student's parent and teacher, if possible. It is unclear exactly who is to develop the reading plans, and why the parent and teacher are to be involved only *if possible*.

This bill requires a student's reading plan to be implemented until the student demonstrates reading proficiency. Is "reading proficiency" to be demonstrated via the state assessment in English language arts (the Smarter Balanced assessment), which is administered on an annual basis?

This bill makes no consideration for students who may have an IEP in place. Is there a potential for a reading plan to conflict with the specifications of a student's IEP?

- 8) **Local control and accountability plans.** Existing law requires the governing board of each school district to adopt a local control and accountability plan (LCAP), and include in that plan a description of the annual goals, for all students and each subgroup, to be achieved for each of the state priorities, and a description of the specific actions the school district will take during each year to achieve the goals, including the enumeration of any specific actions necessary for that year to correct any deficiencies in regard to the state priorities.

The State does not require specific assessments be administered to students in grades 1-2; however, there is an expectation that local educational agencies (LEAs) are measuring and evaluating student performance.

The State Board of Education is required to adopt the evaluation rubrics by October 1, 2016. It is anticipated that the evaluation rubrics will allow LEAs to display performance data at the school level and by subgroup. This should make it easier for LEAs to identify deficiencies in meeting their goals as well as more transparent for parents.

It is unclear what is deficient in the existing requirements regarding LCAPs. Should additional mandates be imposed before the final stages of the LCAP process has been developed, let alone implemented?

- 9) **Recommendations for a comprehensive assessment system.** The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) recently released recommendations that could address the problem this bill attempts to solve. Specifically, the SPI recommends that the California Department of Education vet state-supported resources and tools that support implementation of a comprehensive assessment system and provide those resources for local use. The SPI further recommended that the State provide regional assessment support to LEAs on the implementation of the comprehensive assessment tools and resources. These recommendations provide additional supports and tools to LEAs but stops short of requiring LEAs to utilize those supports and tools.

- 10) ***Other issues of concern.*** This bill requires diagnostic assessments to be administered in schools with less than 50 percent of 4th grade students demonstrating proficiency on English language arts standards. Performance on the English language arts Smarter Balanced assessment can be disaggregated by domains, such as reading. Should additional reading diagnostics be required based on performance on *all* domains within English language arts?

This bill imposes requirements based upon the results of assessments administered in grade 4, which results are known toward the end of grade 4. Is it appropriate to require the administration of diagnostic assessments to students in grades 1-3 based on the performance of students in grade 4? Is it reasonable to assume that students in grades 1-3 are at risk based on the performance of students in grade 4?

This bill requires schools to measure the reading proficiency of each student in grades 1-3 throughout the school year to determine if a student has an appropriate developmental reading level for that student's grade level. This appears to require the measurement of all students' reading proficiency, throughout the school year, regardless of the student's performance on the State assessment or on an initial diagnostic assessment. Should the reading proficiency be repeatedly measured for students who have already reached higher performance levels in reading?

This bill uses the term "proficiency," which is no longer used in relation to performance on the state assessment in English language arts (the Smarter Balanced assessment). The State now uses performance levels (Level 1 means the standard was not met; Level 2 means the standard was nearly met; Level 3 means the standard was met; Level 4 means the standard was exceeded).

This bill applies to all public schools with less than 50 percent of 4th grade students demonstrating proficiency on English language arts standards. It appears, therefore, that a school may be relieved of the requirements imposed by this bill only once more than 50 percent of the school's students achieve Level 3 or Level 4 on the Smarter Balanced assessment in English language arts.

This bill does not require the identified reading diagnostic tools to be aligned with the State Board of Education-adopted common core academic standards.

This bill requires the State Board of Education to identify a list of formative reading diagnostic tools. It would be more appropriate for the California Department of Education to identify a list of formative reading diagnostic tools, as it has already identified existing assessments in language arts and mathematics that are aligned to the common core academic standards and appropriate for students in grade 2 for diagnostic use by classroom teachers.

- 11) ***Suggested alternative approach.*** This bill attempts to address a worthy issue; there is no question that reading is a critical skill. However, this bill takes an approach that is contrary to several efforts the State has recently undertaken and projects that are still under development. As an alternative to the provisions

currently in this bill, **staff recommends amendments** to instead create a grant program to provide funding to local educational agencies to:

- a) Provide professional development on the existing diagnostic, formative and interim assessment tools that are available from the State, and how to evaluate the data from assessment results, adjust instruction, and create system of continuous improvement.
 - b) Administer and score the existing diagnostic, formative and interim assessment tools that are available from the State, evaluate the data, adjust instruction and create a system of continuous improvement.
- 12) ***Fiscal impact.*** This bill creates unfunded mandates, thereby imposing unknown but likely significant costs. Further, this bill states legislative intent to increase the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) base rate of funding for K-3 for the purposes of this bill.

SUPPORT

Center for Latino Education and Innovation
Reality Changers
San Ysidro Women’s Club
StudentsFirst

OPPOSITION

None received.

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