SENATE, No. 2645

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

221st LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 8, 2024

Sponsored by: Senator M. TERESA RUIZ District 29 (Essex and Hudson)

SYNOPSIS

Requires school districts to screen certain students for reading deficiencies.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



AN ACT concerning student literacy and supplementing chapter 40 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

- 1. a. As used in this section, "reading deficiency" means scoring below grade level or being determined to be at risk of scoring below grade level based on a screening assessment.
- b. A school district shall screen each student enrolled in kindergarten through grade three using a reading assessment approved or authorized pursuant to subsections f. or g. of this section. The assessment shall be administered three times per school year.
- c. A school district shall annually screen any newly-enrolled student in the district in grades four through 12 using a reading assessment approved or authorized pursuant to subsections f. or g. of this section.
- d. A school district shall screen any enrolled student at the request of the parent or guardian of the student using a reading assessment approved or authorized pursuant to subsections f. or g. of this section.
- e. The reading assessments required pursuant to subsections b., c., and d. of this section shall:
- (1) measure phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; and
 - (2) identify students who have a reading deficiency.
- f. (1) The Department of Education shall enter into a contract with at least two screening providers that have a reliable and valid reading assessment that meets the requirements of this act. Within the limits of available funds, the department shall make these reading assessments available for use by school districts.
- (2) The department shall establish and distribute a list of providers with reliable and valid reading assessments approved for school district use for the screening and monitoring of student progress toward grade level reading.
- g. Upon application, a school district may be granted a waiver of the requirement to use one of the reading assessments that have been approved by the department pursuant to subsection f. of this section, if the school district demonstrates to the department's satisfaction that it has selected a comparable reading assessment.
- h. A school district shall notify a parent or guardian of a student who exhibits a reading deficiency no later than 15 days after identification of the deficiency.
- i. A school district shall provide appropriate evidence-based intervention strategies to any student exhibiting a reading deficiency as determined through the screening conducted pursuant to subsections b., c., and d. of this section.

j. A school district shall annually report to the department the number of students screened pursuant to this section and the number of students who were identified through the screening as exhibiting a reading deficiency.

2. The Department of Education shall annually provide funds to school districts to implement the provisions of this act. Funds shall be allocated to school districts in accordance with the funding methodology determined by the department.

3. This act shall take effect immediately and shall first apply to the first full school year following the date of enactment, except that the Commissioner of Education may take such anticipatory administrative action in advance thereof as shall be necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this act.

STATEMENT

This bill requires school districts to screen certain students for reading deficiencies.

Under the bill, a school district is required to screen each student enrolled in kindergarten through grade three using a reading assessment approved by the Department of Education. The screening is to occur three times per school year. Additionally, a school district is required to screen newly-enrolled students in grades four through 12 using an approved reading assessment. The bill requires a school district to screen any enrolled student at the request of the parent or guardian of the student.

Under the bill, the reading assessment is required to: (1) measure phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; and (2) identify students who have a reading deficiency. The department is required to enter into a contract with at least two screening providers that have a valid and reliable reading assessment with the ability to screen students pursuant to the provisions of this bill. Within the limits of available funds, the department is required to make these reading assessments available for use by school districts.

Additionally, the department is required to establish and distribute a list of providers of reliable and valid reading assessments approved for school district use for the screening and monitoring of student progress toward grade level reading.

The bill permits a school district to be granted a waiver of the requirement to use one of the department-approved reading assessments if it demonstrates to the department's satisfaction that it has selected a comparable reading assessment.

Under the bill, a school district is required to notify a parent or guardian of a student who exhibits a reading deficiency no later

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than 15 days after the deficiency is identified. The school district is
also required to provide appropriate evidence-based intervention
strategies to any student that exhibits a reading deficiency.

A school district is also required to annually report to the department the number of students screened and the number of students who were identified through the screening as exhibiting a reading deficiency.

The bill defines a "reading deficiency" as scoring below grade level or being determined to be at risk of scoring below grade level based on a screening assessment.