

Senate Education Committee – April 17, 2012

Early Reading Intervention

And, students cannot be successful without the ability to read. To focus on reading readiness, the MBR includes a proposal that strengthens early reading intervention. Ohio law currently has a third grade reading guarantee designed to ensure that students are ready for more advanced learning in later grades. However, the current version of the guarantee law has not been effective at meeting its policy objectives because it does not require a specific intervention plan to be developed for each student who is identified as reading below grade level.

The early reading intervention proposed in Senate Bill 316 would require that students take diagnostic assessments every year from kindergarten through second grade. This will allow educators to identify students who are reading below grade level so that deficiencies can be recognized, targeted and overcome with appropriate interventions. Under the legislation, schools would have to develop a reading improvement and monitoring plan within 60 days of determining that a student requires remediation. If a student is on this plan for two or more years, but is not proficient in reading by the end of third grade, he or she would not advance to the fourth grade. Students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency would be exempt from the retention requirement. A student who does not have an intervention plan for two years will be allowed to advance if the school commits to start or continue intensive intervention services in the fourth grade.

We cannot simply push students forward when the evidence shows that they are not ready for the more difficult curriculum at the next grade level. However, the research on this topic is mixed. On one hand, most experts agree that retention without an intervention plan can lead to academic and self-esteem problems. On the other hand, studies also show that students are up to four times more likely to drop out if they cannot read at grade level by the end of third grade. That is why the most important part of this proposal is the identification and intervention of reading problems as early as possible.

Though commonly called the third grade reading guarantee, it is really about early reading intervention. We shouldn't focus on just the third grade, its test, or the threat of retention. We should focus on students as they enter kindergarten and closely monitor their progress throughout the primary grades. We won't let students move on unprepared, but we will make sure they have every chance to succeed. Whether a student actually learns to read, and is then promoted, is really a consequence of years of focused intervention.

Districts and schools may have concerns about the additional costs of this provision. However, there are several ways to help students without significant cost. First, the state has diagnostic tools available for free on ODE's website. These diagnostic assessments will determine if students are not proficient and why. The assessments are being updated to match the rigor of the Common Core learning standards. Teachers will be asked to use these resources and report the results annually.

Second, ODE has reading instruction tools from the former federal Reading First program available to all schools so that teachers have additional resources to help students succeed.

These resources currently include items like instructional strategies and reviews of research into effective reading instruction. ODE is also working to update the professional development modules to match the Common Core. More resources will continue to be added and updated.

Third, federal funding sources, such as Title I, are used to provide reading interventions now.

Through our No Child Left Behind waiver, we are asking for even more flexibility to use federal funds to help support effective early reading interventions.

Finally, schools can also engage students differently. The bill says that schools must provide summer school to students not proficient at the end of the second grade. This is not the only way to provide additional reading instruction. Other methods include student tutoring and extended learning time before and after the school day.

Schools could also use double blocking of time for reading for more instructional time. Teachers could select books that would be more interesting to students to help motivate them. It may even be necessary to divert time away from other subjects for extra reading instruction until they catch up. Kids must be able to learn to read before they can succeed in other subject areas.

This language in Senate Bill 316 will, for the first time, make parents and educators aware of students' progress throughout the primary school years. The bill will also alert parents and educators, in advance, of the consequences of falling behind while still providing enough time for intervention to succeed. Students will not be able to successfully grasp the more rigorous standards required of them if they are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

House Education Committee – May 16, 2012

Early Reading Intervention

And, students cannot be successful without the ability to read. To focus on reading readiness, the MBR includes a proposal that strengthens early reading intervention. Ohio law currently has a third grade reading guarantee designed to ensure that students are ready for more advanced learning in later grades. However, the current version of the guarantee law has not been effective at meeting its policy objectives because it does not require a specific intervention plan to be developed for each student who is identified as reading below grade level and allows unprepared students to be advanced before they are ready.

Though commonly called the third grade reading guarantee, this provision is really about early reading intervention. We shouldn't focus on just the third grade, its test, or the threat of retention. We should focus on students as they enter kindergarten and closely monitor their progress throughout the primary grades. We won't let students move on unprepared, but we will make sure they have every chance to succeed. Whether a student actually learns to read, and is then promoted, is really a consequence of years of focused intervention.

The early reading intervention proposed in Senate Bill 316 would require that students take diagnostic assessments every year from kindergarten through second grade. This will allow educators to identify students who are reading below grade level so that deficiencies can be recognized, targeted and overcome with appropriate interventions. Under the legislation, schools would have to develop a reading improvement and monitoring plan within 60 days of determining that a student requires remediation.

Senate Bill 316, as it was originally introduced, would require students who do not score proficient at the end of third grade after being on a reading improvement and monitoring plan for two or more years to be retained. Students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency would be exempt from the retention requirement. The Senate's version of the bill would lower the bar on the third grade reading assessment by only retaining students that score at the lowest performance level, "limited." Under the Senate's version of the bill, students would be able to advance to the fourth grade without actually being proficient in third grade reading skills. This sends a false message to our students, parents and schools. Higher standards are coming to Ohio in the next few years. We should not be lowering our expectations now.

In addition to the exemption for limited English and special needs students, the Senate's version of the bill would allow students to demonstrate their reading skills using an alternative reading assessment or through a portfolio judged by their principal. I am in favor of providing alternative methods to measure a student's reading skills as long as the measure is independent, valid and reliable. It would be wrong to push students forward if they are not ready for the more difficult curriculum at the next grade level.

The research on this topic is mixed. On one hand, most experts agree that retention without an intervention plan can lead to students' academic and self-esteem problems. However, on the other hand, studies also show that students are up to four times more likely to drop out if they cannot read at grade level by the end of third grade. That is why the most important part of this proposal is the identification and intervention of reading problems as early as possible.

Districts and schools may have concerns about the impact of this provision. Roughly 9,900 students scored "limited" on last year's third grade reading assessment. That number drops to 5,700 when you remove students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. Given all the other ways students can still advance that I mentioned previously, the number of students actually retained would be far fewer. Even under the As-Introduced version of Senate Bill 316, less than 17,000 students scored "basic" or "limited" on last year's assessment with the special populations removed. Even with these higher standards, almost two-thirds of school districts would have ten or fewer students scoring below "proficient" and thus eligible for retention.

Districts and schools have also expressed concerns about the cost of this provision. Ohio's ESEA waiver will allow for some more flexibility in the use of federal funds. When the waiver is approved, hundreds of districts would be allowed to reallocate an estimated \$52 million from the Supplemental Education Services program, a required set-aside within federal Title I funding, to help pay for reading interventions. The Senate's version of the bill also includes \$13 million in competitive grants from lottery profits to support reading intervention efforts. I understand that this funding may be pulled from bill. If this appropriation were to occur, I would like to target these funds to those schools that do not have access to federal funds for reading intervention.

However, I also believe it is important to share with you that there are also several ways to help students without significant cost. First, the state has diagnostic tools available for free on ODE's website. These diagnostic assessments will determine if students are not reading at grade level and why. These assessments are being updated to match the rigor of the Common Core learning

standards. Teachers will be required to use these resources, or another diagnostic assessment approved by ODE, and districts will be required to report the results annually.

Second, ODE has reading instruction tools from the former federal Reading First program available to all schools so that teachers have additional resources to help students succeed. These resources currently include items like instructional strategies and reviews of research into effective reading instruction. ODE is also working to update existing training modules to match the Common Core standards. More resources will continue to be added and updated.

I support the change made by the Senate to offer summer remediation as an option, but not a mandate, for all districts and community schools. The Senate's version of the bill offers a reasonable list of options for schools to provide reading intervention. Children must be able to learn to read before they can succeed in other subject areas, and schools should be given the flexibility to determine how to best meet the intervention needs of their students.

The language in Senate Bill 316 will, for the first time, make parents and educators aware of students' progress throughout the primary school years. The bill would require that notification be provided to parents of students reading below grade level regarding the services currently being provided, the additional interventions that will be implemented to address the identified deficiencies, and the consequences to the student of falling behind. The key is that this information will be provided while there is still enough time for intervention to succeed. Students will not be able to successfully grasp the more rigorous standards required of them if they are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade.