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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #537

Reading Assessment (DPI -- Administrative and Other Funding)

[LFB 2013-15 Budget Summary: Page 392, #6]

CURRENT LAW

Under 2011 Act 166, a reading readiness assessment is required to be administered to all kindergarten pupils, beginning in 2012-13. DPI is required to ensure that the assessment evaluates whether a pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. The results of each pupil's reading assessment must be reported to the pupil's parent or guardian. If a pupil's reading assessment indicates that the pupil is at risk of reading difficulty, then the school district or charter school is required to provide interventions or remedial reading services that are scientifically based and address all areas in which the pupil is deficient, in a manner consistent with the state standards in reading and language arts.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$1,496,000 GPR in 2013-14 and \$1,351,000 GPR in 2014-15 for assessments of reading readiness for pupils in kindergarten through grade 2. Base level funding is \$800,000 GPR, for total funding of \$2,296,000 in 2013-14 and \$2,151,000 in 2014-15. Require that, in 2013-14, school boards and independent "2r" charter schools must assess each kindergarten pupil for reading readiness. Require that, beginning in 2014-15, school boards and independent "2r" charter schools must annually assess each pupil enrolled in grades kindergarten to 2 for reading readiness, using the appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment of literacy fundamentals selected by DPI.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The kindergarten reading readiness assessment was mandated under 2011 Act 166. This legislation was based on the recommendations of the Governor's Read to Lead Task Force

report, published in January, 2012. The task force recommended changes in the manner in which young children are taught to read, including universal screening in pre-kindergarten (4K), kindergarten (5K), 1st grade, and 2nd grade to identify struggling readers, and a response to intervention system to help those students progress. Prior to 2011 Act 166, the first state-mandated pupil assessment was the third grade reading comprehension test, which is currently assessed, along with federally-mandated mathematics, through the Wisconsin knowledge and concepts exam. In addition, the task force recommended changes in teacher preparation programs and professional development to improve teachers' skills in reading instruction, improvements in early childhood education, linking preschool and K-12 performance data through the state's longitudinal data system, parent outreach, and including reading outcomes under an educator effectiveness evaluation system and school and school district accountability system.

2. Act 166 enacted several of the task force's recommendations, including: (a) new requirements for teacher preparation programs; (b) mandating a new educator effectiveness evaluation system for teachers and principals; (c) creating a requirement for teaching licenses that the applicant must pass the Foundations of Reading test administered as part of the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure, for licensing teachers in the early grades (K-5), special education teachers, and reading specialists; and (d) creating two new grant programs for literacy and early childhood development programs. In addition, Act 166 appropriated \$800,000 GPR in 2012-13 to provide school districts and independent charter schools with a universal early reading readiness assessment.

3. In its 2013-15 agency budget request, DPI indicated that it chose to work with the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) to purchase the "phonological awareness literacy screening" (PALS), a kindergarten reading assessment that meets the statutory requirements under Act 166. PALS is the screening tool provided by the state of Virginia for its own early intervention reading initiative, which has as its goal a reduction in the number of children with reading problems, by detecting those problems early and providing research-based, small-group intervention. The contract costs for the PALS assessment, purchased for 2012-13, were \$13.00 per pupil for approximately 60,000 5K pupils, for a total of \$780,000.

4. The PALS assessment consists of three instruments: (a) PALS PreK for preschool pupils; (b) PALS K for kindergarten pupils; and (c) PALS 1-3, for grades 1 to 3. According to DPI, PALS assessments are designed to identify pupils in need of additional reading instruction beyond that provided to typically developing readers. PALS also assists teachers by providing them with explicit information about their pupils' knowledge of specific literacy fundamentals. According to materials prepared by the Department, PALS PreK was designed as a diagnostic tool to help guide literacy instruction, while PALS K and 1-3, on the other hand, were designed to serve as screeners, to identify children who likely need additional instruction beyond what is typically provided in classroom literacy instruction. Mid-year PALS assessments, and "quick checks" to assess progress on specific skills, provide ongoing monitoring of pupil progress throughout the year, to assess a pupil's response to reading interventions or additional instruction.

5. DPI indicates that, included in the contract for PALS in 2012-13 are the PALS "quick checks" to be used for monitoring progress, as well as the professional development for

kindergarten teachers on administering and scoring the test, pupil data upload, progress monitoring, resources for support options, and other training on using the data to inform instruction. Five-year-old kindergarten pupils first took the PALS assessment in fall 2012, to identify those pupils who need intervention in the kindergarten year. Kindergarteners will take the assessment again in spring 2013, to determine whether those pupils will need intervention in 1st grade.

6. DPI has proposed a similar testing pattern for 4K, testing in both the fall and spring. For 1st and 2nd grades, DPI proposed that only pupils new to the state, and pupils who received summer reading interventions, should be required to take the fall assessment. School districts could choose whether other pupils should also be tested in the fall, depending on how the PALS test is used in guiding curriculum. Further, DPI recommended that children who test above grade level on PALS in the spring of 1st grade should not be required to be assessed again in 2nd grade. For all other pupils, the spring assessment would be mandated in both 1st and 2nd grades.

7. DPI's budget request proposed phasing in the reading assessment and related professional development over the 2013-15 biennium, with 4K and 1st grade added in 2013-14, and 2nd grade added in 2014-15. Based on cost estimates from the vendor, to assess approximately 180,000 pupils in 2013-14 (an average 60,000 each in 4K, 5K, and 1st grade), including initial teacher training activities and 15% replacement of prior year classroom kits, the cost per pupil would average \$12.76, for a total of approximately \$2,296,000. To assess 240,000 pupils in 2014-15 (an average of 60,000 each in 4K, 5K, 1st and 2nd grade), the average cost per pupil would decrease to \$8.96, for a total of approximately \$2,151,000.

8. It should be noted that the bill currently requires that all pupils enrolled in kindergarten must be assessed in 2013-14. Beginning in 2014-15, the bill requires the reading assessment for kindergarten through 2nd grade. One could argue that "kindergarten" encompasses both four-year-old and five-year-old kindergarten. However, to avoid confusion, the Committee could choose to amend the language to specify that 4K pupils, in addition to the 5K pupils currently being assessed, must be given the reading assessment, beginning in 2013-14.

9. Finally, the Governor's recommendation would provide sufficient funding to assess 4K, 5K, and 1st grade in 2013-14. If this funding level is approved, the bill should be further amended to specify that 1st grade assessments would also begin in 2013-14. Alternatively, the Committee could choose to require the assessments only in 4K and 5K in 2013-14, and decrease funding by \$736,000 GPR in the first year of the biennium. However, such a change would mean that kindergarten pupils assessed in 2012-13 would not receive follow-up assessment in 1st grade next year.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$1,496,000 GPR in 2013-14 and \$1,351,000 GPR in 2014-15 above base level funding of \$800,000 GPR, in order to expand the reading assessment to pupils enrolled in kindergarten through 2nd grade by 2014-15.

2. Modify the Governor's recommendation to clarify that school districts and

independent charter schools must assess 4K, 5K, and 1st grade pupils for reading readiness beginning in 2013-14. Specify that, beginning in 2014-15, pupils in 4K through 2nd grade must be assessed for reading readiness. No change in funding would be necessary under this alternative.

3. Modify the Governor's recommendation to specify that districts and independent charter schools must assess pupils enrolled in 4K and 5K beginning in 2013-14. Delete \$736,000 from the bill, related to funding for 1st grade reading assessments. Provide that pupils enrolled in 4K through 2nd grade would be assessed beginning in 2014-15, and funding provided under the bill for 2014-15 would remain unchanged.

ALT 3	Change to Bill Funding
GPR	- \$736,000

4. Delete provision. Delete \$1,496,000 in 2013-14 and \$1,351,000 in 2014-15. A statewide reading readiness assessment for five-year-old kindergarten pupils would continue as under current law, and base level funding of \$800,000 annually would remain unchanged.

ALT 4	Change to Bill Funding
GPR	- \$2,847,000

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