

LEARNING LOSS BILL – UNFUNDED MANDATE, NON-LICENSED PERSONNEL AND A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ON ASSESSMENTS (SB7002/HB7004)

The bill sets up three mandated programs, two of which will be a permanent feature of Tennessee education unfunded by the state: After-school learning mini-camp, Learning Loss bridge-camp, and the Summer learning camp.

The “After-school learning mini-camp” and the “Learning loss bridge-camp” are not sunsetted and are a new unfunded permanent feature of public schools.

While there are funds proposed for this year, the state does not propose setting these programs as recurring expenditure for the state. This is similar to RTI, where it took four years to add RTI to the BEP, and the level of funding for that program is one-tenth of what is expended by LEAs.

After-school learning mini-camps bring in unlicensed personnel to teach. This must change.

It is poor law and policy to bring in unlicensed personnel into public schools to do direct instruction to students. It diminishes the profession and places new variables on teaching practice and professional responsibility. For this program, only licensed teachers should be eligible. 49-6-1502 (1)(A)

These proposed unlicensed personnel have no accountability or licensure requirements for the work they do.

The work of these proposed unlicensed personnel has a direct impact on the evaluation of the licensed teachers responsible for students participating in the afterschool program. As with RTI specialist, licensed personnel who are part of the state accountability and licensure system are the only acceptable instructional personnel in public schools.

Licensed personnel should also have stated preference for employment in summer programs under the bill. Since licensed teachers will inevitably be responsible in evaluations and test scores for students participating in summer programs, licensed teachers should lead the programs.

The after-school and learning-loss bridge camps are a state unfunded mandate on LEAs.

Since these two aspects of the bill have no sunset and are driven by data of universal screeners, the after-school and summer bridge camps will likely continue for years. There is only non-recurring funds currently contemplated for these programs. There must be a fiscal note to address what yearly costs to LEAs will be.

Questions on mandated state universal screeners for math and literacy

LEAs and teachers already administer early literacy assessments approved by the state. These assessments are chosen for their effectiveness and ability to alter teaching practices to meet student needs. These assessments are also chosen by the time needed to administer. Assessing young children in literacy is a time-consuming and often one-on-one process. There is no indication the state will take time factors into account and has a record of not understanding the time burden on classroom teachers.

The state has begun to adopt a pre-test/post-test model in this legislation. This is a positive first step.

Universal literacy and math screeners cannot be used in evaluation of LEAs or schools but is contemplated for teacher evaluations, and as a substitute for the Kindergarten portfolio system. 49-6-1508 (d). TEA has advocated using benchmark assessments as an option in teacher evaluations.

Utilizing benchmark assessments and screeners as a pre-test and post-test for these programs may prove the efficacy of this concept, something supported by TEA.

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