

QUESTIONS AND FACTS - EARLY LITERACY BILL (SB7002/HB7004)

Little trust by teachers for state mandates and additional requirements

RTI was a framework that was effective in practice but was a state unfunded mandate that put unacceptable burdens on classroom teachers when implemented. While RTI was implemented by a previous board and administration, the proposed early literacy bill has teachers voicing similar concerns.

Teachers may lose jobs and careers based on ill-defined mandatory phonics instruction courses

The state will require all K-5 teachers and all administrators to complete a course on foundational literacy skills by August 1, 2023. 49-1-906 (b). There is no indication how long the course can be.

While the commissioner has stated this is not the case in committee, there is language in the bill that K-3 teachers and administrators must also complete and pass a yet to be developed Tennessee reading instruction test for “renewing a teaching license.” Failure to do so may subject the teacher or administrator to loss of their jobs and careers as licenses will no longer be in compliance with state rules or be renewed by the state board. 49-5-5619 (c)(4)(A-F)

There is no limit or outline to the work involved for the mandatory professional development of the Tennessee reading instruction courses. While the courses are provided at no cost to the teacher, there is no understanding of the time and other requirements needed. 49-1-906(a)

There is no definition of what is required to complete these state mandated foundational literacy skills instruction courses—and there is language pointing to a mandatory exam.

To be clear, the current early literacy standards and requirements of practice were products of the SBE and SDE. Teachers are told what to teach by the standards, any alteration of these standards and the training necessary for their implementation should be funded and supported by the state and not be an onerous burden to the classroom teacher. This cannot be reprise of RTI, which was dumped upon schools and to this day is chronically underfunded.

State universal screeners have many unanswered questions

LEAs and teachers already administer early literacy assessments approved by the state for RTI purposes. These assessments are chosen locally for their effectiveness and ability to alter teaching practices to meet student needs. These assessments are also chosen by the time required to administer them. Assessing young children in literacy is a time-consuming and often one-on-one process.

There is no indication the state will consider the amount of time it will take to administer the mandated use of the state universal screener.

Universal literacy screeners cannot be used in evaluation of LEAs or schools but is silent on the use of this data in teacher evaluations. 49-1-905(c)(5)

State law is not the place to set academic and practice standards

The SBE has the power to change standards to phonetic awareness and focus for any grades it determines is needed. The SBE may approve any classroom materials based on phonetic awareness

standards. The SDE may approve assessments and screeners based on phonetic awareness standards. There is no reason for placing academic standards into state law.

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