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Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

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Version: As Passed by the Senate

Primary Sponsor: Rep. Baldrige

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: Yes

Nick Ciolli, Budget Analyst

Highlights

- School district and other public school costs are likely to increase beginning in FY 2023 to pay the cost of structured literacy certifications for teachers. These costs will depend on guidelines the newly created Ohio Dyslexia Committee (ODC) issues, the certification programs chosen, and the fees charged by providers, which can vary widely.
- School districts and other public schools are likely to incur additional costs beginning in FY 2023 to conduct annual dyslexia screenings for certain students. Costs for screening measures and training could be at least in the hundreds of thousands of dollars annually statewide but also could reach into the millions of dollars, depending on the screening measures identified by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and chosen by districts and schools and the number of students screened.
- School districts and other public schools will likely incur additional costs to provide intervention or special education services if the bill's required screening program increases identification of students with dyslexia. These costs may be partially offset by increased state foundation aid for students requiring special education services.
- However, research suggests that there may be a long-term savings effect of providing students at risk for dyslexia with early screening and intervention services, which were shown to reduce the number of students requiring costlier special education services in certain districts participating in a dyslexia screening pilot project. If so, school district expenditures and state foundation formula revenues may decrease over time.
- ODE costs may increase to provide the bill's required teacher professional development in dyslexia screening and intervention and to carry out various other administrative requirements. Professional development costs will depend, in part, on the number of clock hours the ODC prescribes and implementation decisions made by ODE.

Detailed Analysis

The bill regards screening and intervention for children with dyslexia and related professional development and certification requirements for teachers. Dyslexia is a neurological learning disorder characterized by unexpected difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities not consistent with the person's intelligence, motivation, and sensory capabilities. Specifically, the bill requires, beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, each school district and other public school to establish a multi-sensory structured literacy certification process for certain teachers and to implement an annual dyslexia screening process for certain students. The bill also requires the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to provide a professional development program for teachers in dyslexia screening and intervention practices and to establish the 11-member Ohio Dyslexia Committee (ODC), which will produce a dyslexia guidebook for public schools to provide best practices and methods for universal dyslexia screening, intervention, and remediation using a multi-sensory structured literacy program.

Structured literacy certification

Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, the bill requires each school district and other public school to establish a multi-sensory structured literacy certification process for teachers providing instruction for students in grades K-3. According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), structured literacy is evidence-based instruction that emphasizes the structure of language, including speech sounds (phonology); writing and spelling (orthography); the meaningful parts of words (morphology); grammar and sentence structure (syntax), the relationship between words, phrases, and sentences (semantics); and the organization of spoken and written language (discourse). The bill requires the process to align with the guidebook developed by ODC. The bill also authorizes ODC to recommend appropriate ratios in school buildings for students to teachers who have received certification in identifying and addressing dyslexia and certification of additional school personnel.

Cost of certification

The overall cost to districts and other public schools will depend on the guidelines that ODC issues. School districts are likely to pay the cost of the certifications for their teachers, according to an official with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators. The cost for the certifications appears to vary depending on the certification program chosen and the fees charged by providers. One option may be the Center for Effective Reading Instruction (CERI), an affiliate of IDA, which offers three types of structured literacy certifications: (1) classroom teacher, (2) dyslexia interventionist, and (3) dyslexia specialist. The latter two carry practicum requirements while the third carries additional training hour and practicum requirements. The fee for these initial certifications is \$265 for classroom teachers, \$290 for interventionists, and \$315 for specialists. Annualized renewal fees are up to \$90, \$115, and \$140, respectively. Certification renewal requires completion of ten hours of continuing education each year.

Other structured literacy certification programs, such as the Wilson Language Program or Orton-Gillingham, may carry a higher cost per teacher. Training for the Wilson Language Program is provided at only select locations across the country. One district that participated in this program estimated that it cost \$5,200 per teacher to become fully certified, which includes covering accommodations and travel to training sessions. According to Wilson Language

training, the organization offers a limited number of comprehensive programs each year for school districts and schools considering certification for a group of educators though it is unclear if there are discounted fees for this option. A credential earned through the Wilson Language Program is valid for five years and may be renewed at a cost of \$150. The Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators indicates that the cost of training for the Orton-Gillingham approach, including coursework and practicum, varies by provider. Some anecdotal information obtained through an internet search suggests that the cost of Orton-Gillingham certification may be somewhat similar to the cost for the Wilson Language Program.

Dyslexia screening

In the 2022-2023 school year, the bill requires public schools to administer a “tier one” dyslexia screening measure to each student in grades K-3 and to students in grades 4-6 if their parent or guardian requests it or, if approved by the parent or guardian, a classroom teacher requests the student receive a screening. In the 2023-2024 school year and afterwards, schools must annually administer a tier one screening to all kindergarteners and, if requested by the student’s parents or guardians or, if requested by a classroom teacher and approved by the student’s parents or guardians, students in grades 1-6. Districts may also administer a “tier two” screening measure at the same time. Districts must identify each student at risk of dyslexia, notify the student’s parent or guardian that the student has been identified as being at risk, and monitor their progress for six weeks. If the student does not show progress by the end of six weeks, the district must administer a tier two screening measure to the student (this requirement does not apply to districts that administer a tier two measure at the same time as a tier one measure). If the screener determines the student has markers for dyslexia, the district must provide his or her parents or guardian with information both about dyslexia’s risk factors and evidence-based interventions as well as the district’s structured literacy program.

School district and other public school expenditures are likely to increase to administer the screenings, report results and information to parents and guardians, and report data to ODE. In FY 2020, there were approximately 125,000 public school students enrolled in kindergarten by headcount, approximately 497,000 students enrolled in grades K-3 (for purposes of the FY 2023 screening), and approximately 757,000 in grades 1-6 throughout the state. The cost to districts will vary depending on the screening methods ODC approves and schools choose as well as how many optional screenings are administered. As a point of reference, a common dyslexia screening tool, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) 8th Edition, which was developed and is maintained by the University of Oregon, provides reading benchmark screening and progress monitoring for \$1 per student per year. Another option, aimswebPlus Reading, published by Pearson, is offered for \$6.50 per student per year, which also offers screening and progress monitoring. There are a host of other screening measures that may be approved. There are also likely to be additional training costs associated with the particular screening measure and monitoring solution chosen. Therefore, it seems possible that school district and other public school costs for screening tools would be at least in the hundreds of thousands of dollars annually statewide but could reach into the millions of dollars. New costs may be less to the extent that districts and schools are already in compliance with the bill’s requirements.

Intervention services

According to the International Dyslexia Association, as many as 15% to 20% of the population has some symptoms of dyslexia. The bill's required screenings may increase the identification of students exhibiting signs of dyslexia. If so, district and other public school costs may increase to provide intervention services to more students. These costs will depend on how the intervention services are implemented. As a point of reference, the eight school districts that participated in a dyslexia screening and intervention pilot program from the 2012-2013 school year to the 2014-2015 school year were required to design and implement a tiered program of reading instructional support that included core instruction (tier I), core instruction plus strategic, small group reading intervention (tier II), and core instruction plus individualized, intensive instruction (tier III). In addition, the pilot project evaluation reports indicate that participating school districts were required to provide professional development in evidence-based reading instruction and multi-sensory structured language instruction to both general education teachers and intervention specialists serving students in grades K-2.

Special education services and state revenues

Additional students identified as at risk for dyslexia may lead to an increase in the number of students receiving special education services for a learning disability. As a result, school district and other public school expenditures and revenues may increase. For school funding purposes, students with dyslexia are included in special education category two, which includes students identified as specific learning disabled or developmentally disabled or identified as having a minor health impairment. Statewide, school districts and community schools reported about 95,200 students as having a specific learning disability in FY 2020, representing 5.7% of statewide enrollment.

Increased costs for special education and related services for students with dyslexia may be partially offset by a gain in revenue from state foundation aid. The school foundation aid formula provides special education aid to assist districts to educate students with disabilities. In general, the formula provides additional aid of \$4,005 per pupil for students in special education category two. This amount is equalized according to the district's state share index, which provides larger shares of state aid to low-wealth districts.¹ Community school students are provided the full per-pupil amount through a transfer from the resident district's state foundation aid.

Potential long-term savings

There may be longer term savings associated with providing early intervention services to students identified under the bill. Research on outcomes from the pilot project suggests that early identification and intervention services may prevent students from needing costlier

¹ H.B. 166 of the 133rd General Assembly suspends the operation of the current law state foundation formula during FY 2020 and FY 2021 and, instead, provides foundation aid in the same amounts as FY 2019. Foundation aid was subsequently reduced by about \$300 million in FY 2020 to help balance the state budget in the wake of the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office of Budget and Management has implemented spending controls that carry these reductions into FY 2021 for the time being.

interventions when they are older. An evaluation of the three years of the pilot project and a follow-up year for certain districts indicated “that the percentage of students identified as having an educational disability (which includes all disability types, not just a Specific Learning Disability in Reading) decreased for all three years of the Dyslexia Pilot Project and remained lower than the baseline in the follow-up year. Although the decreases in the percentage of students with disability are modest relative to the baseline, they indicate a promising outcome: The number of at-risk students entering special education eligibility as a result of their needs not being fully met in the general education program was less than it had been in the year prior to the Dyslexia Pilot Project, thus lowering the overall percentage of students with disabilities over the course of the Project.”² If fewer students, therefore, require special education services as a result of more proactive intervention at an earlier age, school district costs for those services may decrease over time. Accordingly, state foundation formula revenues may decrease.

Multidisciplinary teams

The bill requires districts and other public schools to establish a multidisciplinary team consisting of trained and certified personnel and a stakeholder with expertise in the identification, intervention, and remediation of dyslexia. This team will administer the screening and intervention measures and assess the results. The creation and operation of this team may increase administrative costs to districts and schools dependent on the guidelines ODC provides.

Teacher professional development

By the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, the bill requires public school teachers providing instruction to students in grades K-1, including those providing special education instruction in those grades, to complete a professional development program in the characteristics of dyslexia and understanding methods of teaching for students with dyslexia from a list of courses approved by ODE. The provision extends to teachers providing instruction to students in grades 2-3, also including those providing special education instruction in those grades, by the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, and to teachers providing special education to students in grades 4-12 by the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year. The courses must be from a list of those approved by ODE and must meet certain requirements. Teachers must complete a number of clock hours of instruction determined by ODC, which must be no less than six hours and no more than 18 hours, in approved courses to meet the requirement. The courses may be delivered online or in a classroom setting. ODC may recommend that the professional development must also include a practicum. Any professional development course completed by a teacher prior to the bill’s effective date that is ultimately approved by ODE under the bill counts toward the number of instructional hours required.

² Morrison, Julie Q. et al., Evaluation of the Dyslexia Pilot Project: Year 4. University of Cincinnati, October 2016, pg. 5. Accessible online at <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Special-Education/Students-with-Disabilities/Specific-Learning-Disability/Dyslexia-Pilot-Project/DPP-Year-4-Evaluation-Report-10-27-16.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>.

The bill requires ODE to provide this professional development. According to public school staffing data reported to ODE, school districts and community schools reported employing about 106,000 full-time equivalent teachers in FY 2019. Tens of thousands of teachers are likely to be required to complete the required courses. The costs will depend on the number of clock hours required, the guidelines ODC adopts, how ODE implements the program, and whether a practicum is ultimately required. There appear to be a number of free courses online that provide teacher training on dyslexia. The bill requires ODE to provide a list on its website of resources for teacher training that are available at minimal or no cost. Alternatively, ODE could opt to produce online courses in-house. Otherwise, an internet search indicates, anecdotally, that third-party courses, which did not include a practicum, for which a fee is required may total several hundred dollars or more. If a practicum is required, which may require a teacher to be supervised working with a student, the costs would be higher, perhaps substantially so.

Scholarship student assessments

The bill clarifies existing law that students participating in the Educational Choice (“EdChoice”) Scholarship Program, the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program, or the Cleveland Scholarship Program are exempt from achievement assessment requirements for scholarship renewal if they meet one of the following criteria:

- The student has a disability and is excused from the requirement by federal law, their individualized education program, or a separate plan adopted by the chartered nonpublic school.
- The chartered nonpublic school that the student attends has received a waiver from administering assessments to all of its students.
- The student is in grades 3-8 and takes an alternative assessment provided by the Ohio Department of Education.
- The student is not required to take the ACT or SAT due to a significant or intellectual disability.

It is unclear how many students these provisions apply to. However, the bill may result in more students renewing their scholarships if they otherwise would have been ineligible by not taking state tests in the above circumstances. If so, deductions of state foundation aid to school districts to pay for performance-based EdChoice and Jon Peterson Special Needs scholarships may increase while district expenditures may decrease due to educating fewer students. EdChoice scholarships are the lesser of the tuition at the chartered nonpublic school the student chooses to attend or \$4,650 for students in grades K-8 and \$6,000 for students in grades 9-12. Jon Peterson Special Needs scholarships are the lesser of the tuition for the alternate provider or the special education funding calculated for the student, which is equal to the formula amount (\$6,020) plus the applicable special education amount, up to \$27,000.

Additionally, more students may qualify for renewal of income-based EdChoice scholarships and Cleveland scholarships. However, these scholarships are limited by an appropriation.

Department of Education administrative costs

Several other provisions of the bill appear likely to lead to additional administrative costs for ODE, which is required to:

- Establish ODC. The bill requires ODC to produce, by December 31, 2021, the dyslexia guidebook regarding the best practices and methods for universal screening, intervention, and remediation. It also permits ODC to make the various recommendations regarding teacher certification and professional development noted above.
- Assist school districts and other public schools in establishing multidisciplinary teams to support the identification, intervention, and remediation of dyslexia.
- Develop reporting mechanisms for districts and schools to submit the required information and data to the Department.
- Develop academic standards for kindergarten in reading and writing that incorporates a structured literacy program.
- Produce a report to the General Assembly by December 31, 2021, concerning the financial costs incurred by no more than four school districts that have already implemented dyslexia screenings, identification, and remediation services similar to those prescribed in the bill.