

**BILL:** Senate Bill 734  
**TITLE:** Education – Students with Reading Difficulties – Screenings and Interventions  
**DATE:** February 26, 2019  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**COMMITTEE:** Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 734, because it would establish in statute a new, comprehensive set of standards and requirements pertaining to the screening, identification, and instruction and monitoring of students with reading difficulties.

MABE appreciates this bill's intent to facilitate the screening, identification, and provision of instructional responses for students learning to read. However, MABE opposes this bill because it does not provide an appropriate balance of state accountability and local discretion to achieve goals for student learning through locally developed reading instruction programs and strategies.

Under this bill, beginning in the 2020–2021 school year, each local school system would be required to ensure that a student is screened to identify if the student is at risk for reading difficulties. The bill mandates that the screening instruments meet the following tiered assessment standards:

- Prekindergarten: phonological awareness and phonemic awareness skills.
- Kindergarten: (i) phonological awareness and phonemic awareness skills; (ii) knowledge of letter names and sound associations for uppercase and lowercase letters; and (iii) normed rapid automatized naming.
- First Grade or above: (i) phonological awareness and phonemic awareness skills; (ii) knowledge of letter names and sound associations for uppercase and lowercase letters; (iii) normed rapid automatized naming; (iv) automatic and fluent single-word recognition with nonsense and real words; and (v) oral reading fluency.

This legislation would also require that, if the screening results indicate that a student is at risk of reading difficulties, the school system must: (i) conduct an informal diagnostic assessment of the student to determine the specific areas of instructional need for supplemental reading instruction; (ii) provide supplemental reading instruction to address the student's identified areas of need; and (iii) notify the parents. School systems would be required to set a schedule, with intervals of not more than 10 weeks, for progress monitoring of students who receive supplemental reading instruction. If progress monitoring data reflect insufficient progress, the school system must adjust the supplemental reading instruction to ensure that the student is making adequate progress toward grade level reading standards.

The bill defines "supplemental reading instruction" as evidence-based, sequential, systemic, explicit, and cumulative instruction or intervention to mastery of foundational reading skills including phonological or phonemic awareness and processing, phonics, and vocabulary to support development of decoding, spelling, fluency, and reading comprehension skills to meet grade level curriculum.

As this Committee knows, MABE generally opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate curriculum, courses of instruction, assessments, or graduation requirements, firmly believing that this role belongs to local boards of education in conjunction with the State Board of Education. Exceptions to this rule are rare. In creating the State Board and local boards of education, the General Assembly has delegated to them the responsibility for guiding and delivering a high quality statewide system of public education through state standards and accountability measures, and locally governed and administered curriculum, teaching, and learning.

Again, MABE opposes the overall approach of this legislation to set forth in statute the method of assessment and instructional interventions for students learning to read.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 734.