

February 1, 2022

**Subject: Summary of SB 127, 1st. Sub
Early literacy outcomes improvement**

To whom it may concern:

SB 127, 1st Sub. (Early literacy outcomes improvement) is Sen. Millner’s attempt at pushing Utah’s public schools to have 70% of students at grade level in literacy by the end of 3rd grade. Her target date for achieving that 70% threshold is July 1, 2027. At present Utah schools stand at about 44%, so this is an ambitious goal.

The bill proposes several simultaneous efforts to achieve that goal. First, a statewide literacy panel[[1]](#footnote-1) will be the research base LEAs and the State Board will turn to for effective learning modules, curricula and other teacher resources.[[2]](#footnote-2) The 1st Sub requires LEAs to select early literacy curricula and intervention programs[[3]](#footnote-3) that are based around the science of reading, as advised by the statewide literacy panel.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Second, all elementary school teachers and principals[[5]](#footnote-5) must take a science of reading course,[[6]](#footnote-6) and pass a literacy preparation assessment.[[7]](#footnote-7) The science of reading course is almost certain to be LETRS,[[8]](#footnote-8) and teachers will have the option of demonstrating competency instead of taking the assessment.

Third, the State Board will provide trained literacy coaches to schools with low literacy rates. These literacy coaches will coach teachers in grades K-3.[[9]](#footnote-9) At a minimum, schools with low literacy rates include schools in the bottom ¼ of schools in literacy performance (as defined by the State Board) and schools participating in the Partnerships for Student Success Grant Program (PSSGP).[[10]](#footnote-10) Fourth, regional professional learning consultants will support the efforts of LEAs and RESAs in designing research-informed/-based professional learning that meet existing standards.

The bill also requires the State Board to “partner” with a private business or non profit that will “annually provide personal, home-use, age-appropriate printed books or digital books with accompanying reading devices to K-3 students who attend a Title 1 school or a school in the PSSGP. The State Board will also “contract” with one or more organizations with expertise organizing community resources to train and coach parent engagement coordinators.[[11]](#footnote-11)

To accomplish these elements, the State Board will administer several grant programs. One grant program will guarantee that licensees do not have to pay for the first taking of the literacy preparation assessment.[[12]](#footnote-12) Another grant program will pay the costs for an LEA to provide the literacy preparation program (LETRS).[[13]](#footnote-13)

The bill also has provisions more directly related to higher education. Because they are not my clients, I have not summarized those portions.

1. The panel may have up to 6 members, and may include legislators. There is good reason to believe professors from Utah State’s Department of Education will form the core of this panel. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In many ways, this bill is designed to guarantee that LEAs implement practices based around the science of reading and instruction in the science of reading. The members of this panel must already be experts in the science of reading, so the research base will reflect that. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is not clear what these intervention programs might be. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The term “as advised” is designed to leave open the possibility that LEAs may find an appropriate curriculum that the literacy panel had not previously evaluated. In other words, the panel is not supposed to usurp the LEA board’s authority over the LEA’s curriculum. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This list includes special education teachers who do not exclusively serve students with significant cognitive disabilities, LEA administrators over literacy, school psychologists working in an elementary school, an elementary school literacy coach who serves K-3, and current or prospective elementary school principals. All of these people must take this literacy preparation course by July 1, 2025. Teachers within 1 year of retirement and dual language educators (in the target language) also do not need to take the course. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. If someone on the list has already taken the early literacy program (i.e., LETRS), that person does not need to take it again. In addition, all license applicants – whether they come through university or Appel preparation programs – must receive instruction in the science of reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The 1st Sub. does not require principals to take this literacy preparation assessment. Rather, they and other “LEA leaders” must take a course in “change management,” which the State Board shall provide. In addition, the literacy preparation assessment does not presently exist, or at least the State Board has not chosen what that assessment may be. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. LETRS is the module that Mississippi used, whose early literacy program Sen. Millner is copying. In addition, the State Board has trained nearly 9,000 teachers in LETRS, so replacing it with a different course would upset the LEAs and teachers. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The bill acknowledges that these coaches are SBE, not LEA employees. Whereas the original bill directed the State Board to determine lines of authority in this relationship, the 1st Sub. describes the roles that these coaches may play, and attempts to make LEA leadership and the SBE partners in selecting which coach will go to which school. The State Board creates a pool of qualified coaches, and then each LEA works with the State Board to select a coach for a given school. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Schools participating in this grant program must also now focus on grade 3 mathematics, in addition to the other subject areas already in statute. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It is not clear who these coordinators would be, what they would do, whether there is an organization Sen. Millner or others already have in mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. License applicants may take the literacy preparation assessment up to 3 times. The applicant is responsible for the cost of taking the assessment after the first time. Educator preparation programs, including Appel programs, will have an obligation to provide ongoing support for license applicants whom they prepared, but did not pass the assessment on the first or second try. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Whether some or all LEAs will to have to come out of pocket to provide this training will depend in large measure on how much the Legislature appropriates. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)