LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS

Bill No: SB 93 **49th Legislature, 1st Session, 2009**

Short Title: Neuroscience-Driven Pilot Program

Sponsor(s): Senator Pete Campos

Analyst: James Ball **Date: February 1, 2009**

Bill Summary:

SB 93 requires the Public Education Department (PED) to establish a pilot research program in which a contractor provides participating schools with an intensive neuroscience-driven language development and reading proficiency intervention for participating students by requiring PED to:

- adopt an application process for participating schools;
- adopt selection criteria for a contractor to provide a program that includes neuroscience-based, scientifically validated intervention methods and instructional tools proven to accelerate learning, cognitive ability, and language and reading proficiency;
- the bill also requires participating schools to select high-risk, English-language learning, special education, and below-proficient-reading students for the program and to assess each student selected, before entering and after leaving the program, to measure the studentôs progress;
- consider results for inclusion within a school improvement, corrective action, and school restructuring framework; and
- report to the LESC regarding the assessment of participating studentsôprogress in the pilot program no later than October 1, 2011.

Fiscal Impact:

- $2.0 million is appropriated from the General Fund to PED for expenditure in FY 10 and FY 11.

- At the end of FY 11, any unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

Fiscal Issues:

PED notes in its analysis of SB 93 that because major fiscal implications depend on the scope of work to be developed in the required request for proposals (RFP) to select a contractor for this project, the cost per student and per school cannot currently be projected.

Issues:

According to PED, the time teachers spend in professional development makes a significant difference in implementing a new curriculum and intervention. Extended opportunities to better understand student learning, curriculum materials and instruction, and subject-matter content can boost the performance of both teachers and students, therefore, a comprehensive training and coaching system would need to be incorporated into the RFP for implementation of a new

curriculum and intervention strategies. PED believes that the time required for a new curriculum to show any results is at least three to five years.

PED will also be responsible for reporting on the results of the pilot in October 2011. Careful attention will need to be paid to data collection of progress made by individual students at each of the pilot schools. As with all school reform research, it is often difficult to isolate and show specific impact of one intervention on student achievement when many interventions are utilized with students. In addition, PED states that recent history mandating specific programs in schools has not yielded positive results.

Technical Issues:

PEDôs analysis of SB 93 notes that the term ñresearchò used in the bill conflicts somewhat with the ñpilot projectò nature of the proposed activity. It is unclear if the intent is to establish a research project on a specific reading intervention program or a pilot program of an existing research-based curriculum.

Background:

According to PED, in general, the term neuroscience-driven language development is geared toward using multiple senses in directing instruction. For instance, the program might use the auditory, visual, and language skills in tandem to direct instruction in literacy. These kinds of programs are designed to leverage neuroscience principles in order to increase student literacy by helping the brain more efficiently process information. In addition to building specific skills, these programs work with memory, attention, processing rate, and sequencing. The idea is to re-wire the brains of struggling learners to establish new neuro-pathways.

The neuroscience-driven language development assumes the premise that the ability to process language is a prerequisite to learning content. Therefore, using a multi-sensory approach of visual and auditory techniques to enrich language development will assist struggling learners in achieving proficiency.

PED also reports that while a focus on curriculum is important, the research into successful schools has also provided insights into common practices in high-performing schools serving high-poverty student populations. The Center for Public Education, an initiative of the National School Boards Association and the National School Boards Foundation, synthesized the most relevant studies and identified five consistently identified practices:

- increased instructional time;
- ongoing diagnostic assessment;
- parents as partners in learning;
- professional development to improve student achievement; and
- collaboration among teachers and staff.

Related Bill:

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