

---

## House Education

---

*June 27, 2013*

The committee met to consider four bills.

**HB 198 Neilson, Ed** - (PN 1924) Amends the Public School Code adding that Dyslexia Screening Pilot Program Law, which establishes a Dyslexia Screening Pilot Program to provide evidence-based early screening and evidence-based intervention services for children with risk factors for dyslexia, such as low phonemic awareness. The Department of Education shall create the program and pilot it in at least three school districts that meet the criteria outlined in the bill. The program shall operate for three full school years and evaluate the effectiveness of evidence-based early reading assistance programs for children with risk factors for dyslexia and to evaluate whether those programs can reduce future special education costs. The bill outlines responsibilities of the department and school districts. - The bill was unanimously **reported as committed**.

Rep. Ed Neilson (D-Philadelphia) explained that the bill would create a Dyslexia Screening Pilot Program in three school districts selected by the administration and Department of Education.

Rep. Kathy Rapp (R-Warren) asked how a child is currently identified to have a learning disability. Rep. Neilson stated "most testing in the public education is good but it's not until middle school when they finally find that the child has a problem." He shared his personal experience of his son's early dyslexia diagnosis.

Rep. Rapp asked if Rep. Neilson is aware that school districts are required to perform an evaluation of a child and determine what disability the child has. Rep. Neilson said he is aware of the current protocol and noted that he met with private contractors that perform the evaluations. "A lot of kids slip through the cracks and we are trying to patch those cracks with the legislation," he stated. Rep. Rapp noted that she would support the bill but emphasized "those evaluations, in my opinion, are not thorough enough to establish a baseline for where a child is reading and then to determine the IEP for the child to become a better reader."

Rep. Will Tallman (R-York) questioned if dyslexia screening is available through Title I. Rep. Neilson responded "yes and no" and explained "they do not step in soon enough and students are sometimes misdiagnosed."

Rep. Tallman asked how the three school districts for the pilot program will be selected. Rep. Neilson indicated that school districts will submit a proposal to the Department of Education and the department will make the final determination.

Rep. Steve Santarsiero (D-Bucks) commended Rep. Neilson on the legislation. "The fact of the matter is that almost everything in education builds on an ability to read," he stated. "When a child has some kind of disability that inhibits that ability, it inhibits every other aspect of learning."

Minority Chairman James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia) echoed the comments of Rep. Santarsiero but noted "even if a child is believed to have a problem you still need parental consent to pursue that; if a parent does not want the intervention that is suggested then indeed that problem goes forward."

Rep. Rapp affirmed "the best situation for a child is when school districts and parents work in a partnership" and noted "it is up to school district itself to educate the parents on the entire process."

[HB 974 Brown, Rosemary](#) - (PN 1115) Amends the Public School Code to require a local school board to convene a public hearing on the use of Automatic Electronic Defibrillators (AEDs) and to require the placement of the AED units in public schools only after a majority vote by the school board. - The bill was unanimously **reported as amended**.

[A02656](#) by Clymer, requires the governing board of school entities to hold a public hearing on acquiring an AED for each school building within 90 days of the bill's effective date and every five years thereafter; a school entity that has acquired an AED for every school building does not have to hold a public hearing. The amendment was unanimously **adopted**.

Rep. Rosemary Brown (R-Monroe) explained AEDs are used to treat sudden cardiac arrest and are portable medical devices that are designed to analyze heart rhythms and deliver an electric shock to the heart to restore normal rhythm. "Although many schools have made the initiative to install AEDs, there has not been a consistent measure across the state to do this," she stated. "This brings a heightened awareness to conversation of AEDs and still allows for local control."

Chairman Paul Clymer (R-Bucks) noted the presence of Rachel Moyer, whose son passed away due to a sudden cardiac arrest. Chairman Clymer commended Moyer for her work as a national advocate for installing AEDs in school buildings.

[HB 969 Truitt, Dan](#) - (PN 1110) Amends the Public School Code, in professional employees, to further provide for definitions and require 75 percent of professional employees to have state certification in the subject matter they will teach with the remainder demonstrating satisfactorily a combination of experience, achievement and qualifications in basic skills, general knowledge, professional knowledge and practice and subject matter knowledge in the subject area that they will teach. - The bill was **passed over**.

[HB 1559 Farina, Frank](#) - (PN 2110) Amends the Public School Code requiring each school entity's professional development plan to include four hours of training in youth suicide awareness and prevention every five years for educators in buildings serving students in grades 6-12. The Department of Education, with the Department of Health, shall develop and make available on its website recommended guidelines and educational materials for the training. - The bill was unanimously **reported as committed**.

Rep. Frank Farina (D-Lackawanna), prime sponsor of the legislation, gave an overview. He shared his family's personal experience with suicide and explained that his brother-in-law was lost due to suicide three days before Christmas. "There were signs that were there," he stated. "I come from an educated family, my wife's a teacher. There was signs there we didn't even recognize. If we did he would most likely be with us today. I feel it's very important that we recognize and educate our teachers on suicide prevention and awareness."

Chairman Clymer questioned if drug and alcohol abuse are contributing factors for suicide. Rep. Farina indicated that his brother-in-law did not have drug or alcohol abuse issues but had a history of depression. Turning back to the bill, "I just think if we can save it would be a huge accomplishment but this has the potential to save hundreds or thousands of lives."

Rep. Mike Fleck (R-Huntingdon) commended Rep. Farina for the legislation. "Suicide is highest amongst the teens that are being bullied especially in the LGBT community," he stated. "I am hopeful this committee can pass a bullying bill that would also aid in identifying those that are in need."