

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Education

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BILL: SB 1816

INTRODUCER: Senator Rouson

SUBJECT: Task Force on Closing the Achievement Gap for Boys

DATE: March 29, 2021

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Jahnke	Bouck	ED	<b>Favorable</b>
2.			AED	
3.			AP	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 1816 establishes the Task Force on Closing the Achievement Gap for Boys within the Department of Education (DOE) to examine evidence-based strategies for closing the achievement gap for boys and to make recommendations to the department, the Governor, and the Legislature. The recommendations must address:

- Professional development for instructional personnel and school administrators.
- The selection of curriculum, supplemental materials, and classroom activities in early learning programs and K-12 schools.
- Academic, behavioral, and mental health supports to help educate and raise young men who are better prepared for success in school and in life.

The bill establishes the Commissioner of Education or a designee as chair of the task force. Other members of the task force must be appointed by August 1, 2021, including stakeholders appointed by the Governor, Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The bill requires the task force to convene by October 1, 2021, and upon the call of the chair thereafter. The task force must submit a report containing its recommendations to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 1, 2022.

The task force expires on June 30, 2022.

The bill has an indeterminate fiscal impact. See Section V.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2021.

**II. Present Situation:**

Low reading performance in 3rd grade predicts future poor academic performance, increased risk of not graduating from high school, and lower economic stability as an adult.<sup>1</sup> Girls have outscored boys in reading at ages 9, 13, and 17 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) every year since it was first administered in 1971, and as far back as the 1940s, educators found girls outscoring boys in reading comprehension and vocabulary.<sup>2</sup>

In Florida, boys had an average scale score on the 2019 NAEP reading assessment that was nine points lower than girls both in 4th grade (220 to 229) and in 8th grade (259 to 268).<sup>3</sup> Data from the 2018-2019 administration of Florida’s statewide, standardized English Language Arts (ELA) assessment shows that 44 percent of 3rd grade boys were reading below grade level, a four percentage point deficit as compared to girls (40 percent). The deficit is 12 percentage points for 10th grade boys.<sup>4</sup>

<b>2018-19 Florida Standards Assessment in ELA</b>			
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Percent of Female Students Scoring Below Grade Level</b>	<b>Percent of Male Students Scoring Below Grade Level</b>	<b>Percentage Point Deficit of Males Compared to Females</b>
3	40%	44%	4%
4	37%	46%	9%
5	39%	48%	9%
6	40%	51%	11%
7	41%	54%	13%
8	38%	49%	11%
9	40%	50%	10%
10	41%	53%	12%

Girls generally outperform boys in reading and writing in most school districts in the United States, regardless of the district’s demographics—girls are about half a grade ahead by 3rd grade, and almost a full grade ahead by 8th grade.<sup>5</sup> Gender achievement gaps in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade through 8<sup>th</sup> grade have narrowed significantly over the last decade, most notably in math.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Early Reading Research Confirmed, A Research Update on the Importance of Third-Grade Reading* (2013) at 3, available at <https://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-confirmed/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Brookings Institution, *The gender gap in reading* (2015), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-gender-gap-in-reading/> (last visited March 24, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> The Nation’s Report Card, *NAEP Data Explorer*, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE> (last visited March 24, 2021) (search query for Florida data on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading for grades 4 and 8, selecting gender as a variable data point).

<sup>4</sup> See Florida Department of Education, *PK-12 Public Schools*, <https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASPortal/main.do> (last visited March 24, 2021) (search query for state level data on the 2018-2019 statewide, standardized ELA assessment, including a gender comparison data point).

<sup>5</sup> Stanford Graduate School of Education, *New Stanford education study shows where boys and girls do better in math, English*, <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/new-stanford-education-study-shows-where-boys-and-girls-do-better-math-english> (last visited Mar. 24, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

There are some theories as to why the reading skills of boys fall behind that of girls, particularly in early years. Some theories attribute differences to environmental or cultural and societal causes or a teacher's treatment and expectations of a student and assumptions about how the student typically behaves.<sup>7</sup> A student's interest or motivation in the subject area could also be a factor. For example, boys are less likely to read for pleasure than girls.<sup>8</sup> One study has supported cultural-societal theories, suggesting further review of differential responses to school-based instruction as well as student interest and motivation, and noted that differences in pre-reading skills apparent in kindergarten are surmountable by later grades.<sup>9</sup>

Some instructional strategies have been identified as helping to improve boys reading skills, including:<sup>10</sup>

- Autonomy in selecting text, including informational texts, to increase interest and motivation to read.
- Robust classroom libraries with high-interest books.
- Small reading groups including common texts or subjects of interest.
- Setting a purpose for a reading activity.
- Providing flexible seating options.
- Incorporating movement into reading lessons.
- Differentiating instruction to ensure success.
- Explicit, systematic instruction including goalsetting with monitoring and feedback.

At least one school district in Florida has implemented an initiative to provide teacher training on strategies that can help close the reading gap for boys.<sup>11</sup> However, there has not been a statewide effort to understand and address the reading gap.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 1816 establishes the Task Force<sup>12</sup> on Closing the Achievement Gap for Boys within the Department of Education (DOE) to examine evidence-based strategies for closing the

<sup>7</sup> See The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Early Warning Confirmed, A Research Update on Third-Grade Reading* (2013) at 3, available at <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-EarlyWarningConfirmed-2013.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Tiffany Rudek, *Instructional Approaches That Increase Reading Achievement for Boys, Grades 3-6* (2015), available at <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2286&context=dissertations>.

<sup>9</sup> The Brookings Institution, *Girls, boys, and reading* (2015), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/girls-boys-and-reading/> (last visited March 24, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g., Ohio State University, *Strategies to Engage Boys in Reading (and the Girls, Too)*, <https://beyondpenguins.ehe.osu.edu/issue/arctic-and-anarctic-birds/strategies-to-engage-boys-in-reading-and-the-girls-too> (last visited March 24, 2021); Tiffany Rudek, *Instructional Approaches That Increase Reading Achievement for Boys, Grades 3-6* (2015), available at <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2286&context=dissertations>; Pinellas Education Foundation, *Closing the Gap: Presentation to the House Early Learning and Elementary Education Subcommittee* (March 9, 2021), available at [https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loadaddoc.aspx?PublicationType=Committees&CommitteeId=3106&Session=2021&DocumentType=Meeting\\_Packets&FileName=ele\\_3-9-21.pdf](https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loadaddoc.aspx?PublicationType=Committees&CommitteeId=3106&Session=2021&DocumentType=Meeting_Packets&FileName=ele_3-9-21.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Pinellas Education Foundation, *Closing the Gap* (2020), available at <https://pinellaseducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Closing-the-Gap.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> A "task force" means an advisory body created without specific statutory enactment for a time not to exceed 1 year or created by specific statutory enactment for a time not to exceed 3 years and appointed to study a specific problem and recommend a solution or policy alternative with respect to that problem. Its existence terminates upon the completion of its assignment. Section 20.03(8), F.S.

achievement gap for boys and to make recommendations to the DOE, the Governor, and the Legislature. The recommendations must address:

- Professional development for instructional personnel and school administrators.
- The selection of curriculum, supplemental materials, and classroom activities in early learning programs and K-12 schools.
- Academic, behavioral, and mental health supports to help educate and raise young men who are better prepared for success in school and in life.

The bill establishes the Commissioner of Education or a designee as chair of the task force. Other members of the task force must be appointed by August 1, 2021, as follows:

- Two members appointed by the Governor:
  - The parent of a boy enrolled in either the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program or the school readiness program.
  - The parent of a boy enrolled in a public elementary school.
- Five members appointed by the Senate President:
  - A school psychologist employed by a school district.
  - An elementary classroom teacher.
  - A prekindergarten teacher employed by a provider participating in the VPK Education Program or the school readiness program.
  - The executive director of an early learning coalition.
  - A member of the Senate.
- Five members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives:
  - A representative of a nonprofit organization that has conducted research or implemented a program designed to close the achievement gap for boys through specific instructional, behavioral, and mental health supports.
  - The superintendent of a school district that has implemented programming and strategies specifically to help close the achievement gap for boys through a partnership with one or more nonprofit organizations.
  - The director of an early learning provider participating in the VPK Education Program or the school readiness program.
  - The principal of a public elementary school.
  - A member of the House of Representatives.

The bill specifies that members may not receive compensation for serving on the task force, but may receive reimbursements for per diem and travel expenses.

The bill requires the task force to convene by October 1, 2021, and upon the call of the chair thereafter. The bill specifies that meetings may be held through teleconference or other electronic means.

The bill requires the DOE to provide staffing, administrative support, data, and other relevant information to the task force to help it carry out its responsibilities. The task force must submit a report containing its recommendations to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 1, 2022.

The task force expires on June 30, 2022.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2021.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The DOE may incur indeterminate expenses to facilitate the functions and meetings of the task force.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

The bill creates an unnumbered section of Florida Law.

**IX. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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