

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2218
By: Grusendorf
Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND

The traditional classroom instructional model is used by the majority of public education systems in Texas. Technological advances have made other teaching methods – such as online content delivery – possible. These advances have the opportunity to address individual student learning needs. For example, changing family circumstances cause many children to move frequently, disrupting the continuity of their learning. Gifted and talented students possess the ability to explore topics in great depth, as long as there is compelling and interesting material at their fingertips. Conversely, some students get lost in the shuffle of large class sizes and would benefit from a program that tracks their progress more closely and provides them with individualized instruction. Also, some children are engaged in other productive endeavors that make it difficult for them to attend class during regular school hours.

Virtual courses and programs use technology to deliver a significant portion of instruction through the Internet or in a virtual or remote setting. Virtual courses and programs allow students to work at an individualized pace that does not prohibit any student from working at a different grade level in any subject.

Current law, under S.B. 975 passed in 2001, provides for a pilot project at the Texas Education Agency to allow school districts to offer and get credit for electronic courses, however this law expires on September 1, 2003.

PURPOSE

C.S.H.B. 2218 permits the operation of virtual programs and courses by school districts under a pilot project in order to offer students greater educational flexibility and repeals the 2003 expiration date of the pilot project.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2218 amends the Education Code to include in the definition of an electronic course one in which a student and a teacher are in different locations for a majority of the student's instructional period. The bill authorizes a school district to offer electronic courses through a designated campus or a full-time program serving students throughout the district.

The bill requires each school district participating in the program to create and maintain on the district's website an "informed choice" report. The bill requires the Texas Education Agency to maintain a link to each district report. This report must include descriptions relating to course instruction and materials, essential knowledge and skills requirements, student placement, attendance reporting, campus policies, extracurricular activities, the teaching model, standardized assessment instruments, and school year calendar. The bill authorizes the commissioner of education (commissioner) to collect from each

participating school district a reasonable fee for paying any administrative costs of the program and grandfathered from the fee school districts already participating in the pilot.

The bill entitles a school district to receive federal, state, and local funding for a student enrolled in an electronic course in an amount equal to the funding the district is otherwise entitled to receive for a student enrolled in the district. The bill authorizes a school district to calculate the average daily attendance of a student enrolled in the course based on hours of contact with the student, the student's successful completion of a course, or a method approved by the commissioner.

The bill requires the commissioner to submit a report including methods proposed by school districts for funding electronic courses and an evaluation of these fiscal methods to the lieutenant governor and speaker of the house no later than December 1, 2006.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2003.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL TO SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 2218 modifies the original by amending and renumbering current provisions in Chapter 29, Education Code relating to electronic courses rather than adding a new section under Chapter 12. C.S.H.B. 2218 modifies the original by extending and clarifying the existing pilot project for school district electronic courses and permits districts to offer the courses in a campus or full-time program, rather than creating school district authority to charter a virtual campus.