

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 396
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Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND

In order to move school children successfully through the educational process, Texas schools should utilize the latest, most effective, and scientifically validated programs and curriculums which are proven to enhance learning and improve achievement. Current technology offers significant promise, and with the right software and other electronic tools, students will have a greater chance of overcoming many educational barriers and improving their academic performance.

Computer labs in schools are generally not cost effective in that they occupy valuable physical space and are not generally focused on teaching the critical technical and analytical skills required in the 21st century work environment. Wireless technologies, however, provide 1:1 access with ubiquitous online connectivity and the option of utilizing the computer labs for additional classroom space, thus saving money otherwise spent on new construction or portable buildings. From a teaching and learning perspective, the wireless laptop environment has also proven to have a meaningful impact on students' success.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Technology Immersion Pilot Project is to eliminate barriers to academic achievement through the analysis and assessment of these barriers and the provision of personal computers (with relevant educational content) to a significant number of students within a school district. C.S.S.B. 396 provides for the establishment of a Technology Immersion Pilot Project.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Education Agency in SECTION 1 (Section 32.151, Education Code) of this bill.

ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 396 amends the Education Code to authorize the Texas Education Agency (agency) to establish the technology immersion pilot project to provide a wireless mobile computing device to each student in a participating school, and implement the use of appropriate learning technologies to improve academic achievement in a participating school. The bill requires the agency to establish a procedure and develop criteria for the administration of the pilot project. The bill sets forth provisions regarding the administration of the pilot project.

The bill authorizes the agency to solicit and accept a gift, grant, or donation from any source for the implementation of the pilot project. The bill sets requirements for the use of such funds including wireless mobile computing devices, software and other equipment. The bill stipulates that project funds may not be used for the construction of a building or facility. The bill prohibits the agency from allocating more than \$1 million for a school participating in the pilot project.

The bill provides that a school district may apply to the agency for the establishment of a technology

immersion pilot project for the entire district or for a particular school or group of schools in the district. The bill requires the agency to select the participating districts and schools for the pilot project based on the district's or school's need for the pilot project. The bill sets forth criteria the agency is required to consider including a district's or school's access to educational resources and other problems that could be mitigated through the use of wireless mobile computing devices and other technologies. The bill requires the agency, if possible, to select at least five schools to participate in the pilot project with at least one pilot project including students in grades 6-12. The bill requires the agency, if possible, to select at least one entire school district and at least one entire school in a second district to participate in the pilot project.

The bill requires each participating school district or school to establish a community educational pipeline progress team. The bill requires the board of trustees of a participating school district, or of a district in which a participating school is located, to appoint individuals to the team, which may be composed of educators, district-level administrators, community leaders, parents of students who attend a participating school, and any other individual the board finds appropriate. The bill requires the team to develop an academic improvement plan that details how the pilot project should be implemented in the participating district or school. The bill sets forth requirements for the team to consider in developing the academic improvement plan.

The bill requires the team to make recommendations to the board on how the pilot project funds should be used to implement the academic improvement plan, and the team may recommend annually any necessary changes in the plan to the board. The bill stipulates that the agency must approve the plan or any changes before disbursing pilot project funds to the board.

The bill requires the board of trustees of each district participating in the pilot project to send an annual progress report to the agency stating the type of plan being used in the district or school, the academic progress of pilot project students, and if applicable, a comparison of pilot project student progress with student progress in the in the district classrooms that are not participating in the pilot project. The bill requires the annual report to include additional information such as: any elements of the project that contribute to improved student performance on assessments instruments, any cost savings, the effect on student dropout and enrollment in higher education, teacher performance, and parental and community involvement.

The bill provides that each student participating in the pilot project may retain the wireless mobile computing device provided under the pilot project as long as the student is enrolled in a school in a participating school district and may retain the wireless mobile computing device after the expiration of the pilot project.

The bill provides that the pilot project expires August 31, 2007, after which the agency may review the project based on the annual reports from the board of trustees of participating school districts. The bill authorizes the agency to include the review of the pilot project in the comprehensive annual report for the 2006-2007 school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon passage, or, if the Act does not receive the necessary vote, the Act takes effect September 1, 2003.

COMPARISON OF ENGROSSED TO SUBSTITUTE

C.S.S.B. 396 modifies the engrossed version by altering the requirements of the software, courses, and other appropriate learning technologies to be used in the pilot project.

