

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 1270
By: Eissler
Public Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Virtually identical legislation was passed last session. However, the program was never truly implemented for a number of reasons, the primary reason being that the legislation was permissive and the Texas Education Agency was extremely busy dealing with issues associated with Hurricane Katrina refugees.

Over the past decade rapid advances in neuroscience research have provided us with a fresh perspective on learning. Many of our students' learning challenges, previously thought insurmountable, can now be directly addressed with neuroscience tools and learning techniques designed to effectively close the gap between human performance and potential. With the significant promise that these discoveries hold and the vast gaps that we see between our students' academic achievement and their actual potential, Texas needs to truly pilot intensive, neuroscience-based reading and language interventions.

Neuroplasticity, simply stated, is the ability of the brain to make new connections and rewire itself in response to experience and learning. Breakthroughs in neuroscience and brain plasticity research have shown that we can now target and activate brain function considered foundational for all learning, and which underly language acquisition and reading skills.

Some of the cognitive skills addressed include working memory, attention, processing, and sequencing (the ability of the brain to process and sequence information). There is now an understood and proven direct link between brain function, neuroplasticity and success in the classroom. Neuroscience-based approaches build neural networks and cognitive functions that are critical to building strong language and reading skills. They prepare students to benefit from good teachers and good curriculum.

The established efficacy of neuroscience and brain plasticity approaches is rapid, significant, and scientifically validated. Language and reading gains that typically take years to achieve can now be accomplished in a matter of weeks. Technology advances have allowed us to take what we've learned in the research laboratory regarding how the brain processes information, how cognitive functions are strengthened through exercise and how the brain acquires language, and apply it in schools to achieve rapid, sustaining and meaningful results in the classroom. Delivery through technology allows for deployment that is wide, consistent, and cost effective.

As more fully described below, this bill requires the Commissioner of Education to develop a pilot program in which a participating campus provides intensive reading and language intervention to participating students. The program would devote specific attention to increasing cognitive ability, accelerating learning, and language proficiency. It would not implement a new type of curriculum, but would augment the existing TEKS with instructional tools

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Commissioner of Education in SECTION 1 of the bill. (Rulemaking authority that was previously discretionary would now be mandatory.)

ANALYSIS

The bill reenacts and amends Section 29.094, Education Code, to require the Commissioner of Education by rule to establish a pilot program in which a participating campus provides intensive reading and language intervention to participating students.

The bill authorizes a campus to apply to the Commissioner to participate. Only campuses that have failed to improve student performance in reading according to standards established by the Commissioner are eligible to participate in the pilot program. The bill sets forth criteria upon which such standards must be based.

The bill requires the Commissioner to adopt minimum criteria that a program must meet to be selected by a participating campus for use in providing intensive reading and language intervention, and sets forth certain requirements regarding the criteria. The bill requires a participating campus to submit a summary of the campus's proposed intensive intervention program to the Commissioner for approval. The Commissioner may approve only a program that follows the minimum criteria adopted by the Commissioner.

The bill requires the principal of a participating campus, in consultation with classroom teachers at the campus, to select students to participate in the pilot program. A participating campus is required to assess each selected student before the student enters and after the student transfers out of the pilot program to measure the student's progress.

The bill requires that, not later than December 31, 2008, any vendor of an intensive intervention program satisfying the criteria adopted by the Commissioner, in consultation with the Texas Education Agency and each school district with which a vendor contracts, shall provide the Legislature with a report describing student progress under the assessments administered to participating students.

The bill requires the Commissioner, notwithstanding any other law, to provide funding for the pilot program using not more than \$6 million of funding appropriated for purposes of Section 28.0211, Education Code.

The bill requires the Commissioner to adopt rules necessary to implement the intensive reading and language intervention pilot program.

The bill requires the Commissioner to make the pilot program available to participating campuses during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon passage, or, if the Act does not receive the necessary vote, the Act takes effect September 1, 2007.