

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2814
By: Eissler
Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Bilingualism is considered a marketable skill in an era of globalization. In order to maintain international competitiveness, language learning opportunities must be expanded. Enhancing language immersion programs can influence student achievement and ensure that Texas school children are adequately prepared for higher education and the 21st century workforce. Several proven technology support systems for language immersion already exist and should be used to increase student achievement.

As proposed, this bill directs the Commissioner of Education (commissioner) to establish a pilot project to implement and study language immersion programs and their effects

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Commissioner of Education in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish a language immersion pilot project in school districts selected by the commissioner. The purpose of this pilot project is for the Texas Education Agency (agency) to examine language immersion programs and their effect on a student's ability to advance to high school, graduate from high school, or prepare for college coursework or postgraduation employment.

This bill requires the commission to establish a procedure and to adopt criteria for agency administration of the pilot project. As part of the adopted criteria, the commissioner must require the agency to select only school districts or campuses that demonstrate factors including the following:

- a substantial enrollment of students with limited English proficiency or bilingual students;
- parent, teacher, and community support for the program;
- commitment to a language immersion program in a language other than English, as chosen by the district, for a minimum of three years in elementary grades;
- that they will offer in secondary grades at least one language program for a language other than English or the language used in the language immersion program; and
- the potential for expanding the programs across primary and secondary grades, in accordance with criteria specified in the bill.

The bill provides that the agency shall require a selected school district or campus to provide annual self-evaluations of progress towards the program goals.

The bill provides that the commissioner by rule shall require that, during the first year, a school district or campus must limit activities of the language immersion program to planning activities, including those specified in the bill, and expanding or improving existing language immersion programs, and further provides that the commissioner by rule shall develop procedures, as specified in the bill, to provide technical assistance to participating districts and campuses.

The bill sets forth specific procedures and criteria for selection of participating school districts and campuses, including geographic diversity, past performance in language instruction, and numerical limits on the number of participating districts and elementary schools.

The bill describes the funding mechanism for the program, including the source of funds, allowable and unallowable costs under the program, a limitation of \$5 million per year in expenditures for the language immersion pilot project (which is not applicable to an expenditure under Section 29.356(c), Education Code, as added by the bill), and permissible supplemental funds.

The bill describes the grant awards process, sources and permissible uses of, and limitations on the use of, grant funds. Grant awards during the 2007-2008 school year are limited to planning activities described in the bill, and are limited to five percent of the total amount required to fully implement the pilot program for the 2008-2009 school year.

This bill also requires the commissioner to enter into a contract to license language-learning software using language immersion methods and the software that will be made available online to a public school students and employees no later than Jan. 1, 2008. The bill provides that the commissioner may not expend more than \$4 million per year for such purpose, and that expenditures must be sufficient to support language learning opportunities for a maximum of one million public school students and employees for a maximum of three years.

This bill requires participating school districts and campuses to establish community educational pipeline progress teams to assist in the development and implementation of the pilot project. The board of trustees of participating districts, or districts with participating campuses, must appoint individuals to the team, and the bill specifies groups from whom the team may be drawn.

This team shall develop an academic improvement plan which describes how the pilot project should be implemented, and which shall consider those factors enumerated in the bill. This team will also recommend to the board of trustees the way in which the pilot project funds should be used to implement the academic improvement plan, and the team may annually recommend to the board any necessary changes to the academic improvement plan.

The agency must approve the academic improvement plan or any changes to the plan before project funds are disbursed.

The board of trustees of each participating district must provide an annual progress report to the agency by a date specified in the bill, and addressing the performance criteria specified in the bill. The agency is directed to perform an annual review of the pilot project, and must include a summary of the review in its comprehensive annual report required under Section 39.182, Education Code..

The agency must also contract with one or more educational research centers, during the 2010-2011 school year, to evaluate the project to determine if it should continue. The bill specifies a cost limitation of \$250,000 for such evaluation.

The section of law added by this bill establishing the pilot project expires September 1, 2011.

EFFECTIVE DATE

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

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL TO SUBSTITUTE

The original provides that the agency may not spend more than \$5 million per year for the pilot project. The substitute adds a provision specifying that this spending limitation does not apply to an expenditure related to a contract to license language-learning software using language immersion methods under Section 29.356(c) of the bill.

The substitute also adds provisions specifying that expenditures related to a contract to license language-learning software using language immersion methods may not exceed \$4 million per year, and must be sufficient to support language learning opportunities for a maximum of one million public school students and employees for a maximum of three years.