

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 136
By: Villarreal
Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Research shows that quality prekindergarten programs produce significant benefits for children. One recent Texas A&M University study found that every dollar spent on high-quality prekindergarten programs for a child produced at least a \$3.50 return in savings that would have been spent on that child's education later in life.

In Texas, a child is eligible for public school prekindergarten if the child is at least three years old and unable to speak and comprehend the English language, educationally disadvantaged, homeless, the child of an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States, the child of a member of the armed forces who was injured or killed while on active duty, or is or ever has been in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services following an adversary hearing.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many parents of eligible children are not aware of their children's eligibility. Additionally, the number of children in kindergarten meeting one of the prekindergarten eligibility standards is much higher than prekindergarten enrollment during the previous year in many school districts, indicating that many eligible children do not enroll. School district representatives have indicated that they develop their own prekindergarten outreach and public notification strategies without proper information or guidance from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) regarding successful strategies.

C.S.H.B. 136 requires TEA to develop joint strategies with other state agencies regarding methods to increase community awareness of prekindergarten programs through programs that provide information relating to public assistance programs. The bill requires TEA to report its actions to the legislature and requires school districts to report their actions to TEA.

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. 136 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop joint strategies with other state agencies regarding methods to increase community awareness of prekindergarten programs through programs that provide information relating to public assistance programs. The bill requires each school district to report annually to TEA the strategies implemented by the school district to increase community awareness of prekindergarten programs available in that district and to submit that report on a form prescribed by the commissioner of education. The bill authorizes the combination of such a report, at the discretion of the commissioner, with another report that the district submits to TEA. The bill requires TEA to post a report on TEA's Internet website not later than the 90th day after the date the agency receives the report from a school district.

C.S.H.B. 136 adds a temporary provision, set to expire March 1, 2010, to require TEA, not later than January 1, 2010, to conduct a study to identify effective methods of notifying parents of eligible children of the availability of prekindergarten programs. The bill requires that the study include research on providing information regarding prekindergarten programs through public, private, and nonprofit institutions that assist and support families with children eligible for prekindergarten programs. The bill requires TEA to make recommendations to school districts regarding the most effective methods of communicating this information, based on this study, not later than February 1, 2010. The bill adds a temporary provision, set to expire January 1, 2011, to require TEA to prepare and deliver a report detailing the strategies developed to the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and the presiding officer of each legislative standing committee with primary jurisdiction over primary and secondary education not later than December 1, 2010. The bill defines "prekindergarten program" to include prekindergarten programs provided by a private entity through a partnership with the school district.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the act does not receive the necessary vote, the act takes effect September 1, 2009.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 136 differs from the original by referring to prekindergarten programs rather than to prekindergarten classes as in the original. The substitute includes a definition of "prekindergarten program" not included in the original. The substitute adds a provision not in the original authorizing a district to combine reports submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The substitute adds a provision not in the original requiring TEA to post a report regarding the notification strategies implemented by a school district on TEA's Internet website.