

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 429
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Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Many children who ultimately fail in school start out with reading difficulties. One in four adults in Texas reads below the fifth grade level. Extensive research shows that children learn from the moment they are born. Early language skills, the foundation for later reading ability, are based primarily on the language to which a child is exposed as a result of talk from parents and other adults. Reading aloud to a child provides the richest exposure to language and also builds a child's motivation, curiosity, and memory. Research shows that children who hear fewer words in their first three years are less engaged in conversations and have dramatically smaller vocabularies than children who have greater early language experiences. Essential learning time is lost if language exposure is limited before a child enters kindergarten.

C.S.H.B. 429 provides the resources to make literacy promotion a standard component of pediatric primary care by requiring The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston to establish a competitive grant program to promote early literacy through the award of grants for the implementation of literacy programs or the expansion of existing programs. The bill authorizes a public or private entity, including a county, municipality, or other political subdivision, to apply for such grants and requires a literacy program funded by the grant to adhere strictly to the program model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center, including providing matching funds in an amount equal to the amount of the grant funds awarded, requiring health care practitioners to provide books to children during well-child examinations and maintain waiting rooms that encourage children to read, and to partner with local adult literacy providers to encourage parent literacy in appropriate circumstances. The bill also requires grant recipients to participate in ongoing monitoring and performance evaluations.

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. 429 amends the Education Code to require The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston to establish a competitive grant program to promote early literacy through the award of grants for the implementation of literacy programs or the expansion of existing programs and for the operation of those programs for a period of not less than two years. The bill requires the health science center to award grants in a manner that ensures that the literacy programs collectively operate in multiple communities that are geographically distributed throughout Texas and provide program services to approximately 50,000 children. The bill authorizes a public or private entity, including a county, municipality, or other political subdivision, to apply for the grant and sets forth application procedures. The bill sets forth additional factors the health science center is authorized to consider in determining whether to award a grant, including a community's need for a literacy program which the health science center is required to determine by considering certain community demographic characteristics and the applicant's ability to participate in monitoring and performance evaluations, to adhere to

published program guidelines, and to develop broad-based community support for a program creation or expansion, as well as the applicant's history of meeting the needs the community.

C.S.H.B. 429 requires the health science center to publish guidelines for the literacy programs funded by the grants, with the assistance of the Reach Out and Read National Center. The bill requires a literacy program funded by the grant to adhere strictly to the program model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center, to provide matching funds in an amount equal to the amount of the grant funds awarded, to require health care practitioners to perform certain duties; and to partner with local adult literacy providers to encourage parent literacy in appropriate circumstances. The bill authorizes the health science center to use program funds, in addition to awarding grants under the bill's provisions, to administer the competitive grant program and to purchase or contract to purchase discounted books for use by grant recipients. The bill authorizes a grant recipient to use grant funds awarded under these provisions only to cover costs related to implementing or expanding and operating a literacy program.

C.S.H.B. 429 requires the health science center, with the assistance of the Reach Out and Read National Center, to publish performance indicators, and it requires the health science center to use those indicators to monitor and evaluate grant recipients on an annual basis. The bill requires the health science center to report annually to the Senate Education Committee and the House Public Education Committee, or their successors, on the number of low-income children served, the number of participating health care practitioner volunteers and the estimated value of their services, and the extent to which each grant recipient adhered to the program model. The bill requires the health science center to establish and implement the competitive grant program required by the bill and, with the assistance of the Reach Out and Read National Center, to publish the guidelines for literacy programs funded under the bill not later than September 1, 2010; to submit a report to those committees regarding the implementation and status of the grant program not later than December 1, 2009; and to submit its initial annual report not later than December 1, 2011.

C.S.H.B. 429 requires the health science center to actively seek and apply for any available federal funds to assist in financing the grant program as soon as practicable, and it authorizes the health science center to use appropriated state funds and to accept public and private gifts, donations, grants of money, and in-kind contributions. The bill defines "competitive grant program," "health care practitioner," "health science center," and "literacy program."

C.S.H.B. 429 establishes that the bill does not make an appropriation, and that a provision of the bill that creates a new governmental program, creates a new entitlement, or imposes a new duty on a governmental entity is not mandatory during a fiscal period for which the legislature has not made a specific appropriation to implement the provision.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2009.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 429 removes a definition included in the original for "coordinating board," makes conforming changes, and grants the authority granted to the coordinating board in the original to The University of Texas Health Science Center. The substitute differs from the original by requiring the health science center to award grants under the competitive grant program to promote early literacy to applicants in a manner ensuring that the literacy programs collectively provide program services to approximately 50,000 children, rather than to 100,000 families as in the original. The substitute differs from the original by requiring health care practitioners volunteering in a literacy program funded through a grant awarded under the bill to encourage parents to read to their children to develop preliteracy skills, whereas the original requires that health care practitioner volunteers to encourage parents to read to their children and teach their

children to read. The substitute adds a provision not in the original requiring a literacy program so funded to partner with local adult literacy providers to encourage parent literacy in appropriate circumstances.

C.S.H.B. 429 removes a provision included in the original requiring an application for a grant under the program to require the applicant to provide certain data about the community in which the applicant proposes to operate or expand a literacy program, to describe the monitoring and evaluation process to which a grant recipient is subject, and to require the provision of other relevant information as determined by the health science center. The substitute differs from the original by authorizing, rather than requiring as in the original, the health science center to consider certain factors in determining whether to award a grant to an applicant under the bill's provisions, including considering the demonstrated need for a literacy program in the proposed community which the health science center is required to determine by considering certain community demographic characteristics, rather than which may be determined by considering those characteristics. The substitute differs from the original by requiring the health science center to publish guidelines for the literacy programs funded under the bill's provisions, rather than requiring the coordinating board to adopt standards for those programs as in the original, and makes conforming changes.

C.S.H.B. 429 adds provisions not in the original authorizing the health science center to use program funds for certain administration and book purchasing purposes in addition to awarding grants. The substitute adds language not in the original to authorize the use of grant funds by a grant recipient under the bill's provisions to cover costs related to contracting to purchase discounted books for use in the literacy program. The substitute adds a provision not in the original authorizing the health science center to accept in-kind contributions to assist in financing the grant program.

C.S.H.B. 429 adds a provision not in the original requiring the health science center, with the assistance of the Reach Out and Read National Center, to publish the literacy program guidelines required by the bill not later than September 1, 2010. The substitute adds provisions not in the original establishing that the bill does not make an appropriation and that a provision in the bill that creates a new governmental program or a new entitlement, or that imposes a new duty on a governmental entity, is not mandatory during a fiscal period for which the legislature has not made a specific appropriation to implement the provision.

C.S.H.B. 429 makes nonsubstantive clarifying and formatting changes.