

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 382
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Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

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 in the interactions between the child and 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 engaged in less conversations and have dramatically smaller vocabularies than children who have greater early language experiences. Essential time is lost if language exposure is limited before a child enters kindergarten.

S.B. 382 provides the resources to make literacy promotion a standard component of pediatric primary care by using the Reach Out and Read national model, which trains doctors and nurses to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and of giving books to children at pediatric checkups from six months to five years of age.

S.B. 382 requires 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 and sets forth provisions relating to the program.

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

S.B. 382 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 a 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 ongoing monitoring and performance evaluations, to adhere to published program guidelines, and to develop broad-based community support for a program's

implementation or expansion, as well as the applicant's history of meeting the needs of the community.

S.B. 382 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 a 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.

S.B. 382 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 Committee on Education 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.

S.B. 382 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."

S.B. 382 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.