

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1511
By: West
Public Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

It has been observed that, of the many school-based factors that affect a student's academic success, access to an effective educator is among the most important. Educator preparation and certification standards help to ensure that teachers are appropriately trained to handle the rigors of the classroom and to provide a quality education for their students. Such standards also help to reduce costly teacher turnover. Interested parties contend that the state's current minimum standards are insufficient with regard to indicating whether teachers have the necessary foundation of knowledge to be effective and the motivation to remain in the profession. S.B. 1511 seeks to address this problem as it relates to minimum standards for approval of educator preparation programs.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the State Board for Educator Certification in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 1511 amends the Education Code to require the State Board for Educator Certification to propose rules specifying the minimum academic qualifications required for an educator certificate, rather than requiring the board to specify the minimum academic qualifications required for such a certificate. The bill requires a person, in addition to satisfying applicable requirements and meeting applicable qualifications, in order to obtain a classroom teaching certificate, including a certificate qualifying a person to teach career and technical or special education classes, unless a certificate is awarded based on extraordinary circumstances, to maintain an overall grade point average of at least 2.5 on a four-point scale or the equivalent while enrolled in an educator preparation program or to earn a grade point average of at least 2.5 on a four-point scale or the equivalent for the last 60 semester credit hours attempted at a public or private institution of higher education.

S.B. 1511 authorizes the board, based on extraordinary circumstances as determined by the board in accordance with board rule, to award a certificate to a person who would be eligible for one if not for the person's failure to satisfy a grade point average requirement set out by the bill. The bill prohibits the board, in any year, from awarding certificates in such a way to more than five percent of an educator preparation program's candidates for certification for that year. The bill authorizes an educator preparation program to impose requirements or qualifications in addition to requirements and qualifications established by the bill's provisions.

S.B. 1511 requires performance standards for the Accountability System for Educator Preparation to include a requirement that an educator preparation program, including an undergraduate, alternative certification, or postbaccalaureate program, admit only an applicant for admission who has, except as otherwise provided, maintained an overall grade point average of at least 2.5 on a four-point scale or the equivalent on any course work previously attempted at a public or private institution of higher education or earned a grade point average of at least 2.5

on a four-point scale or the equivalent for the last 60 semester credit hours attempted at a public or private institution of higher education; who demonstrates, in a manner determined by the board, basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; and who either has successfully completed at least 18 semester credit hours in the subject-specific content area in which the applicant is pursuing certification or, if the applicant is seeking initial certification, has achieved a satisfactory level of performance on a content certification examination, which may be a content certification examination administered by a vendor approved by the commissioner for purposes of administering such an examination for the year for which the applicant is applying for admission to the program.

S.B. 1511 requires the performance standards for the accountability system to permit an educator preparation program to admit an applicant who fails to satisfy the grade point average requirement, provided that not more than five percent of the total number of applicants admitted to the program in a year fail to satisfy the requirement, and, for each such applicant admitted, the director of the program determines, based on documentation provided by the applicant, that the applicant's work, business, or career experience demonstrates achievement and maintains and makes available at the request of the board such documentation.

S.B. 1511 requires the board to determine the satisfactory level of performance required for each certification examination and to require a satisfactory level of examination performance in English language arts, reading, mathematics, science, and social studies for the issuance of a generalist or multi-subject certificate.

S.B. 1511 requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA), not later than December 1 of each even-numbered year, to prepare, publish, and submit to the legislature a report regarding public school staffing and the working conditions for public school educators. The bill requires the report to be posted on the TEA's Internet website and to contain, at a minimum, the following staffing information for each public school campus: the percentage of teachers assigned to teach subjects outside the teacher's area of certification or expertise; the percentage of teachers employed under emergency certificates; teacher turnover rates; and the number and percentage of teachers who have less than one year of teaching experience.

S.B. 1511 requires the report to contain information regarding working conditions in each school district based on a statewide survey conducted by the TEA of educators. The bill requires the survey, in order to encourage the uninhibited participation of educators, to be designed to prevent the disclosure of the identity of a survey participant. The bill requires the TEA to include in the report recommendations for improving the working conditions at campuses identified by the TEA, based on the results of the survey, as having poor working conditions.

S.B. 1511 requires the commissioner of education to seek from private sources the funding necessary to pay the costs for the creation, implementation, and analysis of the statewide survey. The bill prohibits the TEA, if the commissioner does not acquire the necessary funding to pay the costs of the survey, from preparing, publishing, or submitting the report for the applicable year.

S.B. 1511 limits the applicability of its provisions relating to training requirements and performance standards for educator preparation to a person admitted to an educator preparation program on or after January 1, 2012.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2011.