

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1557
By: Carona
Education
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Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Ensuring quality public education is a fundamental and enduring duty of the state. As education methods evolve, so does the state's accountability system. As policymakers consider changes to accomplish better accountability and more effective assessments, it is paramount that local input and contemporary research be considered. School districts around the state are one of our best resources to create a next generation accountability system that is effective, efficient, and innovative.

S.B. 1557 creates a Texas High Performance Schools Consortium. Based on an application process, the consortium will be comprised of up to 20 school districts and one open-enrollment charter school. The consortium is granted flexibility to adopt new approaches to curriculum and assessment requirements. The consortium will emphasize digital learning, high priority "power standards," and an accountability system that reduces the number of assessments and allows for greater parent and community involvement.

S.B. 1557 amends current law relating to the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the commissioner of education in SECTION 1 (Section 7.0561, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter C, Chapter 7, Education Code, by adding Section 7.0561, as follows:

Sec. 7.0561. TEXAS HIGH PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS CONSORTIUM. (a) Defines, in this section, "consortium."

(b) Establishes the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium (consortium) to inform the governor, legislature, and commissioner of education (commissioner), concerning methods for transforming public schools in this state by improving student learning through the development of innovative, next-generation learning standards and assessment and accountability systems.

(c) Authorizes the commissioner, from among school districts and eligible open-enrollment charter schools that apply using the form and in the time and manner established by commissioner rule, to select not more than 20 participants for the consortium. Requires the districts selected by the commissioner to represent a range of district types, sizes, and diverse student populations, as determined by the commissioner in accordance with commissioner rule. Requires an open-enrollment charter school, to be eligible to participate in the consortium, to have been awarded an exemplary distinction designation under Subchapter G (Distinction Designations), Chapter 39 (Public School System Accountability), during the preceding school year.

(d) Prohibits the number of students enrolled in consortium participants from being greater than a number equal to five percent of the total number of students enrolled in public schools in this state according to the most recent Texas Education Agency (TEA) data.

(e) Requires that the application process under Subsection (c) require school districts and open-enrollment charter schools applying to participate in the consortium to submit a detailed plan designed to both support improved instruction of and learning by students and provide evidence of the accurate assessment of the quality of learning on campuses. Authorizes the plan submitted by a school district to designate the entire district or one or more district campuses as proposed consortium participants. Requires that the plan submitted by a district or open-enrollment charter school include:

(1) a clear description of each assessed curricular goal included in the learning standards adopted in accordance with Subsection (f)(2);

(2) a plan for acquiring resources to support teachers in improving student learning;

(3) a description of any waiver of an applicable prohibition, requirement, or restriction the district or charter school would want to apply for; and

(4) any other provision required by the commissioner.

(f) Requires the commissioner, in consultation with interested school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and other appropriate interested persons, to adopt rules applicable to the consortium, according to the following principles for a next generation of higher performing public schools:

(1) engagement of students in digital learning, including engagement through the use of electronic textbooks and instructional materials adopted under Subchapters B (State Funding, Adoption, and Purchase) and B-1 (State-Developed Open-Source Textbooks), Chapter 31 (Textbooks), and courses offered through the state virtual school network under Subchapter 30A (State Virtual School Network);

(2) emphasis on learning standards that focus on high-priority standards identified in coordination with districts and charter schools participating in the consortium;

(3) use of multiple assessments of learning capable of being used to inform students, parents, districts, and charter schools on an ongoing bases concerning the extent to which learning is occurring and the actions consortium participants are taking to improve learning; and

(4) reliance on local control that enables communities and parents to be involved in the important decisions regarding the education of their children.

(g) Requires the commissioner to convene consortium leaders periodically to discuss methods to transform learning opportunities for all students, build cross-district and cross-school support systems and training, and share best practices tools and processes.

(h) Authorizes the commissioner or a school district or open-enrollment charter school participating in the consortium, for purposes of this section, to accept gifts, grants, or donations from any source, including a private entity or governmental entity.

(i) Authorizes the commissioner, to cover administration costs, to charge a fee to a school district or open-enrollment charter school that is selected to participate in the consortium.

(j) Requires the commissioner, with the assistance of school districts and open-enrollment charter schools participating in the consortium, to submit reports concerning the performance and progress of the consortium to the governor and the legislature not later than December 1, 2012, and not later than December 1, 2014. Requires that the report submitted not later than December 1, 2012, include any recommendation by the commissioner concerning legislative authorization for the commissioner to waive a prohibition, requirement, or restriction that applies to a consortium participant. Requires that that report also include a plan for an effective and efficient accountability system for consortium participants that balances academic excellence and local values to inspire learning and, at the state level, contingent on any necessary waiver of federal law, may incorporate use of a stratified random sampling of students or other objective methodology to hold consortium participants accountable while attempting to reduce the number of state assessment instruments that are required to be administered to students. Requires the commissioner to seek a federal waiver, to any extent necessary, to prepare for implementation of the plan if enacted by the legislature. Provides that this subsection expires January 1, 2018.

SECTION 2. (a) Requires the commissioner, not later than January 1, 2012, to adopt rules as required under Section 7.0561, Education Code, as added by this Act.

(b) Requires the commissioner, not later than March 1, 2012, to make available to school districts and open-enrollment charter schools the application forms required under Section 7.0561, Education Code, as added by this Act. Requires the commissioner to require school districts and open-enrollment charter schools that intend to apply to participate in the consortium to submit applications not later than June 1, 2012.

(c) Requires the commissioner, not later than July 1, 2012, to formally select participants for the consortium established under Section 7.0561, Education Code, as added by this Act. Requires the consortium to begin operating not later than the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2011.