

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

S.B. 1557  
By: Carona  
Public Education  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

Ensuring quality public education is a fundamental and enduring duty of the state. As policymakers consider changes to accomplish better accountability and more effective assessments in the public school system, it is essential that input from school districts around the state, as well as contemporary research, be considered. S.B. 1557 establishes a Texas High Performance Schools Consortium composed of up to 20 school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to inform policymakers concerning methods for transforming public schools in Texas by improving student learning through the development of innovative next-generation learning standards and assessment and accountability systems.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the commissioner of education in SECTIONS 1 and 2 of this bill.

### **ANALYSIS**

S.B. 1557 amends the Education Code to establish the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium to inform the governor, legislature, and commissioner of education concerning methods for transforming public schools in Texas by improving student learning through the development of innovative, next-generation learning standards and assessment and accountability systems.

S.B. 1557 authorizes the commissioner to select not more than 20 participants for the consortium 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. The bill 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. The bill requires an open-enrollment charter school, in order to be eligible to participate in the consortium, to have been awarded an exemplary distinction designation during the preceding school year.

S.B. 1557 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 Texas according to the most recent Texas Education Agency data. The bill requires the application process to 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. The bill authorizes the plan submitted by a school district to designate the entire district or one or more district campuses as proposed consortium participants.

S.B. 1557 requires the plan submitted by a district or open-enrollment charter school to include a clear description of each assessed curricular goal included in the learning standards adopted in

accordance with the bill's provisions; a plan for acquiring resources to support teachers in improving student learning; a description of any waiver of an applicable prohibition, requirement, or restriction the district or charter school would want to apply for; and any other provisions required by the commissioner.

S.B. 1557 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:

- engagement of students in digital learning, including engagement through the use of electronic textbooks and instructional materials adopted under provisions of law relating to state funding, adoption, and purchase of textbooks and state-developed open-source textbooks, and courses offered through the state virtual school network;
- emphasis on learning standards that focus on high-priority standards identified in coordination with districts and charter schools participating in the consortium;
- use of multiple assessments of learning capable of being used to inform students, parents, districts, and charter schools on an ongoing basis concerning the extent to which learning is occurring and the actions consortium participants are taking to improve learning; and
- reliance on local control that enables communities and parents to be involved in the important decisions regarding the education of their children.

S.B. 1557 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. The bill authorizes the commissioner or a school district or open-enrollment charter school participating in the consortium to, for purposes of the bill's provisions, accept gifts, grants, or donations from any source, including a private entity or governmental entity. The bill authorizes the commissioner, to cover the costs of administering the consortium, to charge a fee to a school district or open-enrollment charter school participating in the consortium.

S.B. 1557 requires the commissioner, with the assistance of the 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. The bill requires the report submitted not later than December 1, 2012, to 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. The bill requires the report to 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, authorizes the report to 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. The bill requires the commissioner to seek a federal waiver, to any extent necessary, to prepare for implementation of the plan if enacted by the legislature. The bill establishes that its provisions relating to reports concerning the performance and progress of the consortium expire January 1, 2018.

S.B. 1557 requires the commissioner, not later than January 1, 2012, to adopt rules as required by the bill's provisions. The bill requires the commissioner, not later than March 1, 2012, to make the application forms available to school districts and open-enrollment charter schools and to require school districts and open-enrollment charter schools that intend to apply to participate in the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium to submit applications not later than June 1, 2012.

S.B. 1557 requires the commissioner, not later than July 1, 2012, to formally select participants for the consortium and requires the consortium to begin operating not later than the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year.

S.B. 1557 defines "consortium."

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

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