

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2344
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Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Concerns have been raised by educators that the current system of assessing students' writing skills is insufficient and can, in some cases, hinder growth in students. The writing exams incorporated into the STAAR reading exam briefly assess a student's abilities, typically within a few lines. These exams are graded based on a metric and encourage writing to be taught in a formulaic fashion. Teaching students to write to a formula hampers their writing development and causes many talented young writers to lose confidence and develop a disdain for the subject. When students lose their passion for learning, they also lose their ability to achieve their highest potential. In light of these concerns, some have pointed to Dripping Springs Independent School District's recent participation in a pilot program for a portfolio-based writing assessment and would like to see a similar assessment be made available to other school districts. C.S.H.B. 2344 allows school districts to adopt a writing portfolio assessment as a component of the required reading exam.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2344 amends the Education Code to authorize a public school district to elect to use a writing portfolio assessment to assess writing performance for students enrolled in the district as an alternative to administering the portion of a statewide standardized reading test for grades three through eight or an English I or English II end-of-course test that is not presented in a multiple choice format. The bill requires a district that elects to use a writing portfolio assessment to design the assessment in consultation with a public or private institution of higher education and submit the assessment to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for approval.

C.S.H.B. 2344 requires TEA to approve the assessment if the assessment is:

- determined by the public or private institution of higher education that consulted on the design of the assessment to be valid and reliable; and
- designed to assess:
 - a student's mastery of the essential knowledge and skills in writing through timed writing samples;
 - improvement of a student's writing skills from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year;

- a student's ability to follow the writing process from rough draft to final product; and
- a student's ability to produce more than one type of writing style.

C.S.H.B. 2344 requires a district that elects to use a writing portfolio assessment to adopt a policy allowing the assessment to be scored by a classroom teacher assigned to the same campus as the student to whom the assessment is administered. The bill authorizes the district to coordinate with the regional education service center for the district's region in grading the assessments. The bill establishes that a district that elects to use a writing portfolio assessment is not required to administer the portion of a statewide standardized reading test for grades three through eight or an English I or English II end-of-course test that is not presented in a multiple choice format during the period the district is administering the writing portfolio assessment. TEA, to the greatest extent practicable, must apply cost savings that result from the exemption to offset the costs accrued under the bill's provisions.

C.S.H.B. 2344 requires the commissioner of education to adopt rules as necessary to implement the bill's provisions. The bill applies beginning with the 2021-2022 school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2021.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 2344 may differ from the original in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute includes the following provisions that did not appear in the original:

- a requirement for a district that elects to use a writing portfolio assessment to design the assessment in consultation with a public or private institution of higher education and submit the assessment to TEA for approval;
- a requirement for TEA to approve of the assessment under certain circumstances;
- an authorization for such a district to coordinate with the regional education service center in grading the assessments; and
- a requirement for TEA, to the greatest extent practicable, to apply cost savings that result from the election of a writing portfolio assessment to offset the costs accrued under the bill's provisions.

While both the substitute and the original require the commissioner of education to adopt rules, the substitute changes the purpose for which the rules are adopted from allowing the portion of the test to be scored by a classroom teacher assigned to the same campus as the student to whom the test is administered to the necessary implementation of the bill's provisions. With regard to the scoring of the test by a classroom teacher assigned to the same campus as the applicable student, the substitute instead requires a district to adopt a policy allowing that scoring.