

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1614
By: Dutton
Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

With the passage of H.B. 3 in 2019, public school districts were encouraged to expand prekindergarten options available to families. Instead of building new buildings for expanded prekindergarten, H.B. 3 encouraged school districts to partner with existing high-quality child-care programs in their communities. These partnerships provide children and working parents with high-quality prekindergarten programs and often provide wraparound care for hours outside of the traditional school day. Prekindergarten partnerships save taxpayers money, eliminate the need for school bonds, and open up more options for working parents and employers. Unfortunately, bureaucratic hurdles and slightly different eligibility thresholds have made these partnerships logistically difficult to execute at the community level, leaving children who may be eligible for enrollment in prekindergarten partnerships nevertheless unable to attend free prekindergarten. This has the unintended consequence of disincentivizing prekindergarten partnerships and keeping families from accessing free prekindergarten services they need. C.S.H.B. 1614 seeks to extend free prekindergarten eligibility to certain of the children participating in prekindergarten partnerships that are receiving state child-care subsidies through a grant program administered by the commissioner of education.

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 this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1614 amends the Education Code to require the commissioner of education to establish and administer a grant program to support public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools in increasing partnerships with community-based child-care providers to provide free prekindergarten classes. The bill authorizes a district or charter school to apply for a grant under the program in partnership with a community-based child-care provider. The bill requires a district or charter school to use money received under the grant program to fund the enrollment of eligible children in free prekindergarten classes through a partnership between the district or school and a provider and makes eligible to use the grant money for enrollment in a prekindergarten class a child who is at least three years of age and receives subsidized child-care services through the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) child-care services program. The bill caps the number of children for whom the commissioner may provide grants at 3,500. The bill requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to annually report to the legislature regarding the number of children enrolled in a free prekindergarten class through a grant awarded under the grant program. The bill's provisions apply beginning with the 2023-2024 school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2023.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 1614 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

Whereas the introduced directly extended eligibility for free prekindergarten to any child who is at least three years of age and eligible for subsidized child-care services provided through TWC's child-care services program, contingent on the prekindergarten class being provided through a partnership between a district or charter school and a community-based child-care provider, the substitute does not. The substitute instead provides for the creation of a grant program to be administered by the commissioner to support districts and charter schools to enter into partnerships with community-based child-care providers to provide free prekindergarten classes to children at least three years of age and receiving those subsidized child-care services, subject to a cap of 3,500 children who may enroll in a free prekindergarten class using grant funds.

The substitute includes a provision not present in the introduced that requires TEA to annually submit a report to the legislature on the number of children enrolled in a prekindergarten class through the grant program.