

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 4845
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Youth Health & Safety, Select
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

There are calls to recognize the importance of collaboration, evidence-based practices, and targeted resources in reducing incidents of bullying by providing public schools with the support they need to implement effective bullying prevention strategies. This will help to create a safer and more supportive learning environment for all students. C.S.H.B. 4845 seeks to establish a bullying prevention pilot program in Texas public schools and provide for grants to eligible public school districts to implement such a program on district campus to support bullying prevention efforts as a positive step toward promoting the well-being of Texas students.

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. 4845 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop a bullying prevention pilot program to reduce incidents of bullying on public school campuses and to award grants to eligible public school districts to implement the pilot program on district campuses. The bill requires TEA, in establishing the pilot program, to use research-based best practices for the prevention of bullying and collaborate with qualified experts and researchers with experience in child and youth psychology, mental health, and education.

C.S.H.B. 4845 requires the commissioner of education to award grants from funds appropriated for the purpose to districts that demonstrate a substantial need for bullying prevention, as determined by the commissioner and requires a school district that is awarded a grant to implement the pilot program at not more than three campuses in the district. The bill requires the commissioner to establish application criteria for a district to apply to receive a grant and to determine allowable uses of grant funds by a district. The bill requires TEA to use funds appropriated for purposes of the pilot program to provide technical assistance to grant recipients and authorizes TEA to provide the assistance through regional education service centers.

C.S.H.B. 4845 requires the commissioner to adopt rules to implement the bill's provisions and authorizes the commissioner to use funds otherwise available and to solicit or accept grants or donations for such implementation. The bill establishes that the commissioner is not required to develop the pilot program or award grants under the bill's provisions unless money is specifically appropriated for that purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2023.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 4845 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 required the commissioner of education to establish and administer a bullying prevention pilot program to help reduce bullying incidents in public schools, the substitute requires TEA to develop such a pilot program to reduce incidents of bullying on public school campuses. The substitute includes a provision absent from the introduced defining "pilot program."

Whereas the introduced authorized the commissioner, in establishing the pilot program, to collaborate with qualified experts and researchers in the areas of child and youth wellbeing, mental health, and education and other appropriate stakeholders, the substitute requires TEA, in developing the pilot program, to collaborate with qualified experts and researchers with experience in child and youth psychology, mental health, and education. The substitute includes requirements absent from the introduced for TEA to award grants to eligible districts to implement the pilot program on district campuses and to use research-based best practices for the prevention of bullying in developing the pilot program.

Whereas the introduced required the commissioner to establish and administer a grant program under which a district that demonstrates a substantial need for bullying prevention may receive a grant to implement the pilot program, the substitute requires the commissioner to award grants to such districts and includes a specification absent from the introduced that such a demonstration of a substantial need for bullying prevention is as determined by the commissioner.

Whereas the introduced authorized the commissioner to use funds provided through grants or donations sought and accepted by TEA to implement the pilot program, the substitute authorizes the commissioner to solicit or accept grants or donations for such purpose.

Whereas the introduced required TEA to use funds allocated for the grant program to provide technical assistance to grant recipients, including through regional education service centers, the substitute requires TEA to use funds appropriated for purposes of the pilot program for the provision of that assistance and authorizes TEA to provide that assistance through regional service centers.