

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 972
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Public Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

According to interested parties, there is an abundance of research available that illuminates how children learn to read and how schools can enhance that process, including research relevant to the fourth and fifth grades, typically the time in a child's education when the child is expected to start "reading to learn" as opposed to learning to read. Reading to learn, the parties continue, involves more than a child's ability to quickly and easily recognize letters and words; it involves comprehension and inferential thinking, which help children derive enjoyment and enrichment from reading and build on their knowledge of the world while improving language skills. S.B. 972 seeks to create reading-to-learn academies for professional educators in the fourth and fifth grades with a curriculum-focused teaching strategy to improve comprehension across all subjects.

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

S.B. 972 amends the Education Code to require the commissioner of education to develop and make available reading-to-learn academies for teachers who provide reading comprehension instruction to students at the fourth or fifth grade level. The bill authorizes a reading-to-learn academy to include material on writing instruction and requires a reading-to-learn academy to include effective instructional practices that promote student development of reading comprehension and inferential and critical thinking, to provide training in the use of empirically validated instructional methods that are appropriate for struggling readers, and to provide participating teachers with access to the academy training materials through the Internet after the teachers attend the academy. The bill requires the commissioner to adopt criteria for selecting teachers who may attend a reading-to-learn academy and, in adopting selection criteria, to require granting a priority to teachers employed by a school district at a campus at which 50 percent or more of the students enrolled are educationally disadvantaged and to provide a process through which a teacher not employed at such a campus may attend the academy if the academy has available space and the school district employing the teacher pays the costs of the teacher's attendance.

S.B. 972 entitles a teacher who attends a reading-to-learn academy to receive a stipend, from funds appropriated for that purpose, in the amount determined by the commissioner and establishes that such a stipend is not considered in determining whether a district is paying the

teacher the statutorily required minimum monthly salary. The bill requires regional education service centers, on request of the commissioner, to assist the commissioner and the Texas Education Agency with training and other activities relating to the development and operation of reading-to-learn academies. The bill's provisions expire September 1, 2027.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2015.