

SUBJECT: Tuition exemptions for educational aides

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna
0 nays
1 absent — Rodriguez

WITNESSES: For — Ann Anderson and seven other individuals
Against — None

DIGEST: CSHB 571 would exempt eligible teacher aides from paying tuition and fees, other than class or laboratory fees, at public institutions of higher education in Texas. To be eligible, individuals would have to be residents of the state and certified as educational aides by the State Board for Educator Certification; demonstrate financial need; have at least two school years of experience as a certified educational aide working directly with students in a school district; be employed as certified educational aides during the entire term or semester for which they received the exemption; be enrolled in classes necessary for certification as teachers at the institution of higher education granting the exemption; and maintain an acceptable grade point average.

The coordinating board would accept applications and determine eligibility for tuition exemptions and adopt necessary rules. Institutions could fund these exemptions from funds appropriated to them.

Savings from the Early High School Graduation Scholarship program, which rewards individuals who complete a Texas public high school curriculum in three years, would be used first to provide tuition exemptions for students whose families qualify for Aid for Dependent Children. Any remaining savings would be used to provide tuition exemptions for teacher aides. The Texas Education Agency also could accept and disburse gifts,

grants, and donations made to the agency for the purpose of providing teacher aide exemptions.

Effective September 1, 1997, persons who received a bachelor's degree required for a teaching certificate, had at least two years of classroom experience as a teacher aide, and qualified for a tuition exemption as a teacher's aide would not be required to perform an additional teaching internship in order to receive a teaching certificate.

The tuition exemption would take effect beginning with the fall semester of 1997.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 571 would help redress an increasingly serious deficiency of teachers in Texas. The state faces a shortage of certified teachers due to rising student enrollment, rapid turnover, and the growing number of teachers reaching retirement age. Providing an incentive to increase the flow of certified teachers into Texas public schools is essential to remedy this shortage and ensure a high quality of education for our students.

The pool of individuals most qualified and available to meet this need includes teacher aides, many of whom want to become certified teachers and have the classroom experience essential to make them good teachers. Most teacher aides, however, earn low salaries and have trouble paying tuition for college programs that lead to a teaching certificate. Tuition assistance would allow them to meet their career goals while safeguarding their valuable expertise for a field that sorely needs it.

A teacher's aide with two or more years of classroom experience who earned a bachelor's degree would be more than qualified to lead a classroom. Removing additional student teaching internship requirements for these individuals would save them money and allow them to begin teaching in understaffed schools as quickly as possible.

The tuition exemption proposed by CSHB 571 would not be mandatory, but granted at the discretion of institutions' governing boards. Institutions would not be required to fund exemptions beyond those funded through appropriations specifically designated for the program. In such cases, the

institutions would lose no revenue, but would gain the benefit of attracting teacher's aides to their teacher certification programs.

CSHB 571 would not place an undue financial burden on the state. Although the Texas Education Agency estimated that over 16,000 teacher aides would be eligible for the program, in reality most would not meet the program's rigorous requirements, including demonstration of financial need. This provision would ensure that state dollars were not spent on those who could afford to pay their own tuition.

The program would be funded in part with state dollars saved through the Early High School Graduation Scholarship Program, decreasing the financial burden to the state and institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the benefits to the state of encouraging an increase in the number of qualified classroom teachers would far outweigh any costs that this program might incur.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 571 could result in significant loss of income to Texas higher education. The coordinating board estimated that the amount of tuition and fees to be exempted per student through this program would equal \$1,076 in fiscal year 1998 and \$1,621 in fiscal year 2002. If all 16,336 aides estimated to be eligible received the exemption, the program's potential cost would be \$17.6 million in 1998, rising to \$26.5 million in fiscal year 2002 due to increases in tuition and fees. As tuition and fees continue to rise, so would the program's cost to the state.

Although the state has a shortage of qualified teachers, neither the aspiring teachers nor the students of Texas would benefit from lowering the standards individuals must meet to receive a teaching certificate. Student teaching is a valuable experience for all individuals, and even those who have served as teacher aides would benefit from it.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

This session has seen a proliferation of proposals to exempt certain groups — from foreign students to military reservists — either wholly or in part from tuition requirements. This piecemeal approach could endanger the stability of our tuition system. The Legislature needs to exercise both prudence and consistency in granting exemptions. Such caution is necessary to hold down the financial pressure on our already strapped institutions of

higher education and maintain the quality of the education provided to students in Texas.

NOTES:

The committee substitute allowed the Texas Education Agency to accept and make available gifts, grants, and donations made to the agency for the purpose of providing tuition exemptions for educational aides.

The companion bill, SB 178 by Barrientos, is pending in the Senate Education Committee.