

- SUBJECT:** Creating the Texas Teachers' Excellence Program
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith
1 nay — Hardcastle
0 absent
- WITNESSES:** For — Donna New Haschke, Texas State Teachers Association; Rebecca Palacios; Merlinda Rodriguez; Earline Williams
Against — None
On — Edna Sawey
- BACKGROUND:** The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has developed a voluntary certification process based on standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. The program consists of 10 parts that take approximately one year to complete. About half of the program consists of creating a portfolio to demonstrate how candidates' teaching meets board teaching standards. Certification requires six separate portfolios, including video tapes, lesson plans, student work, and analysis and criticism of lesson plans and teaching methods. There also is a one-day Assessment Center component wherein candidates respond to computer prompts about subject matter and classroom situations keyed to the standards for their field, take a six-hour essay exam, and receive instructional assessment.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1310 would amend the Education Code to create the Texas Teachers' Excellence Program. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) would have to establish the program to encourage teachers to become certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The bill would require SBEC to provide specified financial assistance to help teachers become board certified and provide staff to assist the selection

committee. School districts would have to pay stipends to board-certified teachers.

Financial assistance, scholarship, funding. SBEC would have to pay the certification exam application fee for each applicant selected by the committee. SBEC also would have to provide each applicant a scholarship to pay other certification expenses and to establish the scholarship amount. The bill would limit the scholarship to \$1,500 paid from funds appropriated to SBEC for this purpose, and funds from gifts, grants, or donations for this purpose, and \$1,000 from federal grant funds for this purpose. An applicant selected by the committee also would be entitled to three days of leave to prepare the certification application, in addition to any other leave to which the applicant was entitled.

Eligibility. A Texas classroom teacher would be eligible for financial assistance if the teacher met board certification requirements, applied to the program using the form developed by SBEC, and met other SBEC criteria.

Selection committee. The committee would be composed of five members: two appointed by SBEC, two appointed by the State Board of Education (SBOE), and one appointed by the education commissioner, who also would appoint the presiding officer from among the committee members. The bill would require at least one SBEC-appointed member and one SBOE-appointed member to be board-certified. Members would serve staggered six- year terms, with one-third of the terms ending on February 1 of each even-numbered year. The bill would create specific initial terms. The bill would require initial appointees to take office February 1, 2002.

The committee would have to meet at least once per year, in Austin, on a date determined by the presiding officer. It could hold other meetings as needed, at the call of either the presiding officer or at least two-thirds of the committee members. Committee members would not be compensated, but would be reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses incurred in conducting committee business.

The selection committee would have to accept all applications if it received fewer than 100 eligible applications in a fiscal year. If the committee received more than 100 eligible applications in the year, and acceptance of

all of them would result in expenditures greater than the amount available for that fiscal year, the committee would have to review the applications and select not more than 100 eligible applicants to receive financial assistance.

Reimbursement. An applicant who received financial assistance but failed to complete training for the certification exam, take the exam, or teach at least one school year in a public school after becoming board-certified would have to reimburse SBEC for financial assistance received. SBEC could determine whether an applicant was not required to pay reimbursement due to extenuating circumstances. An applicant could appeal SBEC's decision to the selection committee in a manner and within a period to be prescribed by the committee. A teacher who completed training but failed to perform satisfactorily on the certification exam would not have to pay reimbursement.

Stipends. In addition to a statutorily-required minimum salary and any additional amount the school district employing a teacher paid, a district would have to pay an annual stipend of \$4,000 to each classroom teacher who was board-certified at the beginning of the school year, and an additional stipend of \$2,000 to each board-certified classroom teacher who worked at least 40 hours during a school year as a mentor to other public school teachers. A classroom teacher who became certified during a school year would be entitled to the additional stipends beginning with the following school year.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

Board certification is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. The certification process is based on rigorous standards developed by teachers, teacher educators, child development experts, and other leaders in education. The certification process is difficult. The average passing rate for first time applicants is only around 50 percent. Several states recognize board certification and allow board certified teachers from out-of-state to receive a teaching license without taking the state's teacher examination.

Texas should recognize board certified teachers and support teachers who want to become board certified. Thirty-three states recognize the value of certification by paying all or part of the certification fees or offering bonuses

to board-certified teachers. Texas currently is experiencing a teacher shortage, and districts are attempting to recruit teachers from other states. To be competitive with other states, Texas should offer at least the same recognition that other states provide for board-certified teachers.

Recognition of board certification would help to create incentives for teachers to make the effort to go beyond the required state certification. Many teachers leave the profession because they are unchallenged and have no further achievement to look forward to. This bill would help to keep quality teachers in Texas classrooms by demonstrating the state's commitment to teacher professional development.

Teachers should have state-supported incentives to become board-certified. The certification process is rigorous, demanding much time and effort. Also, it is expensive, particularly in light of low teacher salaries. Many teachers report they cannot afford certification costs, which can exceed \$2,000. Because Texas does not recognize or encourage board-certification, few Texas teachers pursue it. Last year only 20 Texas teachers became board certified. Texas has a total of only 36 board-certified teachers. There are approximately 9,500 board certified teachers in the United States; states bordering Texas have approximately 200 board certified teachers. Because having more certified teachers would improve education in Texas, the state should provide incentives for teachers to become board-certified.

Board certification also would help teachers who were not board-certified. Teachers completing the board-certification program would be able to mentor other teachers, especially new teachers, in standards and classroom practices. Mentoring would not be limited to teachers working towards board certification; a board certified teacher would mentor all types of teachers. In addition, teachers working towards board certification often enlist other teachers to help them prepare for certification or critique their portfolios prior to submission. This involvement would encourage other teachers to examine their teaching practices and promote high teaching standards.

Board certification would be good for Texas students. Continuing education for classroom teachers improves teaching skills and the caliber of classroom instruction. Teachers who have completed the certification process report

that certification puts them in the habit of carefully scrutinizing lesson plans and instructional methods, even after they complete the program. Ultimately, this improves the quality of education that Texas schoolchildren receive.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The bill would be too expensive. LBB estimates the bill would cost \$1.5 million through the biennium ending August 31, 2003. LBB predicts future costs for fiscal years 2004 (\$919,247), 2005 (\$1,039,247), and 2006 (\$1,159,247), including the hiring of an additional one-half time employee for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) over fiscal year 2001.

NOTES:

The House-passed version of SB 1 by Ellis, the fiscal 2002-03 general appropriations bill, contains two Article 11 “wish list” provisions that would fund this program. There is a contingency appropriation for the TEA for \$419,520 in fiscal 2002, and \$803,520 in fiscal 2003 and an identical contingency appropriation for SBEC.

The committee substitute does not require SBEC to provide training and information about board certification to teachers. It also decreases the maximum number of applicant that could receive financial assistance from 500 to 100.

The bill as filed would have required a 15-member selection committee rather than five. The committee substitute would require that at least one SBOE-appointed member and at least one SBEC appointed member be board-certified. The substitute would require the board to establish the amount of financial assistance within maximum amounts from different sources of funding. It also modified provisions relating to the expiration of terms of the initial members of the selection committee.

The substitute specified that a classroom teacher would not be entitled to a salary stipend for a year before the effective date of the bill and that only teachers who were board-certified at the beginning of the school year would be authorized to receive a stipend. The substitute decreased the number of hours a teacher must mentor to receive the additional \$2,000 stipend.

The bill as filed did not provide for funding via federal grant.