

SUBJECT: Minimum salaries for interpreters for deaf and hearing-impaired students

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 5 ayes — Sadler, Dunnam, Hardcastle, Oliveira, Olivo
2 nays — Grusendorf, Smith
1 present, not voting — Hochberg
1 absent — Dutton

WITNESSES: For — John Cage, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Center; Yolanda Chavira; Cindy Foster; Fran Herrington-Borre, Texas Society of Interpreters for the Deaf; Kristy Mayne, Katie Murch; Lisa Marie Price; Lina Saliger
Against — Richard Lane, Texas Association of School Personnel Administrators, Texas Association of School Administrators, and Texas Association of School Boards
On — Doug Dittfurth

DIGEST: CSHB 1438 would require a school district to pay each interpreter employed by the district to provide interpreting services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing an annual salary equal to or more than the following amounts, based on the interpreter's level of certification:

- ! No certification — \$13,000
- ! Level 1 certification — \$16,000
- ! Level 2 certification — \$18,500
- ! Level 3 certification — \$20,000
- ! Level 4 certification — \$21,500
- ! Level 5 certification — \$23,000

The minimum annual salary would be based on employment under a 10-month contract under which the interpreter would provide the same number of days of service required of an educator. A school district would have to

pay an interpreter employed under a different arrangement an adjusted salary that proportionately reflected the number of days the interpreter provided service.

A school district could not pay an interpreter less than the amount of the annual salary that the district paid during the 1999-2000 school year to an interpreter with the same level of certification.

Each time classroom teachers or full-time librarians, counselors, or school nurses received a raise in minimum salary, a school district would have to provide a proportionate raise to interpreters. An interpreter's level of certification would be determined by the interpreter's certification issued by the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing or other comparable certification approved by the commission.

A school district, including those that were otherwise ineligible for state aid, would be entitled to state aid in an amount, determined by the education commissioner, necessary for the district to pay the costs of interpreters' salaries. The commissioner's determination would be final and could not be appealed. The commissioner could adopt necessary rules to implement this provision.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001. It would apply beginning with the 2001-02 school year. The provision regarding school districts' transition aid for interpreters' salaries would take effect September 1, 2001, and would expire September 1, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1438 would help ensure that children who are deaf or hard of hearing receive an effective education. According to the Texas Education Agency, more than 7,000 deaf or hearing-impaired students attend Texas' public schools. These children cannot learn efficiently if they are being served by nonqualified interpreters, who could pass along incorrect information and cause these children to misunderstand their lessons.

This bill also would help retain qualified interpreters in Texas' public schools. Currently, interpreters tend to work in public schools until they

become certified, after which they often leave for higher-paying jobs. The Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing certifies interpreters on five different levels. The higher the certification, the higher the interpreter's skills level. Some students need interpreters who are certified at higher levels to derive the most from their education.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 1438 would reduce the discretion and control of local school districts by mandating the minimum salaries that schools must pay interpreters. Local schools know best how to address their needs. If schools are able to hire qualified interpreters for deaf and hearing-impaired children at modest salaries, the state should not impose a minimum salary.

NOTES:

The bill's fiscal note estimates that in fiscal 2002, the state would have to pay transition aid to schools for the deaf totaling \$675,000 to raise interpreters' salaries to the minimum levels required by the bill. As a result of the salary increases, state contributions to the Teacher Retirement System would increase by about \$40,500 per year.

In comparison to HB 1438 as filed, the committee substitute lowered the minimum salary for an interpreter at each level of certification. The substitute added the provision that would prohibit a school district from paying an interpreter less than the annual salary paid during the 1999-2000 school year to an interpreter with the same level of certification. It also added the provision regarding state transition aid for interpreters' salaries.