

- SUBJECT:** Implementing multi-hazard emergency plans in public schools.
- COMMITTEE:** Defense Affairs and State-Federal Relations —favorable, as amended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Corte, Campbell, Berman, Herrero, Leibowitz, P. Moreno, Noriega
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Hodge, Merritt
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 6 — 29-0
- WITNESSES:** For — Cathy Douglass, Texas Association of School Boards; Robert Tabak, Tech Radium; Edwin Thompson, Texas Association of School Boards; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Ann Fickel, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Ryan Rodkey; Johannah Whitsett, ATPE.
- Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Under the Education Code, the board of trustees of a school district may adopt rules and have them enforced for the safety and welfare of students, employees, and property and as necessary for the governance of the district.
- The Texas School Safety Center (TSSC), serves as an ongoing central interdisciplinary resource for school districts, providing school safety information, training, and technical assistance statewide to reduce youth violence and promote safety. Governed by a board of directors, TSSC conducts safety training programs and develops safety and security audit procedures for use by school districts.
- DIGEST:** SB 11, as amended, would direct each school district in Texas to adopt and implement a multi-hazard emergency operations plan by March 1, 2006, with the assistance of TSSC in its development, that addresses mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery as defined by TSSC and

the state office of homeland security. The plan would have to provide for:

- district employee training in responding to an emergency;
- mandatory school drills to prepare students and employees to respond to emergencies;
- measures to ensure coordination with local emergency management agencies, law enforcement, and fire departments in the event of an emergency;
- implementation of a security audit; and
- a system for immediate notification to the parents or guardians of affected district students through various communication methods in the event of an emergency.

Each school district would have to conduct a security audit of each of the district's facilities at least once every three years. Districts would have to use procedures developed by TSSC or other public or private entities able to develop such security audit procedures. Results of the audit would be reported to the school district's board of trustees.

TSSC would be advised, rather than governed, by a board of directors and be responsible for preparing a biannual budget request to the Legislature. Under the bill, TSSC would develop security criteria that school districts would have to consider in the design of new or renovated instructional facilities.

TSSC would have to develop the school safety program to assist school districts in implementing a multi-hazard emergency operations plan and develop the security criteria for the construction and renovation of instructional facilities by December 1, 2005.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 11 would require school districts across Texas to adopt a multi-hazard emergency operations plan, ensuring schools had a plan in place to deal with a variety of hazards, including campus shootings. It would take Texas a step further in ensuring that school officials, law enforcement, first responders, and students knew how to detect, deter, and respond in the event of such emergencies. Teachers and students should be trained to

respond to incidents of violence and other potential emergencies, and every effort should be made to protect students and teachers from harm.

TSSC would serve as a focal point for expertise. School districts and other political subdivisions already are used to working with TSSC, and the districts are represented on its board. The resources of TSSC not only would increase security in schools but would do it efficiently. TSSC could develop uniform security criteria that the districts could tailor to meet their particular local needs.

Frequent drills, using as many alternate evacuation routes as possible, should be conducted to reduce the possibility of students and staff becoming unnecessary victims in a crisis, and to ensure that responses by public safety officials were well thought out and appropriate. Frequent drills help ensure that staff and students know what their responsibilities are during a crisis.

Texas schools need a swift, verifiable communication system that allows administrators to send emergency and routine messages to families through all communication devices in their preferred languages. Studies prove that the lack of communication between schools and families adversely affects attendance and leads to poor test scores. In crisis situations, lack of communication from schools to emergency responders and families can lead to panic and delay an effective response.

Lack of communication is a major reason schools are not adequately prepared or equipped for catastrophic events. Parents should be made aware of the crisis plans at their children's schools. In a crisis, their knowledge of the crisis plan could help reduce confusion, panic, and perhaps serious injury. Most schools do not now have systems in place to communicate routine messages. Most schools depend solely on the media to inform families and teachers of weather-related closings and emergency situations. These messages reach only those tuned to local broadcast efforts. As a result, many important notices are never sent to families and teachers.

SB 11 would provide for a high-speed notification and response system to send emergency priority messages electronically from school officials to families, staff, and emergency responders to ensure that virtually instantaneous, consistent messages reached everyone concerned. It would improve Texas schools by increasing attendance, better informing families and school officials, and minimizing panic during emergencies. The Internet-based system would require no hardware, software, or system

installation, saving school districts time and expenses while ensuring that important messages were received. Auto-dialers are too slow and place calls to just one member per family, which underutilizes current technology capabilities. The system itself would find someone by predetermined and designated means of contact, whether it be by cell phone, pager, fax, or e-mail. Florida and Illinois have already implemented a similar notification system.

The system would require less than two hours of training for school officials, and could include web-based training and conference-call training. All costs to implement the system would be included in the subscription fees. The system could be funded through available private funding and contributions by parents.

A security audit would keep track of whether security systems were in place and were adequate. The security audit would be developed by TSSC, or a comparable public or private entity, and the districts would have to implement it themselves. Schools would conduct assessments to identify potential hazards they could face, including both natural events and man-made events. The assessment could include a review of fights, crimes, and other disciplinary events that had occurred on or around school property. This would help ensure that resources properly were deployed to areas where they were most needed.

The bill would not require state funding in order to be implemented. State leaders are working to ensure federal homeland security funding and other grants will be available to pay costs associated with the provisions of the bill.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 11 does not specify who would oversee the implementation of a security audit conducted by a school district that contracted with a private entity for the development of procedures for the audit. Also, although the results of the audit would have to be reported to the district's board of trustees, the district also should have to submit the results to TSSC for review and recommendation.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 11 would impose another requirement on school districts that already are not adequately funded. It is estimated that the measure could cost as much as \$2 million, and there is no guarantee that the state could secure homeland security funds.

NOTES:

A committee amendment would replace a requirement that emergency operations plans be based on recommendations by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Such plans instead would be as defined by the TSSC in conjunction with the state office of homeland security. Another amendment would require immediate notification to parents or guardians through a variety of communications methods in the event of an emergency.

The fiscal note reports that spread over a three-year cycle, with an average cost of \$3,000 to conduct a security audit on each public school campus in the state, costs would be about \$8 million per year.