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- SUBJECT:** Limiting field testing of assessment instruments in certain campuses
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Eissler, Zedler, Branch, Delisi, Hochberg, Olivo, Patrick
0 nays
2 absent — Dutton, Mowery
- WITNESSES:** For — Holly Eaton, Texas Classroom Teachers Assn.; Alejandra Martin, Texas Assn. of School Personnel Administrators; Mike Moses; David Thompson, Houston ISD; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Assn.; Amanda Brownson, Texas School Alliance; Ramiro Canales, Texas Assn. of School Administrators; Harley Eckhart, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Assn.; Dwight Harris, TFT; Jackie Lain, Texas Assn. of School Boards; Elena Lincoln, Assn. of Texas Professional Educators; and Ken McCraw, Texas Assn. of Community Schools

Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 39.023 requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop appropriate criterion-referenced tests to assess essential knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science.

Testing is required in the following:
- reading, annually in grades 3 through 9;
 - writing, including spelling and grammar, in grades 4 and 7;
 - mathematics, annually in grades 3 through 7 without the aid of technology and in grades 8 through 11 with the aid of technology on assessments that include algebra;
 - English language arts, in grade 10;
 - social studies, in grades 8 and 10;
 - science, in grades 5,8, and 10; and
 - any other subject and grade required by federal law.

DIGEST:

HB 2529 would limit field testing of questions for assessment instruments used to measure essential knowledge and skills under sec. 39.023 that was separate from administration of the assessment instrument to:

- during the spring semester after the annually scheduled assessments were completed; and
- only once on the same campus over a period of four school years.

TEA would be required to conduct field testing on a rotating basis among campuses.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2007-2008 school year.

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, 2007.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

Placing limitations on field tests that are administered in addition to the annual assessments would bring a common-sense balance to the multiple assessments students already are required to take. The bill would not diminish the importance of field testing but would limit it in a way that would minimize learning disruptions and burdens on teachers and students. TEA still would have the opportunity to field test annually by embedding questions if the agency wished to do so. The bill would aim to provide relief to schools that historically have become annual targets for field testing.

HB 2529 would give TEA the flexibility to determine a schedule of rotating campuses that reflected the demographics necessary for field testing. The bill would not limit the number of schools that could be field tested each year nor prescribe the order in which schools could be called for field testing. These variables would allow TEA to continue to gather objective and reliable data that not only reflected the state's demographics, but employed best practices for student assessment.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Field testing is a necessary component of best practices of high-stakes assessment for state and federal purposes, and HB 2529 could hinder test development. Stand-alone field testing is the only option for some assessments, and restrictions would not go without consequences. Providing stand-alone assessments is necessary for the bilingual education program and for state writing assessments. Limiting field testing to certain campuses every four years while continuing to release tests on the current

release schedule would not allow TEA to continue to develop fair tests in these areas. Only 1,500 students are enrolled in bilingual education in grades 5 and 6 across the state. To develop enough test questions and gather sufficient field test data, TEA needs to field test all campuses with eligible students every year. Also, it is not practical to provide two writing exercises during annually scheduled assessments, nor is it possible to embed writing assessments.

Switching the field test dates could limit the comparability of data collected on items from previous years. Student motivation at the end of a school year may not be as high, which could lead to less reliable field test data. Also, students and teachers would be more relaxed in approaching the field tests if they were after actual assessments, possibly affecting the data's objectivity. Limiting TEA to field testing only in the spring after assessments could draw ineffective data.

Field testing in alternate years, providing schools with a year of relief, or changing the current release schedule to every three years might be more favorable options. TEA must ensure that state tests are fair, appropriate, and defensible measures of student achievement, while students and teachers feel burdened by the annual field testing. The two needs must be balanced, and other approaches might better reach this compromise.