

- SUBJECT:** Requiring TEA to establish a language immersion pilot project
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Eissler, Zedler, Branch, Hochberg, Mowery, Olivo, Patrick
0 nays
2 absent — Delisi, Dutton
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Sandi Borden, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; David Duty, Texas Association of School Boards; Elena Lincoln, Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE); Shanna Weisfield, Texas State Teachers Association)

Against — None

On — Paul Colbert, El Paso ISD
- BACKGROUND:** Title 19 of the Texas Administrative Code identifies the essential knowledge and skills for Texas public school students and requires that school districts offer foreign languages other than English at the primary and secondary levels, to the extent possible, as part of an enrichment curriculum. Graduation requirements outlined for students entering high school in the 2007-2008 school year include two credits of foreign language for the recommended high school graduation program and three credits for the advanced high school graduation program.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 2814 would amend Education Code, ch. 29 by adding subch. J, which would require TEA to establish a Language Immersion Pilot Project. TEA would adopt the criteria to administer the project and select participating school districts or campuses that:
- demonstrated a substantial enrollment of students with limited English proficiency or bilingual students;
 - demonstrated parent, teacher, and community support for a language immersion program;

- committed to a language immersion program in a language other than English for a minimum of three years in elementary grades ;
- would offer, at the secondary level, a language other than English or the first language learned through an immersion program for a minimum of three years; or
- demonstrated a potential to expand the language immersion program across grades, incorporate it into kindergarten, and offer it in high school over a four-year period.

In selecting participants, the commissioner would consider geographic diversity and the readiness of a district or campus to incorporate language immersion programs. Not more than 10 school districts and not more than 30 elementary schools could participate. The board of trustees of participating districts would have to provide annual self-evaluations to TEA no later than August 1 of each year that would detail:

- student progress measured by assessment instruments;
- if applicable, a comparison of student progress between campuses participating in the project and those that were not;
- specific elements that contributed to improved student performance on assessment instruments;
- cost savings or improved efficiency;
- effects on dropout rates;
- effects on student enrollment at the high school level;
- effects on teacher performance or retention;
- improvements in communication among students, parents, teachers, and administrators;
- improvements in parental involvement;
- effects on community involvement and support; and
- increases in student proficiency in technology.

Activities for the first year would be limited to planning, including the hiring and training of teachers and obtaining of adequate instructional technology, such as software, and expanding or improving of existing language immersion programs. TEA would establish a technical assistance team to help participating school districts and campuses in program development, implementation, and assessment.

TEA could use only undedicated and unobligated general revenue funds to finance the pilot project. Funding would be limited to \$5 million a year.

To supplement funding, TEA could solicit gifts, grants, or donations of any kind from any source. Funds could be used for teacher training, hiring of technical support staff, and buying of technology-based instructional materials but not for construction of a building or other facility.

TEA would use these funds to award grants to participating school districts and campuses. Grants would be sufficient to pay costs associated with implementing the program locally. Grants made during the 2007-2008 school year would be exclusively for planning, with awards not to exceed 5 percent of the cost of implementing the project for the 2008-2009 school year. Grant awards made by TEA would be considered final and not appealable.

To implement the project, TEA could contract for up to \$4 million annually to license language-learning software using language immersion methods. The contract would have to meet the needs of up to one million public school students and employees for three years. The software would be made available online no later than January 1, 2008.

Each participating school district or campus would establish a community education pipeline team, made up of educators, district-level administrators, community leaders, and parents, to create an academic improvement plan and suggest how the immersion program should be implemented. The team would consider the educational challenges and the necessary resources specific to the district or campus and would recommend how grant funds should be used to implement the improvement plan, with the approval of TEA.

TEA would have to complete an annual review of the project based on the annual evaluations submitted by participants. Findings would be included in the comprehensive annual report presented to the Governor's office and the Legislature. During the 2010-2011 school year, TEA would contract with one or more education researchers for not more than \$250,000 to determine whether the project should be continued. This subchapter would expire September 1, 2011.

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:**

CSHB 2814 would give the TEA an opportunity to test a language learning program to better prepare students to succeed in college and to compete in an era of globalization. Bilingualism and multilingualism are considered marketable skills in Texas and abroad.

Language immersion products could offer interactive technology that allowed students to master a language at their own pace. One program, for example, presents a carefully chosen selection of four images and asks the student to select the image that matches the written text and the voices of native speakers. A student could learn a language without the traditional need for translation or memorization. Schools now experimenting with this type of instruction already are showing significant gains.

The bill also could benefit bilingual education initiatives. Language learning software could provide online support to non-English speakers by supplementing bilingual education curriculum with English immersion software.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 2814 would require TEA to spend \$10 million simply to license the language learning software. Rather than investing in solutions offered by for-profit vendors, TEA should invest in other opportunities for students to acquire new language skills, such as dual language education or Texas' Two-Way language immersion program. These programs not only promote biliteracy and bilingualism but also place English-speaking and non-English speaking students in the same classrooms, which allows them to help each other in learning another language.

With Texas schools already experimenting with language immersion programs, there is a marginal value to implementing a pilot project in this area. CSHB 2814 would require TEA to use budgeted funds to implement the language immersion pilot project. TEA instead could spend significantly less researching existing programs and not have to redirect funds from established programs.

NOTES:

The committee substitute includes spending limitations not presented in the original bill and would limit spending to \$5 million a year on the pilot project. The substitute also would require the license contract for the language-learning software to accommodate up to one million public school students and employees for a maximum of three years and would restrict TEA to contract for no more than \$4 million for the software, apart from the \$5 million for annual expenses.

According the Legislative Budget Board, CSHB 2814 would cost \$12,008,105 in general revenue in fiscal 2008-09. In fiscal 2008, TEA would be restricted to spending no more than \$250,000 on planning grants. It is assumed that after the first year, the agency would award the difference between administrative costs and the \$5 million cap as grants to districts for a total annual cost of \$5 million in fiscal 2009, 2010, and 2011. Administrative costs would not include the expense of licensing the language learning software.