

SUBJECT: Establishing professional institutes for teachers of disabled students

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Eissler, Delisi, Hochberg, Mowery, Olivo

0 nays

4 absent — Zedler, Branch, Dutton, Patrick

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 23 — 31-0

WITNESSES: For — Rene Craft; Eric Hartman, Texas Federation of Teachers; Rona Statman, The Arc of Texas; Karen Yeaman; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association, Ramiro Canales, Texas Association of School Administrators; Bill Carpenter, Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education; David Duty, Texas Association of School Boards; Harley Eckhart, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, Lonnie Hollingsworth, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Kay Lambert, Disability Policy Consortium; Elena Lincoln, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Martin Pena, South Texas Association of Schools; Ted Melina Raab, Texas Federation of Teachers; Ruby Ramos, Texans Care for Children)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, ch. 21 governs public school educators. Subch. J regulates staff development.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, was enacted in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free, appropriate public education just like their nondisabled peers. IDEA provides guidance to states, public agencies, and school districts regarding how to provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible children with disabilities. The act was reauthorized in 2004 and was aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act. The regulations added in 2004 include requirements for highly qualified, special education teachers teaching core

academic subjects, certain personnel qualification requirements for related services personnel and paraprofessionals, and the use of peer reviewed research to the extent practicable. The No Child Left Behind Act also requires that special education students receive their instruction in core academic subjects from highly qualified teachers.

Current law does not require specialized training for teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities. Such training offers systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment. Specialized training relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers. The training provides disability-specific information necessary to enable a teacher or paraprofessional to work effectively in the classroom and support the development of accommodations for disabled students.

DIGEST:

SB 840 would require the commissioner of education to develop and establish professional development institutes for teachers and paraprofessionals for research-based instructional services for students with disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder. The commissioner would be required to adopt criteria for the selection of teachers and paraprofessionals authorized to attend the professional development institute. The criteria would be designed to give priority to teachers and paraprofessionals who had a significant level of professional contact with students with autism.

The commissioner would be required to pay a stipend to each teacher or paraprofessional who completed a professional development institute. The amount of the stipend would be determined by the commissioner.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

NOTES:

According to the fiscal note, the bill would cost \$7.0 million in general revenue-related funds in fiscal 2008-09 and \$3.4 million per year thereafter.