

SUBJECT: Prohibiting diesel bus engine idling while parked at school or school event

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Eissler, Hochberg, Allen, Farias, Jackson, Patrick, Shelton,
Weber

0 nays

1 present not voting — Aycock

2 absent — Dutton, Olivo

WITNESSES: For — Elena Craft, Environmental Defense Fund; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jay Arnold, Texas PTA; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Dwight Harris, Texas AFT; Matthew Johnson, Public Citizen; Marshall Kenderdine, Texas Pediatric Society; Noelita Lugo, Texans Care for Children; Julie Shields, Texas Association of School Boards)

Against — None

DIGEST: HB 4208 would prohibit the driver of a diesel school bus from idling the engine while parked at a school or school event. The bill would not prohibit idling to heat or cool the bus before departure or as necessary to accommodate the physical needs of a student receiving special education services.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2009-10 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, 2009.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 4208 would save taxpayer money and improve children's health at the same time. Texas should spend education dollars on instruction, not waste it on diesel fuel for buses that idle longer than necessary. Turning off the engine when it does not need to be running eliminates 100 percent of the pollution generated during unnecessary idling, and costs nothing.

State government is responsible for the safety of all students. The bill is based on best practices that would enhance the health and safety of children while they are in the state's care. The tailpipe exhaust generated by diesel engines accumulates in and around school buses and poses a known health risk to children and bus drivers. Breathing air heavy with exhaust particulates can be dangerous even for a short time, because these substances can enter the circulatory system and damage blood vessels. Children are more susceptible to this damage than adults. By limiting the amount of time a bus may idle, this bill would reduce these dangerous exhaust emissions.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 4208 would impede on the local control afforded to school districts. If school districts believe they should regulate and enforce school bus idling policies, they should do so because they have chosen so on the local level.

It would be difficult for school administrators to enforce the provision prohibiting a school bus engine from idling for more than the minimum time necessary to heat or cool the bus before departure.

NOTES:

During the 2007 regular session, HB 3457, by Hochberg, which would have prohibited the driver of a school bus equipped with a diesel engine from idling the engine while parked at a school or school event, was enacted by the 80th Legislature and was vetoed by the governor.