

- SUBJECT:** Purchase of electronic textbooks, materials, and technology
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Eissler, Hochberg, Allen, Aycock, Dutton, Jackson, Patrick, Shelton
- 0 nays
- 3 absent — Farias, Olivo, Weber
- WITNESSES:** For — Jennifer Bergland, Texas Computer Educator Association and Bryan ISD; Harley Eckhart, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors; Joan Gore, Texas Computer Education Association; Kari Rhame, Deer Park Independent School District; Mike Smith, New Braunfels ISD; Jerry Vaughn, Floydada ISD; Nola Wellman, Texas Association of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Luke Bellsnyder, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Reece Blinco, Brownwood ISD; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Tom Burnett, Texas Education Reform Caucus; Dana Chiodo, Technology Association of America; Brent Connett, Texas Conservative Coalition; Andrew Erben, Texas Association of Business and TIER; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Ed Lopez, Promethean; Lynn Moak, Texas School Alliance; Julie Moore, Occidental Petroleum; Martin Pena, South Texas Association of Schools; George Rislov; Drew Scheberle, Austin Chamber of Commerce; Geoff Wurzel, Technet; Ken Zornes, Texas Business and Education Coalition)
- Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Merrylynn Gerstenschlager, Texas Eagle Forum)
- DIGEST:** CSHB 4294 would require the commissioner of education to adopt a list of electronic textbooks and instructional materials that conveyed information to the student or otherwise contributed to the learning process, from which school districts and open-enrollment charter schools could select electronic textbooks or instructional materials to purchase.

Electronic textbooks or instructional materials on the list would:

- be reviewed and recommended by a panel of experts in the subject area of the textbook or materials;
- be aligned with current research in the subject area of the textbook or materials;
- cover each part of the Texas essential knowledge and skills and indicate the percentage of each essential knowledge and skill covered; and
- include appropriate training for teachers.

A panel of experts would have to make a recommendation before an approved electronic textbook or instructional material could be removed from the approved list.

If a school district or open-enrollment charter school purchased from the approved list, the state would pay for each textbook or instructional material purchased 100 percent of the maximum amount approved by the State Board of Education for a printed textbook for the subject area and grade level, multiplied by the number of electronic textbooks or instructional materials the district or school needed for that subject and grade level. A school district could use textbooks funds allocated to the school district to purchase technological equipment according to rules adopted by the commissioner.

School districts and open-enrollment charter schools would be required to obtain a classroom set of textbooks for each subject and grade level in the foundation and enrichment curriculum.

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:**

CSHB 4294 would provide more local control and flexibility to school districts and would save the state money. The bill would allow a school district to decide whether a printed or electronic textbook better served the needs of its student population. The bill would acknowledge that not all districts may be ready for the transition to technology, while others could serve their students best with electronic materials. For districts that chose to do so, this bill would allow information to be downloaded to student laptops or kindles or technologies deemed appropriate.

The bill would give school districts the ability to purchase electronic books or other instructional materials that were vetted and less expensive, rather than being forced to buy textbooks that sit in a warehouse. Around the state, warehouses are filled with unused printed textbooks due to reluctance to issue textbooks to each student for fear they might lose or damage them. When each textbook costs on average between \$50 and \$75, it becomes clear that the state must be smarter about the use of state dollars. The claim that textbooks in a warehouse do not go to waste because of a computerized inventory system that allows districts to ship textbooks to another district that needs them fail to account for the fact that other districts do not, in fact, need them.

This bill would bring textbooks into the 21st century. The learning styles of students have change dramatically. Students have been raised in front of computer screens, and they are more comfortable consuming information in this manner. Students often do not find traditional textbooks engaging, and it is cumbersome for them to carry around several big, heavy textbooks when they prefer an on-line version. The state's current approach is short-sighted and undermining the ability of teachers to do their jobs in the most effective and engaging manner.

A study in Great Britain found that young students using electronic textbooks scored higher in both group and individual tests than those using print books. A pilot program in Texas that provided laptops to every student in class has shown a positive impact on student learning, and school administrators emphasize that technology has improved student learning and increased standardized test scores.

Traditional textbooks become out-of-date very quickly, becoming irrelevant and useless to school districts and to teachers, who must find supplemental material to ensure students are learning accurate and relevant information. With electronic textbooks, publishers can update their books and correct errors every year instead of every several years as with printed textbooks.

This bill would facilitate students graduating who were college and workforce ready. The world increasingly demands greater aptitude in technology, and school districts should be allowed to adequately teach these skills.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

This bill would not include parental input in the approval process for electronic textbooks and instructional materials because the process would not include public hearings or comment. It would not give parents control over the content of their children's textbooks. Parents can pick up and read a hard-bound copy of a textbook, whereas they may not take the time to access an electronic textbook to review what their child is learning. There is no evidence that electronic textbooks or an increase in the use of technology in the classroom improves student learning.

Some justify the transition to electronic textbooks by saying that it is what students want, but it is not the role of adults to indulge children. If educators do not trust a student with a textbook, it is not clear why they would trust the student with a laptop. Some families also cannot afford to purchase at-home technology that would enable the student to access an electronic textbook at home.

This bill would not save the state money. Textbooks in warehouses do not go to waste. The state operates a computerized inventory that allows districts to ship books to another district that needs them. Claims that this bill would save the state money are not valid because transitioning to technology and the upkeep required is expensive. Software glitches would require school districts to employ individuals with expertise in these areas.