

- SUBJECT:** Creating an algebra instruction grant program
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Eissler, Allen, Aycock, Farias, Olivo, Shelton
0 nays
5 absent — Hochberg, Dutton, Jackson, Patrick, Weber
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 20 — 30-0
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Andrew Erben, Texas Institute for Education Reform, Texas Association of Business; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Lindsay Gustafson, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Donna Warndof, Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners Association)

Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Enacted by the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999, the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grade advancement requirements apply to the TAKS reading test at grade three, the reading and mathematics tests at grade five, and the reading and mathematics tests at grade eight. As specified by these requirements, a student may advance to the next grade level only by passing these tests or by unanimous decision of his or her grade placement committee that the student is likely to perform at grade level after additional instruction.
- DIGEST:** SB 1576 would amend Education Code, ch. 29, to create an algebra-instruction grant program. The commissioner would establish a program under which grants would be awarded to school districts to implement an algebra instruction program. The commissioner would not be allowed to use more than \$50 million for grants provided under this program.

The commissioner would develop a comprehensive intervention plan to assist school districts with a disproportionate number of students who

failed to perform satisfactorily on a math assessment test in grades five through seven. The plan would be required to be based on high-quality research.

The commissioner would establish application criteria for receiving a grant under this program. The criteria would require a school district that applied for a grant to submit a local intervention plan that met the standards adopted by the commissioner. In awarding these grants, the commissioner would give preference to districts with the lowest rate of satisfactory performance on math assessment tests in grades five through seven.

A grant would support sustained improvement in the school district's pre-algebra mathematics instruction in grades five through eight and would target students that would be administered the Algebra I end-of-course assessment instrument beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

A grant would be used for:

- training and payment of state intervention coaches to assist school districts in implementing the grant;
- training and instructional materials in pre-algebra skills in grades five through eight;
- professional development of mathematics teachers assigned to grades five through eight;
- flexibility in the school day for instruction;
- instructional services; and
- technology as part of instructional activities.

The commissioner would be allowed to condition a grant on the implementation of the comprehensive intervention plan and could withhold or recover any grant funds not spent as provided by the plan. A decision of the commissioner would be final. The commissioner could require a school district to make financial and other commitments as part of the grant application. The commissioner would establish guidelines for implementing the grant program and would adopt rules necessary to administer the grant program.

The bill would not make an appropriation and would take effect only if a specific appropriation were made in a general appropriations act of the 81st Legislature.

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:**

SB 1576 would establish an algebra-instruction grant program for schools that have a disproportionate number of students performing at an unsatisfactory level on math-assessment tests in grades five through seven. Too many students enter high school unprepared to develop their algebraic-reasoning skills. Improving algebra readiness would not simply prepare students for end-of-course exams or standardized testing. It also would give students a strong foundation in mathematics that would enable them to succeed in college and in a job market that increasingly requires high-level math.

SB 1576 would require a comprehensive, research-based intervention plan to assist the districts that receive the grant. The grants would support sustained improvement in the pre-algebra math instruction in grades six through eight. Districts would be able to use grant funds to train and pay experts to assist with instruction and coaching, provide training and instructional materials in pre-algebra skills, provide professional development to middle school math teachers, and provide flexibility in the school day for instruction or to use technology. Grant funding should be available for consultants and technology, which would represent considerable investments in current teachers and better equip new math teachers.

Appropriating \$50 million to fund this grant program would be a prudent investment in the state's future. Not only would the students be better prepared for high school and college level work, they would be better prepared to enter the workforce. While Texas already has business-friendly taxation and regulatory laws, businesses will relocate to other regions if they cannot find enough employees with the necessary training and skills. SB 1576 would strengthen the foundation of the state's education system by providing targeted grants to help those schools that need it most to better educate their students.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The reason math assessment test scores remain flat is the lack of qualified math teachers. The grants that SB 1576 would create instead should go to recruiting qualified instructors, not for consultants or technology that cost a great deal and deliver relatively little.

NOTES: According to the fiscal note, the bill would cost \$50.7 million to implement in fiscal 2010-11.