

SUBJECT: Student loan assistance for speech-language pathologists and audiologists

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — Branch, Patrick, Alonzo, Clardy, Darby, Howard, Martinez,  
Murphy, Raney

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Janna Lilly, Texas Council of Administrators for Special  
Education; Sherry Sancibrian, Texas Speech Language Hearing  
Association; Cherry Wright, Texas Speech Language Hearing Association

Against — None

DIGEST: HB 1073 would amend the Education Code to create a program that would offer limited repayment assistance of student loans to speech-language pathologists or audiologists. To be eligible, applicants would have to be employed and have worked for at least a year at a public school or as a faculty member of a communications disorders program at an institution of higher education.

Assistance would be limited to repayment assistance for up to five years of qualifying employment. For each year of employment, qualifying applicants would be eligible for \$6,000 of loan repayment assistance if they held a master's degree but not a doctorate or \$9,000 for qualifying applicants who hold a doctoral degree.

The program would be funded solely from gifts, grants, and donations.

Repayment assistance would be made to the lender or other holder of a recipient's loan or speech-language pathologist in accordance with applicable federal law.

HB 1073 would direct the Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish the loan repayment program and make rules for its administration. The coordinating board would be allowed to appoint an advisory committee to assist the board in administering the program. The coordinating board would be required to distribute a copy of the rules

adopted for the program to appropriate institutions of higher education, state agencies, and professional associations.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1073 would help school districts address the massive shortage of graduate-prepared speech-language pathologists and audiologists. Nationally, there are an estimated 55 percent more openings than there are speech-language pathologists. Schools need the services of these professionals in order to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The bill would incentivize speech-language pathologists and audiologists to practice in schools by offering repayment assistance on graduate school loans. Currently, graduate-prepared speech-language pathologists and audiologists graduate with so much debt that they overwhelmingly seek employment with private providers who offer much higher salaries than Texas schools can.

HB 1073 would also incentivize Ph.D-prepared speech-language pathologists and audiologists to teach and train other graduates in institutions of higher education by including such employment in the repayment assistance program. Even institutions of higher education have trouble recruiting speech-language doctorates because the pay offered by the private sector is so much higher. Median debt for doctorate-prepared speech pathologists and audiologists is \$30,000. Only half of Ph.Ds minted in Texas end up teaching and training other speech-language pathologists or audiologists.

Incentive programs similar to HB 1073 have proven successful in attracting teachers to work in underperforming schools, attracting lawyers to public-interest or state employment, and attracting doctors to practice in rural and medically underserved regions.

The bill only would authorize the program. It does not make an appropriation. The bill would only allow the program to be funded through gifts, grants, and donations.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

While HB 1073 does not spend money, it would invite future state appropriations for a local issue.

School districts should find ways to offer competitive salaries to attract speech-language pathologists and audiologists as full-time employees.