

SUBJECT: Texas High Performance Schools Consortium

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — Aycock, Allen, J. Davis, Deshotel, Dutton, Farney, Huberty, K. King, J. Ratliff, Rodriguez, Villarreal

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Kim Alexander, Roscoe ISD; Kim Caston, Texas Association of School Boards; Michael McFarland, Lancaster ISD; James Ponce, McAllen ISD; Jeff Turner, Coppell ISD; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Angie Anderson, Klein ISD; David D. Anderson, Fast Growth School Coalition; Ellen Arnold, Texas PTA; Jay Barksdale, Dallas Regional Chamber; Robert Bayard, Clear Creek ISD; Jennifer Bergland, Texas Computer Education Association; Brandon Core, Anderson-Shiro CISD; Nelson Coulter, Guthrie CISD; Amy Dankel, McKinney ISD; Harley Eckhart, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; Monty Exter, The Association of Texas Professional Educators; Matthew Geske, Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce; Michael Gilbert, White Oak ISD; Jan Kennedy, McKinney ISD; Dineen Majcher, TAMSA; Ken McCraw, Texas Association of Community Schools; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Ann McMullan, Klein ISD; Ted Melina Raab, Texas AFT; Wayne Rotan, Glen Rose ISD; Stewart Snider, League of Women Voters of Texas; Mark Terry; Maria Whitsett, Texas School Alliance; Trisha Windham, Dallas Regional Chamber; Howell Wright, Texas Association of Mid Size Schools; Geoff Wurzel, TechNet)

Against — Zenobia Joseph

On — Drew Scheberle, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce (*Registered, but did not testify*: David Anderson, Criss Cloudt, Shannon Housson, and Linda Roska, Texas Education Agency; Priscilla Aquino Garza, Educate Texas)

BACKGROUND: The 82nd Legislature in 2011 enacted SB 1557 by Carona to create the High Performance Schools Consortium to develop innovative, next-generation learning standards, assessments, and accountability systems. The law requires the education commissioner to create a consortium that

reflects the state's diversity in district size and type, as well as student demographics.

In September 2012, the education commissioner invited 23 school districts to participate. The consortium in December 2012 provided a report that identified statutory changes to allow consortium districts the ability to innovate.

DIGEST:

CSHB 2824 would change Education Code provisions on teaching, assessments, and accountability for participant districts and campuses.

The bill would define "participant campus" and "participant district" and make conforming changes. It would add the State Board of Education to the list of policymakers who would get consortium reports. The bill would allow participant districts to add one or more campuses to the consortium, with education commissioner approval.

Consortium campuses could participate in the optional flexible school day program, which is currently available for campuses implementing innovative redesigns.

The bill would authorize the education commissioner to charge a fee to participating districts or open-enrollment charter schools for use of state-provided assessment items or other costs associated with administering the consortium.

At least annually, the school board or governing body of each participant district or charter school would hold a public hearing to discuss the consortium work and provide for parental and community input.

CSHB 2824 would focus on teaching "readiness" standards, defined as the standards identified by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as essential for success.

Testing and accountability. The bill would make the following changes to assessment and accountability measures in the 2013-14 school year:

- Consortium campuses would be evaluated by an independent third party on readiness standards to allow teaching with depth, and on disaggregated data by student group with emphasis on closing achievement gaps;

- TEA evaluations would be on a report-only basis and not to rate districts and schools;
- in grades 3-8, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams would be administered in math, reading, and science;
- districts would be allowed to use national college preparatory tests in grade 8; and
- districts would be allowed to administer fewer assessments than required by federal law if allowed by a waiver; and
- 10th grade students enrolled in English, mathematics, and science could take STAAR end-of-course exams or nationally norm-referenced tests such as the SAT if allowed by federal law.

Beginning with the 2014-15 school year or as soon as possible following receipt of a waiver from federal testing requirements, the following provisions would apply:

- STAAR exams would be limited to reading in grade 3, mathematics in grade 4, science in grade 5, reading in grade 6, and mathematics in grade 7;
- In prekindergarten through 12th grade, districts could administer locally approved or developed assessments aligned to readiness or high-priority learning standards;
- TEA evaluation would be on a report-only basis;
- Districts could administer national college preparatory assessments in grades 8, 10, 11, and 12;
- Participant campuses would be evaluated on community-established measures that include academic achievement and college-and career-readiness.

The bill would make testing provisions for students in a special education programs and students of limited English proficiency. High school students who moved to a non-consortium district could take alternative assessments.

The bill also would exempt end-of-course exam requirements for consortium students who demonstrated satisfactory performance on advanced placement tests, international baccalaureate exams, the PSAT, and other national testing instruments.

Reporting requirements. The consortium report due December 1, 2014

would include:

- an update on the effectiveness with which participant campuses are closing gaps in achievement on readiness standards;
- an evaluation of teaching with depth;
- the result of independent evaluations from one or more external teams, including a Texas institution of higher education;
- recommendations for legislation;
- the effectiveness of various methods of digital learning, use of multiple assessments, and local control.

The bill also would add temporary provisions for a report to be submitted prior to the 85th Legislature.

This 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, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 2824 is the legislation that would enable the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium to carry out its R&D functions. The bill would give participating districts the ability to innovate and the flexibility to meet student needs.

The goal of the consortium is to experiment with alternative ways of teaching, testing, and accountability and report to state policymakers about practices that could be expanded to all public schools.

While there would be expenses associated with CSHB 2824, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) estimates that any costs incurred would be offset by the revenue collected from participants. There are several foundations interested in furthering education innovation that are likely sources of financial support.

The fiscal note estimates a savings of \$1.5 million based on administering fewer tests to students in consortium schools.

In-depth teaching. To transform teaching, the bill would allow consortium campuses to focus more time on the essential readiness standards of the state curriculum. Currently students also spend a great deal of time on supporting standards because they might be included on a STAAR exam. This has led to classroom lessons that some say are a mile

wide and an inch deep. By concentrating on readiness standards, teachers will have time to assign students projects that can result in long-lasting knowledge.

Targeted assessments. The bill would allow participant districts to experiment with alternatives to STAAR exams, including locally developed assessments and nationally recognized college prep exams. If approved by a federal waiver, districts also could experiment with reduced testing requirements. These provisions would allow schools to discover if reduced testing allows more classroom time for in-depth teaching and student projects.

R&D innovation. Allowing these 23 diverse school districts to experiment with in-depth teaching and targeted assessments is the best way to foster innovation. As changing technology drives education into the digital age, Texas must be ready to adopt different ways of instructing students and holding schools accountable. The consortium reports would guide lawmakers in determining the best way forward for all public schools.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 2824 could leave students attending consortium schools less prepared for college. The de-emphasis on supporting standards could result in students retaining less knowledge from grade to grade. The Texas curriculum is designed to be aligned from K-12 for college readiness.

Reducing testing requirements could mean that districts don't know how well their students are learning. The bill would eliminate elementary and middle school writing exams, leaving students less prepared for high school writing assignments.

It is unclear where the money would come from to cover the bill's costs. TEA could charge participating districts a fee and private funding is possible, but not guaranteed. The Legislative Budget Board estimates the costs of hiring nine employees at TEA to implement the bill's provisions at \$900,000 in fiscal 2014 and \$800,000 in subsequent years. The fiscal note states that TEA also would need more than \$1 million to accelerate readiness standards, modify the reporting system, pay for an independent evaluation, and make other changes.

OTHER
OPPONENTS

The school districts that make up the consortium obviously believe that students will learn more if there is less teaching to the STAAR exams and

SAY: more time in class for projects and in-depth discussions. If these are good ideas, all districts in Texas should be allowed to try them rather than only 23 districts representing 5 percent of all public school students. While students in these districts could benefit from a better quality education, the bill leaves the vast majority of Texas students stuck in a system of high-stakes tests.

NOTES: According to the fiscal note, CSHB 2824 would have a negative impact to general revenue of about \$1.6 million in fiscal 2014-15.