

- SUBJECT:** Establishing a school safety certification program and task force
- COMMITTEE:** Homeland Security and Public Safety — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Pickett, Fletcher, Cortez, Dale, Flynn, Simmons
- 0 nays
- 3 absent — Kleinschmidt, Lavender, Sheets
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 25 — 30–0 on Local and Uncontested Calendar
- WITNESSES:** (*On House companion bill, HB 3655*)
For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Ellen Arnold, Texas PTA; Jennifer Canaday, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Patty Quinzi, Texas AFT)
- Against — None
- On — Steven McCraw, Department of Public Safety; Tom Shehan, Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 37.108 requires school districts and public junior college districts to adopt and implement a multi-hazard emergency operations plan for the district's facilities. The plan must address mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery and must provide for employee training, mandatory school drills; coordination with the Department of State Health Services and local emergency management, law enforcement, health departments, and fire departments.
- The plan also requires a safety and security audit at least once every three years, with results reported to the district's board of trustees and the Texas School Safety Center at Texas State University-San Marcos. The center was created in 1999 and authorized by the Legislature in 2001 to serve as a central location for school safety information.
- DIGEST:** CSSB 1556 would establish the School Safety Task Force to study best

practices for school multi-hazard emergency operations planning and make recommendations to the Legislature, the Texas School Safety Center, and the governor's Texas Homeland Security office.

The task force would be comprised of:

- the chief of the Texas Division of Emergency Management or a designee;
- the training director of the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University-San Marcos or a designee;
- the chairperson of the School Safety Center or a designee; and
- the agency director of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service or a designee.

The chief of the emergency management division or the chief's designee would serve as presiding officer of the task force. The task force would be required to submit a report to the Legislature by September 1 of each even-numbered year.

The task force would consider recommendations from school district and school personnel, including school safety personnel and educators, and from first responders, emergency managers, local officials, nonprofit organization representatives, and other interested parties with knowledge and experience concerning school emergency operations planning.

CSSB 1556 also would require the center to establish a school safety certification program in consultation with the task force. Schools would be eligible for the certificate if they adopt and implement a multi-hazard plan as required under sec. 37.108 that includes:

- measures for security of facilities and grounds;
- measures for communication with parents and the media in event of an emergency;
- an outline of safety training for school employees;
- self-reporting by districts that they have conducted separate, annual drills for a school lockdown, an evacuation, a weather-related emergency, a reverse evacuation; and a shelter-in-place event.

The task force could set other eligibility criteria for the certificate.

The bill would repeal a statutory provision requiring the center to develop security criteria that districts could consider in designing schools, and instead require districts to consider security criteria when planning new schools or major renovations.

The bill would take immediate effect if passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

In light of the December 2012 Connecticut school shooting, the state of Texas needs to evaluate current school safety practices to ensure students and staff are prepared to react in emergency situations. CSSB 1556 would use the existing resources of the Texas School Safety Center and the Division of Emergency Management to help districts improve their security plans.

The bill would create a task force to study the most effective safety measures and make recommendations to the Legislature for statutory changes to better protect students and educators. The task force members could be reimbursed their expenses.

The center currently collects school safety data from around the state and provides information and some training, but there is no coordination with other entities that are capable of providing safety training such as the Division of Emergency Management and the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service's "Disaster City" training facility. The task force would bring together those and other experts.

The bill also would create a certification program that could compel districts to take extra steps to become certified as a safe school. After the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the Texas attorney general called on all districts to submit their safety audits. The center reported that of the 1,025 school districts required by law to submit safety audits, 38 did not do so and another 40 reported but did not meet full compliance. CSSB 1556 would encourage compliance with existing law by linking the safety audits to certification.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The House companion bill, HB 3655 by J. Davis, was reported favorably as substituted by the House Homeland Security & Public Safety Committee on April 26.

Compared with the Senate-passed version, the committee substitute would add the school safety certification program.