

SUBJECT: Establishing reading-to-learn academies for teachers of grades 4 or 5

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Aycock, Bohac, Deshotel, Farney, Huberty, K. King, VanDeaver

0 nays

4 absent — Allen, Dutton, Galindo, González

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 23 — 30-0

WITNESSES: For — Barbara Frandsen, League of Women Voters of Texas; Mark Terry, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; (*Registered by did not testify:* David Anderson, Arlington ISD Board of Trustees; Ellen Arnold, Texas Parent Teacher Association; Courtney Boswell, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Jeffrey Brooks, Texas Conservative Coalition; Grover Campbell, Texas Association of School Boards; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Ashlea Graves, Houston ISD; Bill Hammond, Texas Association of Business; Janna Lilly, Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education; Julie Linn, Texans for Education Reform; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Ted Melina Raab, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Colby Nichols, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas Rural Education Association; Cameron Petty, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Rona Statman, The Arc of Texas; Maria Whitsett, Texas School Alliance; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Matt Long; Sandy Ward)

On — Zenobia Joseph (*Registered, but did not testify:* Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 21.4551 requires the commissioner of education to develop and make available reading academies for teachers of students in grades 6 through 8.

DIGEST: SB 972 would require the commissioner of education to develop and make available reading-to-learn academies for teachers of grades 4 or 5. These academies would be required to provide effective instructional methods to promote student literacy development, including reading comprehension and inferential and critical thinking. They could include material on writing instruction. A participating teacher would have access to an academy's training materials online.

The commissioner would adopt criteria to select teachers who could attend a reading-to-learn academy. In adopting criteria, the commissioner would be required to give priority to teachers employed by school districts in which 50 percent of the students enrolled were educationally disadvantaged. The commissioner also would have to provide a process for teachers who did not teach at campuses mentioned above to participate in the reading-to-learn academies if the academy had available space and the school district employing the teacher paid for the attendance.

From funds appropriated for the purpose, a teacher attending a reading-to-learn academy would be entitled to receive a stipend in an amount determined by the commissioner. This stipend would not be considered when determining whether a district was paying the teacher according to the minimum salary schedule in statute.

The commissioner could request regional education service centers to assist with training and activities related to the reading-to-learn academies.

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, 2015, and would expire September 1, 2027.

SUPPORTERS SB 972 would provide teachers with additional professional development

SAY: to effect change in students with reading skills below basic levels. Many Texas fourth-graders are not proficient readers. Reading academies are an early intervention tool for students, providing effective instructional techniques to increase student reading development.

Reading academies are necessary to incorporate research-based methods of reading instruction into educator preparation and professional development. Teachers who have completed traditional or alternative programs could benefit from the research-based methods that would be provided by these academies.

OPPONENTS SAY: SB 972 would not be a good use of government funding because teachers certified through traditional programs should have been provided this type of training through their certification program. Elementary educators take an array of classes covering instructional techniques for core subjects and should be knowledgeable in appropriate pedagogy. If additional training is needed, it should be supplied through continuing education courses. If teachers are not receiving adequate training, then certification course requirements in universities should be adjusted.

OTHER OPPONENTS SAY: Reading-to-learn academies should require a writing instruction component, rather than making it optional. Literacy involves reading and writing. A teacher should know how to teach a student to read and write to support the student's academic development.

NOTES: The Legislative Budget Board estimates that SB 972 would have a negative net impact to general revenue of about \$11.1 million in fiscal 2016-17.

The House companion bill, HB 2223 by Deshotel, was referred to the House Public Education Committee on March 13.