

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 816
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Higher Education
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Like many states across the nation, Texas is experiencing a critical shortage of certified math and science teachers in the public school system. This shortage affects the state economy as many technology-based companies are searching nationally and even internationally for capable workers. Studies show that the shortages have increased dramatically in the past five years and are projected to increase in the next five years. As Texas schools implement the four-by-four graduation requirements for core courses, this shortage will have dire consequences for students as more school districts are forced to rely on out-of-field teachers to lead math and science classes.

As proposed, S.B. 816 requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to address this shortage by establishing the Texas Teach Corps Scholarship Program to award scholarships to undergraduate students who are enrolled in educator certification programs and who commit to teaching math and science in areas of the state where shortages are the highest.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Section 61.9837, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Subchapter GG, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER GG. TEXAS TEACH CORPS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Sec. 61.9831. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM; AMOUNT OF SCHOLARSHIP. (a) Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), in accordance with this subchapter and THECB rules, to establish and administer the Texas Teach Corps Scholarship Program to award scholarships to undergraduate students who are enrolled in educator preparation programs provided by public or private institutions of higher education in this state and agree to teach for a specified period in the public schools in this state that are determined by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to have shortages of teachers in math and science.

(b) Provides that the amount of a scholarship under this subchapter for an academic year is equal to the lesser of the total amount of tuition that the public or private institution of higher education in which the scholarship recipient is enrolled charges the recipient for that academic year for semester credit hours for which the recipient is authorized to use the scholarship to pay tuition as provided by Subsection (c) or \$5,000.

(c) Authorizes a student to use a scholarship under this subchapter only to pay tuition for a semester credit hour that is required for completion of the educator preparation program in which the student is enrolled.

(d) Requires TEA, for purposes under this subchapter, not later than April 1 of each school year, to determine which public schools in this state are anticipated to have shortages of math and science teachers during the following school year and

to provide that information to THECB and to each educator preparation program in this state accredited by the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC).

Sec. 61.9832. ELIGIBILITY; LIMITATION ON NUMBER OF SCHOLARSHIPS. (a) Requires a person, to be eligible to receive a scholarship under this subchapter, to have graduated from high school in this state with an overall grade point average of at least 2.75 on a four-point scale or the equivalent and in the top 35 percent of the student's graduating class; be enrolled in an educator preparation program accredited by SBEC that is provided by a public or private institution of higher education in this state; and enter into an agreement with THECB as provided by Section 61.9833.

(b) Prohibits more than 4,000 scholarships from being awarded under this subchapter for an academic year.

(b-1) Provides that this subsection expires September 1, 2013. Provides that, notwithstanding Subsection (b), the number of scholarships authorized to be awarded under this subchapter for the specified academic year are not more than 1,000 for the 2010-2011 academic year, 2,000 for the 2011-2012 academic year, and 3,000 for the 2012-2013 academic year.

(c) Requires THECB, if in any year the amount of money available for scholarships under this subchapter is insufficient to award a scholarship to each eligible applicant or if there are more eligible applicants than the number of scholarships authorized by this section, to establish criteria to determine which eligible applicants will be granted scholarships as THECB determines appropriate to further the purposes of this subchapter, including criteria that are related to the financial need of an applicant and serve to ensure geographic and ethnic diversity among scholarship recipients.

Sec. 61.9833. AGREEMENT REQUIREMENTS. (a) Requires a person to enter into a written agreement with THECB as provided by this section to qualify for a scholarship under this subchapter. Sets forth certain required content of the agreement.

(b) Requires a person to teach math or science classes for not less than an average of four hours each school day to satisfy the teaching obligation prescribed by an agreement under this section.

(c) Provides that for purposes of Subsection (a)(5)(A) (regarding the requirement that the person complete four consecutive school years of the eight years of full-time employment in public schools with a shortage of teachers in math and science), if a person is employed as a teacher in a public school anticipated to have a shortage of teachers in math and science subjects in the first year of employment, each subsequent year of continuous employment as a teacher in that school is considered to be employment in a school anticipated to have such a shortage of teachers in that subsequent year, regardless of whether TEA anticipated that the school would have a shortage of teachers in that year.

(d) Requires THECB to determine the terms of the promissory note required by Subsection (a)(7) (regarding the requirement that the person sign a promissory note acknowledging the conditional nature of the scholarship). Requires that, to the extent practicable, the terms be the same as those applicable to state or federally guaranteed student loans made at the same time.

Sec. 61.9834. EXCEPTIONS TO TEACHING AND REPAYMENT OBLIGATIONS. (a) Sets forth certain periods in which a person is not considered to be in violation of the teaching obligation in the agreement described by Section 61.9833.

(b) Provides that a person is excused from the repayment obligation in a promissory note described by Section 61.9833 if the person becomes permanently totally disabled as established by the affidavit of a qualified physician or THECB waives repayment in the case of extreme hardship to the person.

Sec. 61.9835. FORGIVENESS OF REPAYMENT OBLIGATION. Requires THECB to forgive 25 percent of the total amount of a person's scholarship awards under this subchapter for each complete school year the person teaches in accordance with the agreement under Section 61.9833 after the expiration of the period described by Subsection (a)(5)(A) of that section.

Sec. 61.9836. GRANTS, GIFTS, AND DONATIONS. Authorizes THECB to solicit and accept grants, gifts, and donations from any public or private source for the purposes of this subchapter in addition to money appropriated by the legislature.

Sec. 61.9837. RULES. (a) Requires THECB to adopt rules to administer this subchapter, including rules providing for the manner in which a student is authorized to apply for a scholarship and for notification of the scholarship program under this subchapter to students enrolled in educator preparation programs in this state.

(b) Requires THECB to distribute to each educator preparation program of a public or private institution of higher education in this state a copy of the rules adopted under this section.

SECTION 2. Requires THECB and TEA, not later than December 31, 2009, to adopt rules for the Texas Teach Corps Scholarship Program under Subchapter GG, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2009.