

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1511
By: West
Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Of the many school-based factors that affect a student's academic success, research shows that having access to an effective educator is the most important. Educator preparation and certification standards help ensure that teachers are appropriately trained to handle the rigors of the classroom and provide a quality education for their students. Such standards also help to reduce costly teacher turnover. High standards help ensure that prospective teachers have the necessary background knowledge, including content knowledge in the subject matter they will be teaching, to be successful in the classroom. The state's current minimum standards do not sufficiently ensure that the future teachers have the necessary foundation of knowledge to become highly effective and motivated to remain in the profession.

As a minimum standard for admission into an educator preparation program, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) currently requires an overall grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.5 or at least 2.5 in the last 60 semester credit hours, and SBEC allows a program to waive the GPA requirement for up to 10 percent of its admitted candidates based on their work experience. Countries with education systems that are often considered superior to that in Texas tend to hold their prospective teachers to higher standards for entrance into the profession. In Finland, for example, eligibility to become a teacher is limited to the top 10 percent of high school graduates.

S.B. 1511 calls for higher admission standards to help make the education profession more selective and prestigious. Under S.B. 1511, a person could not be admitted to an educator preparation program or recommended for certification without maintaining an overall GPA of 2.75. The bill permits a waiver for the GPA requirement for no more than five percent of an educator preparation program's cohort.

S.B. 1511 amends current law relating to the preparation, certification and working conditions of educators.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the State Board for Educator Certification in SECTION 1 (Section 21.044, Education Code) of this bill.

Rulemaking authority previously granted to the State Board for Educator Certification is modified in SECTION 2 (Section 21.048, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 21.044, Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 21.044. EDUCATOR PREPARATION. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text and makes no further changes.

(b) Prohibits a person from being admitted to an educator preparation program, including an undergraduate university program, alternative certification program, or post baccalaureate program, unless the person:

(1) has an overall grade point average of at least 2.75 on a four-point scale or the equivalent;

(2) demonstrates, in the manner determined by the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; and

(3) has successfully completed a minimum of 18 semester credit hours in the subject-specific content area for the certification sought, a passing score on a content certification examination, or a passing score on a content examination administered by a vendor on the Texas Education Agency (TEA)-approved vendor list published by the commissioner of education for the calendar year during which the person seeks admission.

(c) Provides that the requirement in Subsection (b)(3) applies only to a person seeking an initial certificate.

(d) Authorizes an educator preparation program to admit a person to the program who does not have at least the grade point average required by Subsection (b)(1) if the person's work, business, or career experience demonstrates achievement. Requires that the person submit satisfactory documentation regarding the person's experience to the program director, and the program is required to maintain the documentation and make it available to SBEC on request. Prohibits the number of persons admitted under this subsection in an academic year from exceeding five percent of the total number of program candidates admitted to the program in that year.

(e) Prohibits an educator preparation program from recommending any person for a standard classroom teacher certificates, including special education certificates, career and technical education certificates, and endorsement areas, unless the person has maintained an overall grade point average of at least 2.75 on a four-point scale or the equivalent while enrolled in the program. Authorizes an educator preparation program to waive this requirement only in extraordinary circumstances and for no more than five percent of the cohort of candidates recommended by the program for certification in that year.

(f) Authorizes an educator preparation program to impose requirements in addition to the requirements imposed under this section.

(g) Requires SBEC to propose rules to implement this section.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 21.048(a), Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 21.048. CERTIFICATION EXAMINATIONS. (a) Requires SBEC to determine the satisfactory level of performance required for each certification examination. Requires SBEC, for the issuance of a generalist or multi-subject certificate, to require satisfactory performance in each of subject areas of English Language Arts and Reading, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

SECTION 3. Amends Subchapter A, Chapter 21, Education Code, by adding Section 21.008, as follows:

Sec. 21.008. BIENNIAL REPORT ON EDUCATORS. (a) Requires TEA, not later than December 1 of each even-numbered year, to prepare, publish, and submit to the legislature a report regarding public school staffing and the working conditions for public school educators. Requires that the report also be posted on TEA's Website.

(b) Requires that the report contain staffing information for each campus, including at least the following:

- (1) the percentage of teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their areas of expertise or certification;
- (2) the percentage of teachers employed under emergency certificates;
- (3) teacher turnover rates; and
- (4) the number and percentage of teachers who have less than one year of experience as a teacher.

(c) Requires that the report contain information regarding working conditions in each district based on a statewide survey conducted by TEA of certified educators. Provides that to encourage the uninhibited participation of educators, the survey should be designed to prevent the disclosure of the identities of individual respondents in the report. Provides that, based upon the results of the survey, TEA should include recommendations for improving the working conditions at schools identified as having poor working conditions.

SECTION 4. Provides that Sections 21.044(b)-(e), Education Code, as added by this Act, applies only to a person who is admitted to an educator preparation program on or after January 1, 2012.

SECTION 5. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2011.