

SUBJECT: Pre-reading instruction grant programs

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Sadler, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hochberg, Lengefeld, Oliveira,
Olivo, Smith

0 nays

1 present, not voting — Dutton

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 9 — voice vote

WITNESSES: *(On House companion bill, HB 2608:)*

For — Robert Massonneau, Head Start of Greater Dallas; Chrys Dougherty;
Kathy Haule

Against — None

On — Rene Lara, Texas Federation of Teachers

DIGEST: CSSB 955 would establish four programs designed to promote reading and literacy education for preschool aged children.

Ready to Read grant program. The bill would establish a Ready to Read grant program, administered by the commissioner of education, who would establish a competitive grant procedure to distribute funds appropriated for the program. At least 95 percent of all funds appropriated would have to be distributed in grants of \$50,000 to \$150,000 each. In order to receive a grant, the recipient would have to commit matching funds in a percentage determined by the commissioner based on the economic capacity of the community in which the program would be located. The matching percentage would range between 30 percent and 75 percent of the amount of the grant.

Grants could be awarded to district and open-enrollment charter school programs only if at least 75 percent of the children enrolled in the program are low-income, as determined by commissioner rule. The funds could be used for professional staff development in pre-reading instruction, pre-reading

curriculum and materials; pre-reading skills assessment materials; and employment of pre-reading instructors.

The commissioner would be required to develop performance criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs.

Head Start Programs. CSSB 955 would require an education component to the federally funded Head Start Program. The program is focused primarily upon children from low-income families who have not reached the age of compulsory school attendance and provides comprehensive health, education, parental involvement, nutritional, social, and other services to aid the children to attain their full potential and provides for direct participation of the parents of the children in the development, conduct, and overall program direction at the local level (42 U.S.C. §9833). The bill would require a Head Start service provider to include education components designed to enable children in the program to develop reading skills and mastery of the English language.

Professional child care training scholarships and bonuses. The bill would allow the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to develop and administer a \$1,000 scholarship program to allow individuals to pay expenses associated with obtaining professional child-care training, including:

- ! Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials;
- ! Certified Child-Care Profession (CCP) credentials; or
- ! a certificate or associate's degree in child development or early childhood education.

In order to receive a scholarship, the applicant would have to be currently employed at a child-care facility, intend to obtain the additional professional development, agree to work at a child-care facility for an additional 18 months, and meet other requirements established by TWC.

A scholarship recipient could receive a bonus or wage supplementation from TWC if that recipient remained at the same child care facility where they were employed when they were awarded a scholarship for at least 18 months and provided child care during that time to children younger than six years of age.

Any bonus or wage supplementation would have to be matched equally by the

recipient's employer.

The bonuses and scholarships would be funded through federal Child Care Development funds or other available funds. The total amount of bonuses and scholarships awarded under the program may not exceed \$2 million per biennium.

TWC rules established to administer the program would have to provide for the ability to recover the scholarship amount from a recipient who failed to meet the 18 month service requirement.

Child-care worker student loan repayment program. CSSB 955 would allow the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to help full-time early childhood child-care workers repay eligible student loans. The bill would define such workers as those working more than 30 hours a week in a child-care facility and whose duties consist primarily of providing child care or education to children under age four.

The bill would limit eligibility for loan repayment assistance to people with degrees in early childhood development from accredited public and private institutions who signed written agreements to serve as workers in this field for two years in Texas. An eligible person could receive help in repaying any student loan for higher education through any lender. The board could not provide repayment assistance for a loan in default. The written agreement between the board and the person receiving repayment assistance would have to require the person to serve at least two years as an early childhood child-care worker in Texas within three years of entering the agreement. The contract would have to specify:

- ! the number of additional years of service beyond the required two years for which the person could receive repayment assistance and the period within which the person would have to complete those years of service;
- ! that any assistance would be considered a loan before the initial two years or each additional full year of service was completed; and
- ! that only service after the contract was signed could be considered as

satisfying the agreement's terms.

The agreement would have to require the person to sign a promissory note, the terms of which the board would determine, to repay the loan assistance with interest and reasonable collection costs if the person did not meet applicable conditions.

Loan repayment assistance each year could not exceed 15 percent of the person's outstanding student loans, including scheduled interest. Annual assistance could not exceed the lesser of the actual payments required that year or an amount set by the board equal to the maximum resident tuition and required fees for a full-time student at a general academic teaching institution. The coordinating board could only provide assistance to the extent that money is appropriated or otherwise available. If that money would not be sufficient to assist each eligible applicant, the board could select applicants based on financial need or another reasonable basis.

The coordinating board would have to adopt rules needed to administer the assistance program and would have to distribute copies of the rules and other pertinent information to Texas higher education institutions that offer degree programs in early childhood development or the equivalent.

The student loan repayment assistance provisions of the bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house and apply with the 1999 fall semester. The remaining provisions of the bill would take effect September 1, 1999

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Pre-reading instruction is an essential component of ensuring that children learn the skills necessary to begin reading and keep progressing so that they become fully literate students. These pre-reading skills allow children to learn the alphabet, develop word recognition, and associate sounds with written words and letters. They also can help children to increase their comprehension of English if English is a second language in the child's home.

The various programs in CSSB 955 would help to encourage instruction in pre-reading through grants and loan repayment assistance to professional child-care workers. It also would ensure that federal Head Start programs include a pre-reading educational component. All of these programs would only be funded if funds are appropriated to the program. The conference

committee on the General Appropriations Act, HB 1 by Junell, currently contains a \$2 million appropriation to fund the Ready to Read grant program.

The loan repayment assistance provisions would help improve child care in Texas by encouraging child-care professionals to keep working in their chosen field and by helping child-care facilities retain experienced staff. It would demonstrate the state's commitment to supporting trained child-care workers who provide invaluable education and care for young children.

A survey by the National Council of State Educators revealed that 31 percent of staff members working in the child-care industry leave their jobs within one year. One reason for the high turnover rate is very low wages. Combined with the need to repay college loans, this becomes an insurmountable obstacle to many potential child-care workers in Texas. The program proposed in this bill would help relieve college graduates trained in child care from some of the financial burden of their loan obligations.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Problems in the child-care industry are industry problems that need industry solutions. When market demand for child-care workers rises, wages will rise. This bill would create another government program using public money for private purposes. Instead, employers who want qualified child-care workers should implement loan repayment programs or bonuses for professional development of their own. Similar contractual relationships work for other industries.

NOTES:

The committee substitute would added provisions relating to the Head Start program, the child-care training scholarship, and the loan repayment assistance program.

The child-care training scholarship program is similar to HB 66 by Greenberg, which was referred to the House Human Services Committee.

The loan repayment assistance program for child-care workers was included in HB 1689, which passed the House on April 27 by 131-9 and passed the

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Senate without amendment on May 20 by 29-0.