

- SUBJECT:** Requiring mental disorder detection instruction for education certificates
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 11 ayes — Aycock, Allen, J. Davis, Deshotel, Dutton, Farney, Huberty, K. King, Ratliff, J. Rodriguez, Villarreal
- 0 nays
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, May 2 — 31-0
- WITNESSES:** For — Linda De Sosa; Andrea Usanga, Mental Health America of Greater Houston; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness - Texas; Dwight Harris, Texas AFT; Josette Saxton, Texans Care for Children; Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas)
- Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Lelia Culpepper; Lauren DeWitt and Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights; MerryLynn Gerstenschlager, Texas Eagle Forum; Christy Peterson; Anna Poulin; Judy Powell, Parent Guidance Center; Michelle Watts; George Wier)
- On — Belinda Carlton, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities; (*Registered, but did not testify:* David Anderson, Texas Education Agency)
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 21.044 requires the State Board for Educator Certification to establish training requirements a person must accomplish to obtain an education certificate.
- DIGEST:** SB 460 would require instruction in the detection of students with mental or emotional disorders as a part of the training for any education certificate that required a person to possess a bachelor's degree. This instruction would have to be developed by a panel of experts appointed by the Board of Educator Certification and include information on the characteristics and identification of mental and emotional disorders, strategies for intervention, and appropriate ways to notify a child's parent or guardian.

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, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

SB 460 would train educators to appropriately respond to students with mental or emotional issues, which would help the students and improve classroom management and behavioral and academic outcomes. Mental and emotional illnesses can hinder a student's home and school activities, leading to school problems, disciplinary placements, and, in extreme cases, suicide. Without training in how to recognize and respond to students with these illnesses, educators may inadvertently reinforce or escalate the illness. Equipping school personnel with these basic skills and tools would help educators identify disorders, properly intervene, and help link students with the needed services. This requirement would not be an attempt to turn teachers into mental health professionals, just as taking a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course would not attempt to make someone a doctor. SB 460 would be a simple way to help teachers reduce potentially dangerous, degrading, and unhealthy situations, benefiting students and improving educational outcomes.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Texas teachers should remain focused on teaching and not on identifying and intervening with students' mental and emotional health disorders. Schools are already struggling with tight budgets and high expectations. Schools represent the state government, and it is not the government's role or responsibility to identify and intervene with personal matters that should be left to the family and a physician. Additionally, requiring this training could make teachers overly sensitive to possible illnesses in students, which could lead to over-diagnosing and over-prescribing medications for students.