

SUBJECT: Creating an early childhood certification to teach pre-K through grade 3

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Bohac, Dutton, Gooden, K. King, Koop,
VanDeaver

0 nays

3 absent — Allen, Deshotel, Meyer

WITNESSES: For — Larrisa Wilkinson, Prek4SA; Wendy Uptain, The Commit!
Partnership; Laura Laywell; Cody Summerville; (*Registered, but did not
testify*: Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans
with Disabilities; Isaac Faz, Dallas County Community College District;
Melanie Rubin, Dallas Early Education Alliance; Derek Little, Dallas
ISD; Angela Farley, Dallas Regional Chamber; Priscilla Camacho, San
Antonio Chamber of Commerce; Lindsay Sobel, Teach Plus; Diane
Ewing, Texans Care for Children; Kimberly Kofron, Texas Association
for the Education of Young Children; Justin Yancy, Texas Business
Leadership Council; Kyle Ward, Texas PTA; Lee Nichols, TexProtects;
Margaret Johnson, The League of Women Voters of Texas; Cathy
McHorse, United Way for Greater Austin; Stephanie Mace, United Way
of Metropolitan Dallas; David Brown; Jerry Burkett; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — Zenobia Joseph; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Diann Andy,
Bexar County Democratic Women; Rose Benitez, Texas Association of
School Personnel Administrators)

On — Kate Kuhlmann, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Jodi
Duron, Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of
Community Schools, and Texas Elementary and Principals Supervisors
Association; Ryan Franklin, Texas Education Agency; Karen Alexander;
(*Registered, but did not testify*: Lolly Guerra, Texas Association of School
Personnel Administrators; Kara Belew, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 21.003(a), requires that a person employed as a teacher in a public school district hold the appropriate teaching certificate. Under 19 TAC, part 7, §233.2, teachers who teach prekindergarten through grade 6 must hold an early childhood through grade 6 certificate.

DIGEST: HB 2039 would require the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) to create an early childhood certificate to specially train teachers on instruction in prekindergarten through grade 3. A person would not have to hold the certificate to teach prekindergarten through grade 3 in a school district.

The bill would set eligibility requirements for obtaining the early childhood certificate. A person would have to complete the course work for an early childhood certificate in an educator preparation program, including a knowledge and skills-based course of instruction on early childhood education that included teaching methods for using small group instructional formats and strategies for teaching fundamental academic skills, including reading, writing, and numeracy. Alternately, a person holding an early childhood through grade 6 certificate could complete the coursework described above.

To be eligible for a certificate, a person would be required to perform satisfactorily on an examination prescribed for this purpose by SBEC and satisfy any other board requirements. The board would develop criteria for the course of instruction for an early childhood certificate in consultation with college and university faculty members who taught education preparation programs.

SBEC would propose rules establishing requirements and prescribing an exam for early childhood certification, as well as standards governing the approval and renewal of educator preparation programs for that certification.

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, 2017.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

HB 2039 would create a teacher certification for early childhood, which is important because of the differences between instructing the state's youngest students and those in grades 4 through 6. The current certification of early childhood through grade 6 (EC-6) is too broad, and due to standardized testing in later elementary grades, results in a focus on the later grades. Teachers with an EC-6 certification sometimes feel unprepared to meet the unique needs of early grades, and certification for EC-3 would provide the special training needed.

Prekindergarten and early elementary years are some of the most critical in a child's education, and the specialized focus provided by an EC-3 certificate would help prepare teachers for this. Being able to read proficiently by third grade is a significant factor in whether a student graduates from high school, and some researchers note that the EC-6 program does not always adequately cover areas such as reading methodology and child growth development, leaving many children unprepared as they leave grade 3.

Creating an EC-3 certification would incentivize colleges and universities to provide more focused coursework on early childhood and early elementary education, leading to a better prepared workforce.

The bill would provide flexibility and local control to school districts and elementary school teachers, who would not have to hold the EC-3 certificate to teach the grades it would cover. The bill simply would allow teachers to receive an optional certificate based on a desired specialization. Superintendents would maintain flexibility to staff schools.

Providing a certification would be preferable to an endorsement because a certification is connected to training and coursework, whereas an endorsement only requires passing a test. Endorsements also can be costly for teachers and would create a double-burden for early childhood teachers seeking one because they would have to obtain both the endorsement and an EC-6 certificate.

Many stakeholders, including teachers, principals, and parent-teacher associations already are in favor of an additional certificate for instruction of young children. This demonstrated need should be addressed now, rather than waiting two years for the state to further study the issue.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 2039 could result in early childhood teachers who were unprepared if reassigned to teach in grades 4 through 6. When Texas previously offered an early childhood through grade 4 certification, it resulted in fewer teachers qualified to teach grades 5 and 6. As a result, some teachers were reassigned to teach grades outside their certification expertise and were unprepared to do so. Teachers who received an EC-3 certificate might become less marketable. When schools experience budget cuts, they are more likely to retain generalists than specialists able to teach only a certain number of grades.

Early childhood education training already is covered with the EC-6 certificate, and an additional certificate is unnecessary. If teachers wanted to gain a special credential for EC-3 education, a supplementary endorsement would be preferable. The creation of any new certification should wait until the completion of studies by TEA and the State Board for Educator Certification on whether an EC-3 certificate or endorsement should be considered.