

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 382
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Many children who ultimately fail in school start out with reading difficulties. One in four adults in Texas reads below the fifth grade level. Extensive research shows that children learn from the moment they are born. Early language skills, the foundation for later reading ability, are based primarily on language exposure resulting from parents and other adults talking to young children. Reading aloud to a child provides the richest exposure to language and also builds a child's motivation, curiosity, and memory. Research shows that children who hear fewer words in their first three years are engaged in less conversations and have dramatically smaller vocabularies than children who have greater early language experiences. Too much essential time is lost before a child enters kindergarten.

This bill provides the resources to make literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric primary care by utilizing the Reach Out and Read national model. Reach Out and Read trains doctors and nurses to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and of giving books to children at pediatric checkups from six months to five years of age.

As proposed, S.B. 382 authorizes a public or private entity, including a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of Texas, to apply to The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston for a grant. The bill requires the recipients of the grants to strictly adhere to the program model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center, provide matching funds in an amount equal to the grant funds awarded under this subchapter, and require health care practitioners volunteer to provide books to children in conjunction with their well child examinations and maintain waiting rooms that encourage children to read. The bill requires grant recipients to participate in ongoing monitoring and performance evaluations.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 2 of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 73, Education Code, by adding Subchapter I, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER I. COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM TO PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY

Sec. 73.601. DEFINITIONS. Defines "competitive grant program," "coordinating board," "health care practitioner," "health science center," and "literacy program."

Sec. 73.602. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM TO PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY. (a) Requires The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (health science center) to establish a competitive grant program (program) to promote early literacy through which the health science center will award grants for the implementation of literacy programs, or the extension of existing programs, and for the operation of those programs for a period of not less than two years.

(b) Requires the health science center to award grants under the program to applicants, including applicants operating existing programs, in a manner that ensures that the literacy programs collectively operate in multiple communities

that are geographically distributed throughout this state and provide program services to approximately 100,000 families.

Sec. 73.603. LITERACY PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS. (a) Requires that a literacy program funded through a grant awarded under this subchapter strictly adhere to the program model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center, including any clinical, programmatic, and data collection requirements of that model, provide matching funds in an amount equal to the amount of the grant funds awarded under this subchapter, and require that health care practitioners volunteer to perform certain tasks.

(b) Authorizes matching funds under Subsection (a)(2) to include in-kind contributions.

Sec. 73.604. APPLICATION. (a) Authorizes a public or private entity, including a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of this state, to apply for a grant under this subchapter.

(b) Requires an applicant, to apply for a grant, to submit a written application to the health science center on a form prescribed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) in consultation with the center.

(c) Requires that the application require the applicant to provide data on the number of low-income families residing in the community in which the applicant proposes to operate or expand a literacy program and provide a description of existing services available to those families; describe the ongoing monitoring and evaluation process to which a grant recipient is subject under Section 73.608, including the recipient's obligation to collect and provide information requested by the health science center under Section 73.608(d); and require the applicant to provide other relevant information as determined by the health science center.

Sec. 73.605. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN AWARDING GRANTS. Requires the health science center, in addition to the factors described by Sections 73.602(b) and 73.603, in determining whether to award a grant to an applicant under this subchapter, to consider certain factors.

Sec. 73.606. LITERACY PROGRAM STANDARDS. Requires the THECB, with the assistance of the center, to adopt standards for the literacy programs funded under this subchapter. Requires that the standards adhere to the Reach Out and Read national program model standards and guidelines that have been tested and replicated in multiple communities.

Sec. 73.607. USE OF AWARDED GRANT FUNDS. Authorizes the grant funds awarded under this subsection to be used only to cover costs related to implementing or expanding and operating a program, including costs related to administering the program, training and managing health care practitioners who volunteer to participate in the program, and purchasing discounted books for use in the program.

Sec. 73.608. PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION; ANNUAL COMMITTEE REPORTS. (a) Requires THECB, with the assistance of the center, to adopt performance indicators that are designed to measure a grant recipient's performance with respect to the literacy program standards adopted under Section 73.606.

(b) Requires the health science center to use the performance indicators adopted under Subsection (a) to continuously monitor and formally evaluate on an annual basis the performance of each grant recipient, and prepare and submit an annual report to certain legislative entities not later than December 1 of each year regarding the performance of each grant recipient during the preceding state fiscal year with respect to providing literacy program services.

(c) Requires that the report under Subsection (b) include certain information concerning the number of low-income children and participating practitioners, and the extent to which grant recipients adhered to the program model.

(d) Requires each grant recipient, on request, to timely collect and provide data and any other information required by the health science center to monitor and evaluate the recipient or to prepare the report required by this section.

Sec. 73.609. COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM FUNDING. (a) Requires the health science center to actively seek and apply for any available federal funds to assist in financing the competitive grant program established under this subchapter.

(b) Authorizes the health science center to use appropriated funds from the state government and to accept gifts, donations, and grants of money from the federal government, local governments, private corporations, or other persons to assist in financing the competitive grant program.

SECTION 2. (a) Requires the health science center, as required by Section 73.609, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable, to apply for any available federal funds to assist in financing the competitive grant program under Subchapter I, Chapter 73, Education code, as added by this Act.

(b) Requires THECB to adopt necessary rules for and the health science center to establish and implement, not later than September 1, 2010, the competitive grant program required by Subchapter I, Chapter 73, Education Code, as added by this Act.

(c) Requires the health science center, not later than December 1, 2009, to submit a report to the Senate Education Committee, or its successor, and the House Public Education Committee, or its successor, regarding the implementation and status of the competitive grant program required by Subchapter I, Chapter 73, Education Code, as added by this Act.

(d) Requires the health science center, not later than December 1, 2011, to submit the initial annual report required by Section 73.608(b)(2), Education Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2009.