

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R9391 CAE-F

S.B. 2081
By: Menéndez
Education
4/26/2021
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

With a class size of over 22 students per teacher, it's challenging even for the most experienced teacher to address each child's needs, manage behavioral challenges, and get young students ready for kindergarten. According to the E3 Alliance's analysis of Texas education data, it takes the combination of full-day pre-k and low student-teacher ratios to see significantly greater kindergarten readiness, leading to better outcomes across a child's education.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has reported that "the effects of high-quality pre-k programs continue to benefit [Texas] students as they get older, reducing their likelihood of dropping out of school by two percent, and increasing their likelihood of graduating from high school on time (by six percent), enrolling in college (by seven percent), and attending the second year of college (by six percent)."

In 2019-20, the average pre-k class size in Texas was 19, and the average teacher-student ratio was 17:1. However, according to a 2021 report from TEA, hundreds of pre-k classrooms operate with an average teacher-student ratio of 1:30 or worse. With the influx of federal COVID relief dollars, increased state education expenditures through H.B. 3 (86R), and more robust support from TEA in implementing strategies to partner with neighborhood child care centers, it is the ideal time to assess and bolster districts' requirements.

S.B. 2081 would limit a prekindergarten classroom to no more than 22 kids and no more than 11 students for each teacher or aide in a classroom with more than 15 students. A report done by TEA in 2016 recommended that these are the numbers for prekindergarten classrooms. However, for programs unable to meet the proposed standard, TEA would have the authority to grant waivers as needed. S.B. 2081 would ensure pre-k class sizes and student-teacher ratios are manageable, meet national best practices, and create an optimal learning environment for children.

As proposed, S.B. 2081 amends current law relating to the average ratio of students and teachers in a prekindergarten class.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 29.167, Education Code, by amending Subsection (d) and adding Subsections (e), (f), and (g), as follows:

(d) Requires a school district to maintain, rather than to attempt to maintain, an average ratio in any prekindergarten program class of not less than one certified teacher or teacher's aide for each 11 students, except as provided by Subsection (e).

(e) Authorizes the commissioner of education (commissioner), on application by a school district, to exempt the district from complying with Subsection (d).

(f) Requires a school district seeking an exemption under Subsection (e) to apply to the commissioner for the exemption not later than October 1 or not later than the 30th day after the first school day the district exceeds the ratio provided by Subsection (d).

(g) Authorizes the commissioner to take any appropriate action authorized to be taken by the commissioner under Chapter 39A (Accountability Interventions and Sanctions) if a school district repeatedly fails to comply with Section 29.167 (High Quality Curriculum and Teacher Requirements).

SECTION 2. Provides that this Act applies beginning with the 2021-2022 school year.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2021.