

SUBJECT: Performance systems for regional education service centers

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Price, Rhodes, Uher, Williamson
0 nays
3 absent — Culberson, Hernandez, Hochberg

WITNESSES: For — Alva Batiste; Donald Egg; Gloria Martinez-Watts; Monique Mason-Kelly; Dorothy McMeans
Against — None
On — Mike Moses and Joe N. Neely, Texas Education Agency; Catherine Clark

BACKGROUND : Texas has 20 regional education service centers that provide teacher training and curriculum materials for schools and school districts. These centers are regulated under Chapter 8 of the Education Code.

The 74th Legislature directed the commissioner of education to submit proposals for revising Chapter 8 provisions on the mission, resources, and powers and duties of regional education service centers. Chapter 8 will be repealed and all regional education service centers abolished on August 31, 1997.

DIGEST: HB 2839 would establish new authority for regional education service centers. It would authorize the education commissioner to decide any matter concerning the operation or administration of centers, including the number, location, boundaries and funding of each center, and to establish performance standards and indicators to measure achievement.

The bill would specify that the centers would form a system intended to enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically and implement initiatives assigned by the Legislature or the commissioner. It also would provide that school districts would not be limited to purchasing

services from any regional education service center or required to purchase these services.

The commissioner would adopt rules for appointing boards of directors for each center. The boards would be required to develop policies consistent with the stated mission of regional service centers, adopt an annual budget, and hold a public hearing each year on the center's performance compared to the standards established by the commissioners. A board would select an executive director, whose selection and dismissal would be subject to the commissioner's approval.

Regional service centers would have the same tax status and immunity from liability as a school district and district employees. With the commissioner's approval, centers would be able to purchase, lease or sell property and acquire debt.

Regional centers would have to submit an annual plan of improvement to the commissioner that includes a description of services for low-performing campuses. At the request of the commissioner, centers would have to report audited or budgeted financial information. The commissioner could require corrective action for a center determined to be deficient. Initial actions could include conducting an on-site investigation of the center and requiring it to send notices of the deficiency to each school district and campus in the region. The commissioner also could require the center to prepare a plan to address each area of deficiency, appoint a master to oversee the operations of the center, replace the executive director or board of directors, and, where performance had been deficient for two consecutive years, close the facility.

Regional service centers would receive from the state an allotment that could not be less than 0.4 percent of the amount appropriated for the Foundation School Program for that year. The Legislature could appropriate money from the foundation school fund to establish an incentive fund to encourage efficiency in regional centers.

The statutory provisions that would abolish regional education centers and repeal Chapter 8 of the Education Code on August 31, 1997, would be repealed.

HB 2839 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. The funding formula outlined in the bill would take effect September 1, 1997.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2839 would redirect the mission of regional education service centers from maintaining core services for school districts to developing services to improve student and school district performance and enabling school districts to operate more efficiently and economically. Current law is not sufficiently specific about what regional education service centers are expected to do and it contains no system of accountability. As a result, programs and services vary from center to center, lacking clear direction.

HB 2839 would establish a concrete system of accountability and direction by making the education commissioner directly involved in overseeing the operation of regional education service centers and developing performance standards. This would help improve and enrich regional service centers by making them a more integral part of the state educational system. The bill is a direct response to the legislative mandate of the 74th session.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The performance standards designed to increase the accountability of regional service centers should be more specific in measuring outcomes and gauging how service centers have helped improve performance in their school districts.

HB 2839 should specify that service center boards of director be involved in developing programming and activities for school districts. Each board of directors is responsible for developing policies for the center and preparing an annual budget; these boards also should have a say in center programming.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 1158 by Luna, passed the Senate on April 21. Floor amendments provided that boards of directors would be involved in developing programming for centers and specified performance standards and indicators. The bill has been referred to the House Public Education Committee.