

**SUBJECT:** Establishing the Texas School Safety Center in statute

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 9 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hardcastle, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith

0 nays

**SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 3 — voice vote

**WITNESSES:** For — None

Against — None

On — Sherry Peyton and Judy Renick, Texas School Safety Center

**BACKGROUND:** The Texas School Safety Center is operated by Southwest Texas State University with grant-funding from the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor. The center collects and analyzes information, serving as a statewide interdisciplinary resource for training and technical assistance to reduce youth violence and promote safety. The attorney general has named the center a clearinghouse for information on school safety.

**DIGEST:** SB 430 would establish the Texas School Safety Center in the Education Code as a central location for school safety information and a resource for prevention of youth violence and promotion of safety in Texas.

**Board.** The center would be governed by a board of directors, with members serving staggered two-year terms. The board members would include:

- ! the attorney general or designee;
- ! the commissioner of education or designee;
- ! the executive director of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission or designee;

- ! the executive director of the Texas Youth Commission or designee;  
and
- ! the commissioner of the Texas Department of Mental Health.

The board also would include the following members, appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate:

- ! a juvenile court judge;
- ! a member of a school district's board of trustees;
- ! an administrator of a public primary school;
- ! an administrator of a public secondary school;
- ! a member of the state parent-teacher association;
- ! a teacher from a public primary or secondary school;
- ! a public school superintendent who was a member of the Texas Association of School Administrators;
- ! a school district's police officer or a peace officer whose primary duty consisted of working in a public school; and
- ! two members of the public.

The governor would have to make initial appointments not later than October 1, 2001. Board members would not be compensated but would be entitled to reimbursement of travel expenses incurred while conducting board business, as provided by the general appropriations act. The board could form committees as necessary. It would have to elect a chairperson and a vice chairperson annually and meet at least four times each year.

**Safety training and summit.** The center would conduct safety training programs for school districts, including development of a positive school environment and proactive safety measures, school safety courses for law enforcement officials, discussion of safety issues with parents and community members, and specialized training for the staff of alternative education and juvenile justice alternative education programs. The center also would conduct a statewide summit emphasizing mobilization of schools, families, and communities to reduce school violence and promote school safety.

**Model audit procedure.** The center would have to develop a model safety and security audit procedure. The center would have to provide each district

with guidelines and a training video showing proper audit procedures, review each district audit and make recommendations for improvement, and incorporate district audit findings into a statewide school safety report.

**On-site assistance and website.** The center would have to provide on-site technical assistance to requesting districts for both school safety and security audits, and school safety and security information presentations. The center also would have to develop and maintain an interactive Website to include:

- ! quarterly news updates related to school safety and violence prevention;
- ! school crime data;
- ! a schedule of training and special events; and
- ! a list of persons approved by the board to give school safety presentations.

**Essay contest, recognition of schools.** The center would sponsor a student essay contest and publicly recognize schools that implemented effective school safety and violence prevention measures.

**Interagency cooperation; services for at-risk youth.** The center also would promote cooperation between state agencies, institutions of higher education, and local juvenile delinquency councils. It would develop model agreements to address provision of services to youth at risk of committing violent acts. The agreements would address cooperation between agencies and cost sharing.

**Funds, budget, annual report.** The center could solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from public and private entities. The board would have to approve the center's budget on an annual basis, and biannually prepare a budget request for the center for submission to the Legislature. The center would have to provide an annual report to the governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, and the Texas Education Agency not later than September 1 of each year. The report would include findings made by the center regarding school safety, and the center's functions, budget information, and strategic planning initiatives.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

The Texas School Safety Center already is well-established as one of 16 school safety centers in the United States. The center covers the largest area and serves the most schools but has the lowest funding of any funded center.

SB 430 would formally establish the center in statute, thereby strengthening its important mission. The center already provides a variety of resources on school safety to teachers and schools. During the past year, the center trained over 4,000 teachers and provided over 1,200 videotapes, CD-ROMs, and school safety manuals to districts. The center performed 8,000 “walkabout” safety inspections to assess both social environment (e.g. gang activity, teasing) and physical safety issues (e.g. asbestos, broken tiles). Training materials have been given to law enforcement personnel who increasingly are focusing on school safety. The center has conducted youth institute workshops for 150 students. It submits articles for magazines and provides technical support for schools, including meetings with parents to discuss school safety issues (e.g. gang clothing, curfew, general parenting tips). The center also answers questions via email and serves as a contact point for newspapers. It provides all these services free of charge.

The center needs support to keep up with demand for its services. For example, demand for high school presentations has increased over 300 percent in the past year. All available presentation times are booked through March 2002. The center is unable to provide additional presentation times due to a limited staff of only six employees. Videotapes and other materials need to be updated after each legislative session to reflect new laws, as well as up-to-date safety practices

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

**NOTES:**

The fiscal note estimates a cost for the center of \$250,000 through fiscal 2002-03 and an additional cost of \$125,000 per year beyond that. The Senate version of SB 1 by Ellis, the fiscal 2002-03 general appropriations bill, includes \$125,000 in each year of the biennium for the center, contingent on enactment of SB 430.