

SUBJECT: Granting alternative teaching certificates to persons with advanced degrees

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Grusendorf, Branch, Dawson, Eissler, Griggs, Madden

1 nay — Hochberg

2 absent — Oliveira, Dutton

WITNESSES: For — Marty DeLeon, Texas Association of School Boards; Gary Reeves, Texas Association of School Personnel Administrators; Karen Soehnge, Texas Association of School Administrators

Against — Lonnie Hollingsworth, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Ted Melina Raab, Texas Federation of Teachers; Marjorie Wall, Texas State Teachers Association; Lauren Whelan, Association of Texas Professional Educators

On — Bill Franz and Edward Fuller, State Board for Educator Certification

BACKGROUND: Basic requirements for becoming a teacher in Texas include having a bachelor's degree from an accredited university or college, completing approved teacher training, and successfully passing pedagogy and content tests for the subject and grade level to be taught. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) is responsible for ensuring that educators are qualified to teach in the Texas public schools.

A number of routes to teacher certification are available, including traditional university-based programs, alternative certification programs, additional certification by subject area based on exam, or certification based on credentials from another state, U.S. territory, or foreign country.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires schools that receive federal funds under Title I, Part A to have a "highly qualified" teacher in every classroom by the 2005-06 school year. NCLB defines a highly qualified teacher as an educator who is licensed by the state, holds at least a

bachelor's degree, and demonstrates competence in his or her subject area. A highly qualified teacher can demonstrate competency by passing a state test of subject knowledge or by successfully completing a graduate degree program in the academic major related to his or her subject area.

Title I, the largest federal program supporting elementary and secondary education, provides funds for many high-poverty districts and schools. Part A targets federal funds to educate disadvantaged children with low academic achievement. A school district must have a minimum number and/or percentage of disadvantaged children to be eligible for Title I, Part A funds.

DIGEST:

CSHB 2723 would allow SBEC to issue a teaching certificate to a person with a master's, doctoral, or other advanced academic degree in an academic major other than education that was related to one of the elements of the approved secondary school curriculum. A person with an advanced degree could be certified to teach only in the subject area related to his or her academic major, and only could teach in middle school, junior high school, or high school.

SBEC could not require a person with an appropriate advanced degree under the bill to pass a teacher certification exam as a condition of certification.

The 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, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 2723 would help school districts deal with a serious and growing teacher shortage in Texas, especially in the key areas of math, science, bilingual education, foreign languages, and technology. Currently, when shortages occur, districts must fill teaching positions with people who are not certified in their fields. The result is that about 45,000 teachers in Texas currently are teaching outside of their areas of expertise. The shortage of qualified teachers is particularly acute in low-performing schools.

Teacher shortages are fueled by many factors, student enrollment growth being the primary one. Student enrollment has grown steadily in Texas for the past 10 years, with an average of 75,000 new students entering the public schools each year. Some fast-growth districts, such as those in suburban areas, are experiencing greater than 10 percent enrollment growth each year, which

puts a strain not only on districts to provide adequate facilities and classrooms, but also to maintain a qualified teaching staff while remaining within class size limits. Alternative certification for qualified college graduates with advanced degrees would allow Texas to fill these classrooms with knowledgeable instructors.

CSHB 2723 would support the spirit of federal NCLB legislation, which requires that all schools receiving Title I, Part A funds have a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by the 2005-06 school year. The requirements for certification under CSHB 2723 would meet the full definition of “highly qualified” for middle school and high school teachers under NCLB, and thus the bill could be particularly helpful toward alleviating shortages in urban districts where a high percentage of students are economically disadvantaged.

Recent studies cited by the U.S. Department of Education show that teacher quality is the key determinant of student success, more so than class size, spending, and instructional materials. The two main qualities of a highly effective teacher that have the greatest positive impact on student performance are content knowledge and verbal ability. Pedagogy training does not have a statistically significant impact on student performance, and in fact, no scientific research has validated the claim that fully certified teachers are more effective than teachers on one-year certificates, teachers enrolled in alternative certification programs, or even teachers on emergency permits. Further, college professors with the same credentials are not required to take pedagogy tests, and many of them go on to obtain respect and tenure in their profession.

Alternative certification for college graduates with advanced degrees would make it easier for professionals from other career fields to bring their expertise to the classroom for the benefit of Texas students. On the heels of the “dot-com” bust in Texas, many degreed professionals are struggling to find decent jobs. With computer technology being one of the critical teaching shortage areas, this bill could open up hundreds of good-paying, rewarding jobs, reduce the unemployment rate, and allow graduates with advanced degrees to contribute to the economy while helping Texas students learn.

CSHB 2723 could open the doors for retired professionals who wanted to give something back to their communities by pursuing a second career in

teaching. Further, alternative certification for qualified college graduates with advanced degrees could help alleviate teacher shortages in rural areas, where it often is hard to attract teachers, because evidence shows that Texas retirees tend to move to smaller towns and rural areas.

Because this method of teacher certification has not yet been tried, there is no evidence to support that new teachers under the bill would leave the field any sooner than teachers certified by other means. In fact, because enrollment growth ensures that teaching is a secure profession, new teachers with advanced degrees may be less inclined to leave the field.

Individuals would be certified to teach only in areas in which they had proven expertise. Recent studies show that 96 percent of teacher certification candidates with advanced degrees passed the Texas certification tests. Therefore, the test represents nothing more than an unnecessary barrier to entry into the teaching profession for these individuals. Alternative certification through this route would be preferable to the emergency teacher certification that many districts now employ. Districts have no guarantee of the knowledge or expertise of an emergency-certified teacher. Further, chronic teacher shortages have contributed to a growing trend toward employing “permanent substitutes” in Texas classrooms. Students deserve better than just a warm body in the classroom.

CSHB 2723 would give districts more choices when hiring teachers. Districts have always taken on the commitment of training new teachers. This bill would not change that commitment. The reality is that current alternative certification and educator prep programs are not producing enough certified teachers to meet district needs. It still falls on the district to make an employment decision between variously qualified teachers. Concerns about pedagogical training always can be addressed by districts providing extra professional development. The recent passage by the House of HB 1024 by Crossover, which returns local control to districts in the area of professional development, also would support the goals of this bill, allowing districts to devote extra staff development days to train new teachers. Finally, because of the training issue, traditionally certified teachers would not be less attractive to districts, but more so.

CSHB 2723 has a positive fiscal note as well as the potential to certify about 5,000 new teachers in the coming biennium. The Legislative Budget Board estimates that the bill would result in an estimated net gain in general revenue of about \$782,000 in fiscal 2004-05. The increased revenue would come from teaching candidates paying state fees for credential review.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 2723 could fill classrooms temporarily, but it would not provide an effective long-term solution to the teacher shortage. Studies have shown that between one-third and one-half of all teachers leave the field within five years of beginning as a teacher. Attrition rates are highest among undertrained teachers, about 60 percent of whom quit within three years. The problem is not recruiting more marginally qualified teachers, but retaining those teachers who have committed to the profession by investing in their own education, training, and full certification. In survey after survey, certified teachers have said that greater administrative support, improved discipline in the classroom, reduced paperwork, and better salaries and benefits would keep them teaching longer.

CSHB 2723 would create an enormous training burden on districts. It currently costs on average between \$3,000 and \$5,000 to train a teacher through an alternative certification program. Some of these teachers can gain certification while they are teaching full-time, but at least in these alternative certification programs, teacher candidates have the benefit of participating in a summer induction program before they enter the classroom. This bill could shift the entire burden of training new teachers onto districts. Without the concurrent passage of HB 317 by Grusendorf — a bill that would provide teacher mentoring programs for newly certified teachers — CSHB 2723 could spell trouble for fledgling teachers who would have to sink or swim as soon as they hit the classroom.

CSHB 2723 would not help raise the educational standard and would be insulting to certified teachers. It would allow a person with no training in pedagogy to be certified fully as a teacher. A person who holds an advanced degree in a subject and is knowledgeable in that area is not necessarily qualified to teach a classroom full of junior high or high school students. Further, it could be a way for individuals with advanced degrees who have tried and failed teacher certification exams in the past to get essentially a free pass into the teaching profession. Texas should treat teaching as a profession,

like medicine, law, or pharmacy, and require appropriate training before issuing a license.

CSHB 2723 would be a way for districts to reduce salary costs, because a person holding the alternative certification would be less expensive to hire than a certified teacher with adequate professional development. This form of certification essentially would allow districts to give up on finding qualified, certified teachers.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

During Connecticut's teacher shortage, the state took the opposite approach of this bill. The state required higher standards, more exams, and all new teachers to participate in a mentoring program. In addition, the state required mandatory training in the art of teaching. The state also significantly raised teacher salaries. Instead of watering down the profession, the state raised the bar, and Connecticut now has a teacher surplus.

NOTES:

The committee substitute differs from bill as introduced by deleting the provision that would apply the bill beginning with the 2003-04 school year. The substitute also would make a conforming change to another section of the Education Code.

A similar bill, HB 318 by Grusendorf, which would grant teaching certificates to individuals with bachelor's degrees who could pass state teacher certification exams, also is on today's General State Calendar.

A related bill, HB 317 by Grusendorf, which would provide teacher mentoring support for new teachers, is pending in the Public Education Committee.