

SUBJECT: Funding the “Read to Succeed” program with specialized license plates

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Alexander, Siebert, Finnell, Hawley, Hill, Pickett, Uher

0 nays

2 absent — Edwards, Hartnett

WITNESSES: For — Ann Williams and Marilyn J. Mask, Trinity Chapter, Links, Inc.; Robby Collins, Dallas Independent School District; Claire Hill, The Hills Psychotherapy Center; Patricia Hayes, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Sandy Kibby, Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers

Against — None

DIGEST: CSHB 107 would authorize the Texas Department of Transportation to issue specially designed license plates bearing the motto “Read to Succeed” for use on passenger cars and light trucks. Proceeds from the sale of these plates would be collected and deposited in an account to fund the Read to Succeed program and to offer grants for similar projects.

The Commissioner of Education would develop the Read to Succeed program offering extra reading education to students in kindergarten through 3rd grade reading below their grade level. Public schools where more than 35 percent of students in these grades were reading below standard would be eligible for a grant from the program.

The grant could not replace any existing program, extra reading instruction would have to be offered after regular classroom hours; and teachers assigned additional duties because of the program would have to be compensated at a reasonable rate of pay.

CSHB 107 would authorize the commissioner of education to determine additional guidelines for grant eligibility and prescribe procedures for applications, recipient selection, and grant distribution. The bill also would create an advisory board to assist in developing program goals, selecting

recipients, determining grant amounts, and promoting the program. The advisory board would include the commissioner or designee and four members appointed by the governor, with one designated to represent the public, two representing children's educational interests, and one the interest of public schools; two additional selected by the governor from a list of nominees provided by the speaker of the House; and two persons appointed by the lieutenant governor. Service on the advisory board would not be compensated, but members could receive reimbursement for travel expenses necessary for performing board duties.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 1997. Grants could be made beginning August 1, 1998.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 107 would establish and provide a funding source for a necessary and positive program to help Texas schoolchildren improve their reading skills. Last year, more than 20 percent of our state's third graders failed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills reading test. These children must be reached before they slip even further behind in their reading skills, with dire implications for overall study habits and academic progress.

CSHB 107 would target children at early stages of reading problems so that the state would have to spend less for remedial programs in middle school and high school to help youngsters to catch up and master skills that should have been learned while in elementary schools. The grant application procedures outlined by the bill would ensure that the neediest children received this assistance.

The Read to Succeed program would be a self-funding program. Vanity plates have proven to be an effective money-making project, especially when the cause is right. The schools themselves could be counted on to promote the project, since they would directly benefit from it. The fiscal note estimated the program could net \$500,000 each year, factoring in expenses to produce the plates. With its substantial experience, the Department of Transportation could easily take on the job of producing and distributing the special license plates.

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Read to Succeed is precisely the kind of program that works in Texas — no mandates, plenty of opportunity to succeed, and broad bipartisan support, as evidenced by the 82 co-authors to CSHB 107.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute eliminated design requirements for the license plates, added a \$15 annual fee for purchasing 50 or more customized plates, required regular school employees to be compensated for extra duties assigned because of the program, and reduced the size of the advisory board.