

SUBJECT: Training teachers in instruction of students with disabilities

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Dunnam, Hardcastle, Hochberg, Olivo, Smith
0 nays
2 absent — Grusendorf, Oliveira

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 26 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — Brock Gregg, Association of Texas Professional Educators
Against — None

BACKGROUND: “Mainstreaming” refers to placing students with intellectual, behavioral, learning, or physical disabilities in regular classes with their non-disabled peers. Because of federal, state, and local policies, mainstreaming of disabled and special-education students has increased steadily over the past 25 years. Education Code, sec. 21.451 requires that annual staff development programs for teachers include training in technology, conflict resolution, and discipline strategies.

DIGEST: SB 1727 would require that staff development also include a component for training teachers who are not special-education teachers on how to instruct students with disabilities.

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, 2001. The training requirement would apply beginning with the 2002-03 school year.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 1727 would meet the needs of many teachers who have one or more special-education students in their classrooms but who lack specialized training in instructing these students. Teaching special-education students requires certain modifications in instructional techniques, and most teachers

are left to navigate these concerns on their own. Lack of training frustrates both teachers and special-education students. The educational experience of non-special-education students also suffers when the teacher must devote extra time and attention to the special-education student because of the teacher's lack of training.

SB 1727 would not create significant new costs for school districts. Training teachers how to teach special-education students in a mainstreaming setting easily could be incorporated into existing staff development programs. Additional days of training would not be required of either school districts or teachers. Local districts could rely on programs already developed by their own special-education instructors or by the Texas Education Agency. Advocacy groups would be willing to provide this kind of instruction at nominal or no cost to districts.

Under SB 1727, staff development programs would provide only general guidelines on training teachers on how to instruct special-education students. The exact program would be a local decision determined by individual school districts and campuses.

Instruction programs for special-education students are subject to complex and ever-changing federal laws. This area also is subject to much litigation. Teachers should receive yearly training on updates in the law. The training under SB 1727 could protect school districts from costly lawsuits.

SB 1727 would help teachers and school districts prepare for the new standards established in SB 1196 by Truan, which has passed both houses of the Legislature and has been sent to the governor. SB 1196 would amend the Education Code regarding the use of confinement, restraint, seclusion, and time-out in public schools. Specifically, it would prohibit confining a student with a disability in a locked box, closet, or other space as a discipline or behavior-management technique. SB 1727 would require that teachers be given training to manage potentially disruptive students in a mainstream classroom.

The instructional techniques needed to instruct special-education students often are effective for all students. Ultimately, non-special-education students also would benefit from the training required by SB 1727.

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OPPONENTS
SAY:

SB 1727 would represent another unfunded state mandate. According to the bill's fiscal note, based on an estimate of \$75 per teacher for trainers and materials, the bill would cost local school districts more than \$18.5 million to train the state's 246,500 non-special-education teachers. The training that this bill would require could become a yearly cost borne by the school districts with no assistance from the state.