

SUBJECT: Mentoring programs for students at risk of dropping out of school

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Grusendorf, Dawson, Dutton, Jr., Eissler, Griggs, Hochberg
0 nays
3 absent — Oliveira, Branch, Madden

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 8 — voice vote

WITNESSES: For — Sandi Borden, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association
Against — None
On — Celeste Padilla, Governor’s Mentoring Initiative and TxCUCS; Toni Turner, Governor’s Mentoring Initiative

BACKGROUND: School districts receive a compensatory education allotment for each student who is educationally or economically disadvantaged or lives in a residential placement facility where the student’s parents do not live. Under Education Code, sec. 42.152, the compensatory education allotment may be used only to fund supplemental programs and services designed to eliminate disparities on assessment tests or in dropout rates between at-risk students and other students. Specifically, the funds may be used only to meet the costs of providing a compensatory, intensive, or accelerated instruction program to serve at-risk students and economically disadvantaged students. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) distributes about \$1 billion per year to school districts to fund the compensatory education allotment.

DIGEST: SB 16 would allow school districts to use compensatory education funds to provide mentoring services for students at risk of dropping out. These mentoring services would have to meet standards adopted by the governor’s mentoring initiative. School boards would have to obtain the consent of a student’s parent or guardian before allowing the student to participate in the

program. A school board could arrange for any public or private community-based organization to implement the program.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 16 would encourage school districts to expand mentoring programs for students at risk of dropping out of school as a supplement to other efforts to support at-risk students. One-on-one support from a mentor can make a critical difference in a student's academic success. Of 400 students with mentors who participated in a Louis Harris poll, 73 percent said mentors had helped them raise their goals and expectations; 87 percent went to college or planned to attend college within two years of graduation; 59 percent improved their grades; and 87 percent said they felt some benefit from their mentoring relationship. Not enough mentoring programs exist in institutions that have the resources to build and sustain them, such as schools, churches, and corporations. SB 16 would offer a funding option for school districts that want to establish or expand a mentoring program.

Mentoring programs supported by state funds would have to meet quality-assurance standards developed by mentoring professionals and adopted by the Governor's Mentoring Initiative, a program of the Texas Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service. These include standards for program management, orientation, screening and matching of mentors with students, training and support, and program evaluation. The standards would help ensure safety for young people, allow programs to support and retain members, and foster the long-term operational stability of mentoring organizations.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Compensatory education funds are intended to help provide academic support, such as accelerated instruction, for students at risk of dropping out. School districts should not be allowed to divert funds intended for direct academic instruction to support volunteer mentoring programs that could be funded from other sources.

NOTES:

SB 894 by Bivins, passed by the House with amendments on May 20, would give school districts more flexibility in using compensatory education funds, but these funds would have to be used for instructional expenses for at-risk students. The bill is now before a House-Senate conference committee.

