

SUBJECT: Transition assistance for school-age dependents of military personnel

COMMITTEE: Defense Affairs and State-Federal Relations — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Corte, Campbell, Herrero, Hodge, Leibowitz, Merritt
0 nays
3 absent — Berman, P. Moreno, Noriega

WITNESSES: For — Stephanie Surles, Military Child Education Coalition
Against — None
On — Sharon Jackson, Texas Education Agency

BACKGROUND: With 18 major military installations, Texas public schools enroll a significant number of military personnel dependents, who must move and change schools frequently.

Under the direction of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Texas public school students are held to accountability standards through enrollment, curriculum, statewide assessment testing, and graduation requirements.

Texas public school districts require submission of certain information in order for a new student to enroll. Education Code, section 25.002, requires a student's parent, legal guardian, or the school district in which the child most recently attended school to provide the child's records to the new school district within 30 days of the child's enrollment.

Under Education Code, subsec. 28.025(c), a student may graduate and receive a diploma only if (1) the student successfully completes the curriculum requirements identified by the State Board of Education and passes the secondary exit-level assessment exams required by subsec. 39.025(a); or (2) the student successfully completes an individualized education program. If a student fails to meet the necessary requirements because the student successfully completed the curriculum requirements but failed to pass the exit-level assessment exams, section 28.025(d)

authorizes a school district to issue a certificate of coursework completion to the student.

If a student fails to perform satisfactorily on the secondary exit-level assessment instruments under subsection 39.025(a), then subsections 39.025(b) and (c) allow the student to retake the exam until the student performs satisfactorily on the test.

These provisions also apply to students who complete course requirements at a Texas Youth commission educational program.

DIGEST:

CSHB 25 would amend the Education Code by adding section 25.006, which outlines ways in which the TEA would provide transition assistance to school-aged dependents of military personnel.

The bill would require TEA to assist the transition of military students from one school to another by:

- improving the timely transfer of student records;
- developing systems to ease student transition during the first two weeks of enrollment at a new school;
- promoting practices that foster student access to extracurricular programs;
- establishing procedures to lessen the adverse impact of student moves to a new school after the end of the student's junior year of high school;
- encouraging or maintaining partnerships between military bases and affected school districts;
- encouraging school districts to provide services for military students in transition when applying for admission to postsecondary study and when seeking sources of funding for postsecondary study; and
- providing other assistance as identified by the agency.

Sec. 39.025 would be amended to require the TEA commissioner to adopt one or more alternative nationally recognized norm referenced assessment exams to administer to a student to qualify for a high school diploma if, after January 1 of the school year in which the student would otherwise be eligible to graduate, the student enrolled for the first time in a public school in Texas or after an absence of at least four years from any public school in the state.

The required performance level for an assessment exam would have to be at least as rigorous as the performance level for the secondary exit-level assessment exam for the same subject. As a result, if a qualified military or other transfer student successfully completed the alternative assessment exam, in addition to completing the curriculum requirements, the student would graduate and receive a diploma.

CSHB 25 also would amend section 25.002 by requiring school districts to provide student records for all new students, not just military personnel dependents, to the new school district not later than 10 days after the date a request for information is received by the school district.

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, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

With such a large military presence in the state, a great number of military dependents are enrolled in Texas public schools. There also will soon be a large influx of military personnel to the state from transfers to Fort Hood and Fort Bliss. The state must take the necessary steps to ease the transition of the thousands of school-aged military dependents who come in and out of our public school system.

Military personnel dependents, as well as other transfer students, face many social and educational obstacles when they have to switch schools during the school year. CSHB 25 would help ease the transition by recognizing the difficulties and working to accommodate the students with enrollment, curriculum, extracurricular activity, assessment testing and graduation requirements.

CSHB 25 would not lower the standards for military and transfer students. Military and transfer students would face the same rigorous requirements as other students in order to graduate and receive diplomas. The bill simply would try to lessen the frustrations they face. It is not fair to ask high school students to pass the secondary exit-level assessment exams when they have not been through the educational training for the exams and have completed comparable programs elsewhere. The bill would give these students a nationally recognized equivalent alternative to Texas' exit-level assessment exam, retaining accountability for all students.

TEA currently has exit-level assessment exam reciprocity agreements with the governing education agencies of other states. CSHB 25 would apply such an exception to military students and other transfer students who did not qualify under the reciprocity agreements.

It is unfair for school children to be delayed or denied access to extracurricular activities because their records have not been transferred from their old schools. Participation in extracurricular activities is very important to the development and growth of children and helps them make new friends and feel a sense of community. The bill would help ensure that these children have fair and prompt access to extracurricular activities such as sports, drama, and art.

Texas is not alone in trying to get this kind of law passed. Other states with considerable military presence are currently developing similar legislation that would take into account the many challenges faced by military and transfer students.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

While most have sympathy for military personnel dependents and the frequent moves they must make, these students should be held to the same standards as other graduating Texas high school seniors. Each group of students receives the same diploma and should have to pass the same exam.

NOTES:

The committee substitute modified the original bill by changing the time limit for school districts to transfer school records from 30 days after the student enrolls to 10 days after the new school district requests the records. It also added the alternative secondary exit-level assessment exam option for students who are new to the state or have been attending school elsewhere for at least four years and required that the alternate exam be at least as rigorous as the existing assessment exam.