

SUBJECT: Administering international assessments in certain public schools

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Eissler, Branch, Delisi, Hochberg, Olivo, Patrick

0 nays

3 absent — Zedler, Dutton, Mowery

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: David Duty, Texas Association of School Boards)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Martin Peña, South Texas Association of School Boards)

On — Rudy Sandoval, Texas Workforce Commission

DIGEST: HB 3259 would amend the Education Code to establish a program requiring certain school districts to administer internationally comparative assessment instruments to their students. School districts from rural and urban areas of the state would participate on either a voluntary basis or as required by the commissioner of education.

In administering the program, the commissioner would:

- compare the performance on the international assessment instrument of Texas students to students of the same grade level in other countries;
- compare the international assessment instrument with state assessment and state educational goals; and
- provide professional development for educators in the interpretation and use of results of the international assessment instrument.

The initiative would be funded through the Foundation School Program (FSP) at an amount not to exceed \$2 million per fiscal biennium. In advance of each legislative session, the commissioner would report student performance on the assessment to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the House, each member of the Legislature, and each 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, 2007, and apply beginning in the 2007-2008 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 3259 would help Texas prepare a workforce that could compete not only with neighboring states but in the international community. Texas is the second largest economy in the United States and ranked as the 15th largest economy in the world in 2005. The implementation of international assessment instruments in Texas schools would allow the state to directly compare the performance of its students to students that represent the economic future in other countries. Some school districts already have expressed an interest in such a program, and this bill would allow them to volunteer to administer the international assessment at their campuses.

Statewide testing based on the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) curriculum provides a basis for comparing performance among schools and districts in Texas. The NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) examinations compare the performance of Texas students to students in other states, but there currently is no measure for comparing Texas students to students of the same grade level in other countries. The bill would provide this needed assessment tool and give Texas schools and students the potential to benchmark against their international counterparts. Ignoring the importance of international comparisons creates an isolationist atmosphere in American education that would serve only to disadvantage Texas students who soon will join a competitive, increasingly global workforce.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The bill would require already over-tested students to take yet another exam of questionable validity. Comparing students in Texas to those in other countries would not necessarily provide valuable results. These assessments often do not account for cultural and lifestyle differences or which students are represented in the test — all students, or only the top performers. Additionally, students' performance on the NAEP already is used to make similar comparisons. International assessment instruments have limitations on the reliability of the data they yield, and the state should not spend \$2 million requiring some Texas students to take them.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, it would cost the state up to \$2 million in FSP funds in fiscal 2008-09 to administer the testing program.