

SUBJECT: Parenting and paternity awareness in middle and junior high schools

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Eissler, Farias, Jackson, Olivo, Patrick, Shelton
1 nay — Weber
4 absent — Hochberg, Allen, Aycock, Dutton

WITNESSES: For — Patricia King, ChildBuilders; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Conni Barker, One Voice; Christine Gendron, Texas Network of Youth Services; Noelita Lugo, Texans Care for Children; Madeline McClure, TexProtects, The Texas Association for the Protection of Children; Jason Sabo, United Ways of Texas)

Against — None

On — Michael Hayes, Office of the Attorney General

BACKGROUND: In 2007, the 80th Legislature enacted HB 2176 by Deshotel, which required school districts to incorporate a parenting and paternity awareness (p.a.p.a.) program into a high school's health curriculum. The program addresses parenting skills and responsibilities, including child support and other legal rights and responsibilities of parenthood; relationships skills, including money management, communication skills, and marriage preparations; and family violence prevention, if the district does not have such a program.

DIGEST: HB 3076 would require that the parenting and paternity awareness program be used in a district's middle and junior high school health curriculum. School districts would provide high school health credit to a middle or junior high school student who completed a course that included the p.a.p.a. program.

A school district could develop or adopt research-based local programs and curriculum materials for use in conjunction with the p.a.p.a. program that provided instruction in child development; parenting skills, including child abuse and neglect prevention; and assertiveness skills to prevent

teenage pregnancy, abusive relationships, and family violence. The Texas Education Agency could evaluate local programs and curriculum materials and distribute information regarding those programs and materials to other districts.

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, 2009. It would apply beginning with the 2009-2010 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

By requiring the p.a.p.a. program to be incorporated into the middle and junior high school health curriculum, HB 3076 would provide another tool to make middle and junior high school students think about the consequences of having a child and would help encourage more responsible behavior. Texas has the highest teen birth rate in the nation. Texas Medicaid pays millions of dollars per year for the care of pregnant teens and their newborns.

For many students, learning about parenting and paternity in high school is too late. More than 1,200 13- and 14-year-old girls get pregnant each year. Many of these students have not had role models from whom they can learn positive parenting skills. Ineffective or abusive parenting is a significant contributing factor to many social and health problems, including substance abuse, crime, and emotional issues such as depression or aggression. The p.a.p.a. program would teach responsible parenting practices to teens who may become teen parents or have children later in life, such as what the difference is between discipline and abuse.

The p.a.p.a. program serves as a deterrent to teen pregnancy, and HB 3076 would extend this benefit to middle and junior high school students. Teens may engage in less risky behavior if they become more aware of how their lives would be impacted as teen parents in terms of the time they would spend caring for the child as well as the financial commitment. The program also could help teens think about such issues as what type of relationship they would like to be in when they have children. The program can be particularly helpful in targeting male students, because most health education deals more with pregnancy prevention among female students.

HB 3076 would give districts the option to incorporate more useful materials into their existing p.a.p.a. program and would provide for an

information exchange of useful curriculum materials. The new materials could help students understand the stages of child development, how to prevent child abuse and neglect, and how to be assertive to avoid teen pregnancy and abusive relationships.

Concerns about this bill would be addressed by a floor amendment that would remove the provision that would give middle and junior high school students health credit for completion of a course that included the p.a.p.a. program. The amendment also would make adding the program to the middle and junior high health curriculum optional rather than mandatory.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 3076 would allow middle and junior high school students to satisfy the high school health curriculum requirement needed to graduate high school by taking any course that included the p.a.p.a. program without having to learn everything that is required of high school health students. The essential knowledge and skills requirements that must be taught to high school health students are more extensive and complex than the middle school health curriculum.

Adding the parenting and paternity awareness program to middle and junior high school health programs should be discretionary for school districts rather than mandatory. Each district, school, and teacher should be able to tailor the program to fit the needs of their students or have the option of not using it at all.

NOTES:

Rep. Deshotel intends to offer a floor amendment that would remove the provision that would give middle and junior high school students health credit for completion of a course that included the p.a.p.a. program. The amendment also would give districts the option to incorporate the p.a.p.a. program into middle and junior high school health curriculums rather than require it. A teacher could modify the suggested sequence and pace of the program at any grade level.