

SUBJECT: Revising eligibility for grants to student clubs for dropout prevention

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Eissler, Hochberg, Allen, Dutton, Guillen, Huberty, T. Smith, Strama

3 nays — Aycock, Shelton, Weber

0 absent

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Yannis Banks, Texas NAACP; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Nelson Salinas, Texas Association of Business)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 29.095 requires the education commissioner to administer a pilot program to provide grants to school districts to fund a student club for students at risk of dropping out of school. The commissioner may not spend more than \$4 million in any state fiscal biennium on the program.

The commissioner may award a matching grant of no more than \$5,000 in a school year to a school district on behalf of one or more student clubs at a district high school campus that is eligible. A student club is eligible for a grant if the district or campus exhibited characteristics that strongly correlated with high dropout rates during each of the three preceding school years.

A student club may use funds to support academic or co-curricular club activities, other than athletics, in which at least 50 percent of the participating students have been identified as students at risk of dropping out of school. A student club may use funds for materials, sponsor stipends, and other needs that directly support the club's activities. A student club must use the entire amount of the grant to directly fund the club's activities. A student club may not use more than 50 percent of a grant to pay sponsor stipends.

At the end of the school year, a student club that receives a grant must submit a report to the board of trustees summarizing the club's activities and the extent to which the club met the club's goals and achieved the club's intent.

DIGEST: HB 2748 would amend the pilot program to provide grants to school districts to fund student club activities for students at risk of dropping out of school by requiring that an eligible club be on a school campus with a student population at least 50 percent of whom were students at risk of dropping out of school.

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, 2011.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 2748 would alter the eligibility criteria to direct the state's limited resources to a more specific subset of students. Focusing state resources on at-risk students would help decrease the dropout rate, a universal state goal. It would make the program more targeted and more efficient.

The bill would not play favorites among the disadvantaged, nor would it lower incentives. The bill would increase the number of student clubs that could receive grants, which would positively impact the lives of at-risk students.

OPPONENTS SAY: HB 2748 would play favorites among the disadvantaged. It would send the message to other student clubs that have worked hard to meet their goals that their efforts do not matter when grant funding is involved. The bill could prevent a successful club on a financially disadvantaged campus from getting a grant because the bill would direct grant funding to those who are at-risk, not those who are financially disadvantaged. The bill would remove any incentive for some financially disadvantaged clubs to compete with other clubs for funding because to be awarded the students would have to be at-risk, or willing to drop out.