

SUBJECT: Limiting eligibility to the educational aide exemption program

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Branch, Brown, Johnson, Lewis, Patrick
1 nay — D. Howard
3 absent — Castro, Alonzo, Bonnen

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 54.214 authorizes the educational aide exemption program, which provides tuition and fee assistance to individuals with experience in public education as classroom aides so that they may become certified to teach. Awards vary based on the number of hours taken by the student and the relative costs of the institution. Awards cover tuition and fees other than class and lab fees.

DIGEST: HB 3624 would limit eligibility for the educational aide exemption program for persons enrolled at the higher education institution granting the exemption to persons seeking certification in one or more subject areas determined by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to be experiencing a critical shortage of teachers at public schools in Texas.

The board of trustees of a school district would have to establish a plan to encourage the hiring of educational aides who showed a willingness to become certified teachers in one or more subject areas determined by the TEA to be experiencing a critical shortage of teachers at public schools in Texas.

The bill would require higher education institutions that offered courses required for certification in one or more subject areas experiencing a critical teacher shortage to establish a plan to make those courses more accessible to individuals seeking certification.

The change in law made by the bill would take effect beginning with the 2011 fall semester.

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:**

To address the growing need for more qualified teachers, Texas established the educational aide exemption program, which exempts certain educational classroom aides from tuition and some fees. The shortage of teachers in critical areas is forcing otherwise unqualified teachers into these subject areas. If there are shortages in certain subject areas, it would make sense to find ways to help a teacher attain the necessary certification to address the shortage. This could offer an incentive for teachers to work in disadvantaged schools.

In the current budget climate, it would be a proper use of limited state dollars to target this small financial aid program toward people seeking certification in specific subject areas – like bilingual education, math, and science – that are experiencing critical teacher shortages.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The bill could deny or limit access to higher education for educational aides desiring to become teachers outside of critical subject areas.

NOTES:

Provisions similar to HB 3624 are contained in HB 3639 by Pitts, regarding state fiscal matters related to public and higher education.