

SUBJECT: Allowing certain charter schools to be awarded academic distinction

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Eissler, Allen, Aycock, Shelton, T. Smith, Strama
1 nay — Weber
4 absent — Hochberg, Dutton, Guillen, Huberty

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 14 — 31-0, on the Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; David Dunn, Texas Charter Schools Association; Andrew Erben, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Julie Shields, Texas Association of School Boards)
Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, ch. 39, subch. G requires the education commissioner to award academic distinction designations to school districts and campuses rated academically acceptable or above by the public school accountability system. The commissioner awards academic distinction designations based on certain criteria, which can include academic achievement in English language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies; fine arts; physical education; the 21st Century Workforce Development program; and the second language acquisition program.

DIGEST: SB 1484 would allow an open-enrollment charter school to be awarded an academic distinction designation by the commissioner of education, subject to the same criteria as a school district or campus. An open-enrollment charter school would not be eligible for a designation if the school was evaluated under alternative education accountability procedures adopted by the commissioner.

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:**

SB 1484 is necessary to allow the commissioner of education to recognize and reward open-enrollment charter schools assessed under the public school accountability system. These charter schools are public schools and should qualify for the same recognition afforded to their peers. The purpose of the academic distinction designation is to recognize innovative programs that help improve student performance, and there are many charter school programs that have fulfilled this purpose.

SB 1484 appropriately would exclude charter schools evaluated under the alternative accountability system. Those charter schools are not comparable to those evaluated under the public school accountability system because the alternative system is not as rigorous. The state should not award a distinction to a school subject to lower standards.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 1484 would place unnecessary limitations on the recognition of open-enrollment charter schools. Charter schools evaluated under the alternative education accountability system should be eligible for an academic distinction designation.