

SUBJECT: Certification requirements for teachers in bilingual education

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Aycock, Allen, Bohac, Deshotel, Farney, Galindo, Huberty, K. King, VanDeaver

0 nays

2 absent — Dutton, González

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 1 — 30-0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 218*)

For — Pauline Dow, Austin ISD; Laila Ferris and Cynthia Montes-Bustamante, El Paso ISD; Vivian Pratts, Spring Branch ISD; Jesse Romero, Texas Association for Bilingual Education; (*Registered, but did not testify*): Kate Kuhlmann, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Ted Melina Raab, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Nelson Salinas, Texas Association of Business; Colby Nichols, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas Rural Education Association; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Dominic Giarratani, Texas Association of School Boards; Melva V. Cardenas, Texas Association of School Personnel Administrators; Maria Whitsett, Texas School Alliance; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Suzanne Mercado)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*): Monica Martinez and Tim Miller, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Districts with enrollment of 20 or more students of limited English proficiency in any language classification in the same grade level are required by Education Code, sec. 29.053(c) to offer a bilingual education or special language program.

Sec. 29.061(b) requires a teacher assigned to a bilingual education program to be certified for bilingual education by the State Board for Educator Certification, and sec. 29.061(c) requires a teacher assigned to an English as a second language (ESL) or other special language program to be certified for ESL.

19 Texas Administrative Code, part 2, sec. 89.1210(d) requires bilingual education be implemented through one of the following programs:

- transitional bilingual/early exit;
- transitional bilingual/late exit;
- dual language immersion/two-way; or
- dual language immersion/one-way.

Sec. 89.1207 allows school districts to apply to the education commissioner for an exception to the bilingual program and the approval of an alternate program.

DIGEST: SB 159 would make changes to Education Code, sec. 29.061 regarding required certifications for teachers in certain bilingual programs, beginning with the 2015-16 school year.

The bill would allow a teacher assigned to a bilingual education program using a dual language immersion/one-way or two-way program model to be certified for:

- bilingual education for the component of the program provided in a language other than English; and
- bilingual education or ESL for the component of the program provided in English.

A district that uses a dual language immersion/one-way or two-way program would be allowed to assign a teacher certified in bilingual education for the language other than English component and a different teacher certified in ESL for the English language component.

The bill would require teachers to be certified for bilingual education for transitional bilingual/early exit program models or transitional bilingual/late exit program models.

This 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, 2015

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 159 would help address a shortage of teachers certified in bilingual education by allowing districts flexibility to staff the English component of dual language programs with teachers who were certified in ESL. In dual language programs, students receive instruction in both English and Spanish, or another language. A two-way program integrates students proficient in English and students identified as limited English proficient. A one-way program serves only students identified as limited English proficient.

Teachers certified in ESL are well qualified to teach the English component of a dual language two-way program. Districts have had success using this teaching model to integrate student populations and help students achieve biliteracy in English and Spanish or another language. The bill would remove an unnecessary barrier to the model and save districts time spent requesting an exception for their programs each school year.

Texas has more than 860,000 English language learners — about 90 percent of whom are Spanish speakers — and the number is increasing every year. Over the next few years, Texas is expected to need more than 11,000 additional teachers who are prepared to help these students. Some educators worry that Texas has made it too difficult for teachers to achieve bilingual certification. The bill would allow teachers certified in bilingual education and those certified in ESL to team teach so that more students could be served in dual language two-way programs.

OPPONENTS SB 159 would do little to help the growing population of English language

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SAY:

learners, who need to be taught by teachers who are trained in academic Spanish and the best methods of delivering bilingual instruction. The bill would not address the underlying problem of the state's shortage of certified bilingual teachers. Although the test for bilingual certification may be challenging, it is designed to determine if a teacher has sufficient proficiency to help students achieve Spanish literacy. If it is the state's philosophy to focus on dual-language programs in which students must learn to read, write, and speak in Spanish, it is critical to have teachers who know more than conversational Spanish.

NOTES:

The House companion bill, HB 218 by Márquez, passed the Senate on May 22 by a vote of 30-1 (Huffines).