

**SUBJECT:** Establishing a reading excellence team pilot program

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 7 ayes — Aycock, Bohac, Deshotel, Farney, Huberty, K. King, VanDeaver

0 nays

4 absent — Allen, Dutton, Galindo, González

**SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 23 — 30-0

**WITNESSES:** For — Barbara Frandsen, League of Women Voters of Texas; Mark Terry, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; (*Registered by did not testify*: Ellen Arnold, Texas Parent Teacher Association; Courtney Boswell, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Jeffrey Brooks, Texas Conservative Coalition; Grover Campbell, Texas Association of School Boards; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Ashlea Graves, Houston ISD; Bill Hammond, Texas Association of Business; Janna Lilly, Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education; Julie Linn, Texans for Education Reform; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Ted Melina Raab, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Colby Nichols, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas Rural Education Association; Cameron Petty, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Rona Statman, the Arc of Texas; Maria Whitsett, Texas School Alliance; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council)

Against — Zenobia Joseph; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Matt Long; Sandy Ward)

On — Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency

**DIGEST:** SB 935 would require the commissioner of education to establish a pilot program for reading excellence teams to provide teacher training and assistance at eligible school districts with low student performance on certain reading assessments.

The commissioner would determine eligibility in the pilot program based on the district's low student performance on:

- a reading diagnosis assessment given in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade; or
- the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) grade 3 reading exam.

The pilot program would allow an eligible school district to request a reading excellence team. This team, composed of reading instruction specialists, would:

- review with the district the results of reading assessments and, based on these assessments, determine school campuses and classrooms with the greatest need of assistance for students in kindergarten through third grade; and
- work with teachers on campuses and in classrooms identified above to provide training designed to improve student reading outcomes.

The commissioner would be required to establish this pilot program and adopt necessary rules by September 1, 2016.

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, and expire on September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** SB 935 would create a pilot program to place reading specialists in campuses with teachers who most need additional training in literacy best practices. Children who excel early in reading tend to do better academically than those with basic literacy skills. This gap increases as students grow older, which makes early intervention crucial to ensuring

proper student literacy development. Reading specialists apply research-based methods and consistent assessments to effect change in student performance. With reading specialists, literacy instruction is consolidated and standardized, allowing consistent instruction throughout a district.

By placing reading specialists in schools, the bill would give teachers the opportunity to ask questions about irregularities in student achievement in literacy. Also, reading specialists could share literacy techniques that teachers could apply immediately and receive feedback about in the classroom.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

SB 935 would not be a good use of government funding because certified teachers should have already mastered the information and training this program would provide. Teachers who receive their certification from universities should be well versed in literacy pedagogy, and any additional training should be provided through continuing education courses. If teachers are not receiving the adequate training for literacy improvement, then certification course requirements in universities should be adjusted.

This bill would attempt to create standardized instruction, but not every student would fit within this box. Students are a diverse group, and what works for one student might not work for another. Trying to fit students within a standardized instructional framework could leave behind students who learn best in a different environment.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note, SB 935 would have a negative net impact to general revenue of about \$3.1 million through fiscal 2016-17.

The House companion bill, HB 3134 by Deshotel, was referred to the Public Education committee on March 23.