

**SUBJECT:** Creating a competitive grant program to fund early literacy programs

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 13 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, Dutton, M. González, K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

**WITNESSES:** For — Maria Cantu-Ondarza, Legacy Community Health; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Mandi Kimball, Children at Risk; Shannon Meroney, Impact Dyslexia; Bill Kelly, City of Houston Mayor’s Office; Lauren Spreen, Texas Academy of Family Physicians; Mia Hutchens, Texas Association of Business; Chris Frandsen, Texas League Of Women Voters; Michelle Romero, Texas Medical Association; Clayton Travis, Texas Pediatric Society; Kyle Ward, Texas PTA; Nataly Saucedo, United Ways of Texas)

Against — None

On — Jocelyn McConnell, UT Health Houston; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eric Marin, Texas Education Agency)

**DIGEST:** CSHB 2879 would require the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) to create a competitive grant program to promote early literacy. UTHealth would award grants for the implementation of literacy programs or expansion of existing programs and for the operation of those programs for at least two years. The requirement to create the program would be contingent on appropriations from the Legislature.

**Literacy program requirements and guidelines.** A literacy program funded through a grant awarded under the bill would consult and use as a guide the program model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center, including any clinical, programmatic, and data collection requirements of that model. UTHealth and the Reach Out and Read National Center would publish guidelines for the literacy program funded

through the grant.

The program would require participating health care practitioners to:

- provide books to children and encourage parents to read to their children to develop pre-literacy skills during a well-child examination;
- maintain waiting rooms that encouraged children to read; and
- provide services designed to increase the school readiness of children receiving program services.

The program would partner with local adult literacy providers to encourage parent literacy.

**Application.** To apply for a grant, a public or private entity, including a county or municipality, would submit a written application to UTHealth on a form prescribed by UTHealth in consultation with the Reach Out and Read National Center.

**Program funds.** UTHealth, as soon as practicable, would actively seek and apply for any available federal money to assist in financing the literacy grant program and could use appropriated money from the state government.

UTHealth also could accept gifts, donations, grants money, and in-kind contributions from the federal or local government, corporations or other persons, provided that UTHealth implemented the program in accordance with the bill's contingency requirement. UTHealth would be required to implement a provision of the bill only if the Legislature appropriated money specifically for that purpose. If the Legislature did not appropriate money for that purpose, UTHealth could, but would not be required to, implement the provision using other money available to UTHealth for that purpose.

UTHealth would be required to award grants to applicants in a manner that ensured that the literacy program collectively operated in multiple

communities geographically distributed across Texas. UTHealth also could use program money to administer the competitive grant program and to purchase or contract to purchase discounted books for use by grant recipients.

A grant recipient could use grant money awarded only to implement or expand and operate a literacy program including costs related to:

- administering the literacy program;
- training and managing health care practitioners who volunteered to participate in the literacy program; and
- purchasing or contracting to purchase discounted books for use in the literacy program.

**Program evaluation and reporting.** UTHealth and the Reach Out and Read National Center would prepare and submit a report by December 1 of each even-numbered year to relevant legislative committees regarding the grants awarded during the preceding fiscal biennium. The first report would be due December 1, 2022.

The report would include:

- the number of health care practitioners in the program;
- the number of children who were receiving literacy program services as result of the grant; and
- the amount of each grant awarded to a health care practitioner under the program.

On request, each grant recipient would be required to timely collect and provide certain data and other information required by UTHealth to monitor and evaluate the program.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.