

SUBJECT: Earning academic credit for American Sign Language in elementary school

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, M. González,
K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — Dutton

WITNESSES: For — Claudia Barthulu, Comal ISD; (*Registered, but did not testify*:
Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans With Disabilities; Steven Aleman,
Disability Rights Texas; Angela Smith, Fredericksburg Tea Party; Ted
Raab, Texas American Federation of Teachers (Texas AFT); Lisa Dawn-
Fisher, Texas State Teachers Association; Michael Belsick; Richard
Bohnert; Matt Long; Joseph Murphy)

Against — None

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

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 28.025(b-5) requires high school students to
complete two credits in a language other than English in order to graduate.
Section 28.025(b-21) allows a student to earn one credit in a language
other than English by successfully completing a dual language immersion
program at an elementary school.

DIGEST: HB 678 would allow a student to earn one foreign language credit toward
high school graduation requirements by completing a course in American
Sign Language at an elementary school.

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, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 678 would allow students to earn high school credit for American Sign Language (ASL) courses taught in elementary school. This could encourage more elementary schools to offer the courses and more students to take them. Other elementary school language programs already count toward high school credit, and the same credit should be offered for ASL courses.

The bill would encourage elementary students to take ASL earlier in their childhood, when language acquisition is easiest and most beneficial. Speaking two or more languages as a child has been shown to improve a child's concentration, memory, and other cognitive and multitasking skills. Studying ASL at a young age also increases students' retention of the language.

Some elementary schools already offer ASL courses, and HB 678 would give students high school credit for these courses. Allowing students to earn language credits earlier also would give them the opportunity to study other, more challenging elective subjects when they reach high school.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No concerns identified.