

SUBJECT: Establishing the life skills advisor pilot program for certain schools

COMMITTEE: Youth Health & Safety, Select — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — S. Thompson, Allison, Dutton, A. Johnson, T. King, Lozano
1 nay — Hull
2 absent — Capriglione, Landgraf

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Omodele Ojomo, Autism Society of Texas; Jolene Sanders, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Paige Duggins-Clay, IDRA; Christina Destefano)

Against — Carrie Moore, Texas Education 911 Citizens Defending Freedom (*Registered, but did not testify*: Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights)

On — Jessica Riley, National Association of Social Workers, Texas Chapter (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eric Marin, TEA)

BACKGROUND: Some have suggested that employing a life skills advisor in high schools could help address certain emotional and mental health concerns of students.

DIGEST: CSHB 3898 would require the commissioner of education to establish a life skills advisor pilot program at each high school campus located in an applicable county and develop a mental health and safety curriculum for use by life skills advisors under the program.

The bill would apply only to a county that was:

- adjacent to at least two counties that bordered the Gulf of Mexico and at least two counties that were located on the international border; and
- located within 50 miles of a county described above.

A school district located in an applicable county would designate for each district high school campus an educator employed by the district to serve as a life skills advisor. The number of life skills advisors in a district could not exceed the number of school counselors employed by the district. A life skills advisor serving at a high school would:

- collaborate with district administrators, school counselors, social workers, certain mental health professions, and local law enforcement agencies to address mental health concerns affecting students at the campus;
- provide instruction to students relating to skills and techniques to cope with anxiety, frustration, and other emotions;
- provide instruction on the mental health and safety curriculum;
- counsel any students who committed a crime of violence or were identified as having a mental health condition; and
- establish a life skills circle to assess certain student behavior and make a recommendation regarding the appropriate disciplinary action a school should take in response to that behavior.

A life skills advisor would be required to establish a life skills circle including the advisor and students enrolled at the campus to assess a student's behavior if an incident involving the student occurred that violated school policy, required the involvement of law enforcement, and involved violence or drugs. During a life skills circle, the advisor would facilitate open discussion between participating students regarding the relevant incident. Based on such discussion, the advisor and students would make a recommendation regarding the appropriate disciplinary action the school should take against the student whose behavior was assessed and submit the recommendation to the school administrator designated by the district.

Such a recommendation could include restricting the student's participation in certain activities, requiring the student to perform community service, or a combination thereof. The advisor and students would submit a letter to the designated administrator stating the finding if

they found that the assessed student did not violate school policy. The district would be required to consider such a recommendation when determining the disciplinary action to be taken against the student.

The bill would allow an applicable school district to solicit and accept a gift, grant, or donation from any source to implement or administer the pilot program.

By January 1, 2029, the commissioner of education would be required to review the pilot program and submit to certain state officials a written report on progress made by the program.

By December 1, 2023, the commissioner of education would be required to adopt rules to implement and administer the pilot program. As soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, the commissioner would develop the required mental health and safety curriculum. The pilot program would be implemented in each applicable high school beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.

The bill would expire September 1, 2029.

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, 2023.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the cost to the state for the biennium would be about \$1.1 million.