

**SUBJECT:** Establishing the school safety grant program

**COMMITTEE:** Educational Opportunity & Enrichment, Select — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 14 ayes — Buckley, Gervin-Hawkins, Ashby, K. Bell, Dutton, Frank, Cody Harris, Hefner, Hinojosa, K. King, Metcalf, Shaheen, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — Longoria

**WITNESSES:** For —Chance Ramos, Arc One Protective Services; Josh Sanderson, Equity Center; Ben Russian, EZY PA Holdings; Robert L. Green; Kristin Lewis (*Registered, but did not testify*: Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; John Litzler, Baptist General Convention of Texas' Christian Life Commission; Julia Grizzard, Bexar County Education Coalition; Max Rombado, Raise Your Hand Texas; Colby Nichols, Texas Association of Community Schools; Texas Association of School Administrators; Ruben Longoria, Texas Association of School Boards; Amanda Brownson, Texas Association of School Business Officials; Jennifer Allmon, Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops; Jennifer Easley, Texas PTA; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Christy Rome, Texas School Coalition)

Against — None

On — Steven Aleman, Disability Rights Texas; Paige Duggins-Clay, IDRA (*Registered, but did not testify*: Tom Currah, Brad Reynolds, Comptroller of Public Accounts; Von Byer, Eric Marin, Mike Meyer, Texas Education Agency)

**BACKGROUND:** Education Code sec. 48.115 establishes the school safety allotment that provides a school district with an entitlement of \$15,000 per campus in addition to an amount based on students in average daily attendance. The

money provided by the allotment must be used to improve school safety and security.

DIGEST: HB 2 would establish and amend provisions of the Education Code and Government Code regarding funding for school safety.

**School safety grant program.** HB 2 would require the education commissioner to establish a school safety grant program using proceeds of the school safety fund to annually provide grants to school districts and charter schools. Each school year, the awarded grants could not exceed a total of \$1.1 billion. The commissioner would be required to award a district or charter school such a grant in an amount equal to the sum of the total basic allotment amount to which the district or school was entitled, if it was allotted for each student enrolled instead of for each student in average daily attendance, multiplied by 0.01, and the sum of:

- \$50,000 for each district or school campus with 500 or fewer students;
- \$100,000 for each district or campus with 501 to 1,000 students;
- \$150,000 for each district or campus with 1,001 to 1,500 students;
- \$175,000 for each district or campus with 1,501 to 2,000 students;
- and
- \$200,000 for each district or campus with more than 2,000 students.

If the amount of grants calculated exceeded \$1.1 billion in a school year, the commissioner would be required to proportionately reduce the amount of each grant to limit the amount of grants to \$1.1 billion.

A district or charter school that provided only virtual instruction or used only facilities not subject to the district's or school's control would not be included in the determination of the grant amount.

The bill would revise provisions on permissible uses of a school safety grant to include charter schools.

**School safety plan implementation grant program.** The bill would require the education commissioner to establish a grant program using school safety fund proceeds to provide grants to districts and charter schools for the reimbursement of expenditures required for the implementation of a Texas Education Agency approved school safety plan. The commissioner could award grants each school year in an amount not to exceed a total amount of \$250 million and \$10 million per district or charter school. If excess funds were available for a given year, the commissioner could provide additional grants to districts and charter schools that incurred eligible expenses of more than \$10 million in that school year. If the amount of grant requests exceeded \$250 million in a school year, the commissioner would be required to proportionately reduce the amount of each grant to limit the total amount of grants provided to \$250 million.

**Allocations to economic stabilization fund, state school safety fund, and state highway fund.** The bill would establish provisions regarding the allocation and transfer of funds to the state school safety fund depending on the sums of the economic stabilization fund and the state highway fund. The allocations to the school safety fund and the state highway fund would be reduced under certain circumstances, while the allocations to the economic stabilization fund would be increased to comply with certain fund balance requirements.

**Other provisions.** The bill would repeal certain provisions related to the school safety allotment. The bill also would repeal the expiration date for the requirement for the comptroller to determine the threshold for constitutional transfer of funds to the state school safety fund and the state highway fund.

Changes to the Education Code would apply beginning with the 2024-25 school year and changes to the Government Code would apply beginning with fiscal 2025.

The bill would take effect May 4, 2024, only if the constitutional

amendment proposed by the 88th Legislature, 4<sup>th</sup> Called Session, 2023, was approved by the voters. If the amendment was not approved by the voters, the bill would have no effect.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

With increasing occurrences of school shootings in recent years, HB 2 would be an important step in ensuring students' safety in Texas by funding future school safety projects through a school safety grant program. These grants could help schools meet mandates set by previous legislatures, with which schools are currently struggling to comply due largely to lack of funds. Additionally, schools could use these funds for projects that met the unique needs of their campuses. Funds also could be used to fund mental health supports for students, a preventative approach that is an important aspect of school safety.

**CRITICS  
SAY:**

HB 2 should more clearly establish flexibility for schools to use school safety grants as they deem necessary. Schools should be supported in determining which approaches to school safety are best for them. During the 88th Regular Session, the Legislature passed HB 3, which included strict school safety requirements without appropriating adequate funds to support schools with implementation. Funds from new school safety grants would likely go towards previous mandates and could limit schools' abilities to establish projects unique to their campuses.

Schools should not have to expend resources applying for grants to access this funding. Instead, schools should automatically receive money to help protect their students. Additionally, every school should receive at least \$100,000 each year to sufficiently fund school resource officers and meet other safety needs. The bill would only entitle campuses with 500 or fewer students to \$50,000 annually, which is not enough to support the cost of a school resource officer.

**OTHER  
CRITICS  
SAY:**

While school safety is critical for Texas students, a more effective way to protect students would be to regulate the use and sale of guns. The Legislature should limit the sale of certain weapons, improve background checks, and require training and licensing.

NOTES: According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a positive impact of \$205,172,469 in general revenue related funds through fiscal 2025.

HB 2 is the enabling legislation for HJR 1 by K. King, which is also on the calendar for second reading consideration today.