

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1544
By: Bonnen
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Community colleges provide an invaluable service by offering educational opportunities to their local communities at an accessible distance and affordable cost. They serve to strengthen the economy by responding to the workforce training needs of their respective local industries through many outstanding associate degree programs. However, the technology growth and demands of today's industrial workplace have created a disparity between the need and supply of workforce education programs.

HB 1544 would establish a pilot project to allow select public junior colleges to offer limited baccalaureate degrees in Applied Science and Technology, providing the opportunity to examine the effectiveness and feasibility of a permanent program. Community colleges are well positioned to address the need for readily available, applied baccalaureate opportunities. The open door admission policy, low tuition costs, and convenient location of community colleges would provide access to many more citizens who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree in workforce training areas.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the opinion of the committee that this bill does not expressly delegate any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency or institution.

ANALYSIS

CSHB 1544 amends Subchapter A, Chapter 130, Education Code, to authorize the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish a pilot project to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in the fields of applied science and applied technology. The bill provides that the coordinating board shall operate the pilot project at Brazosport College, El Centro College of the Dallas County Community College District, Midland College, North Harris Montgomery Community College District and South Texas Community College. The bill provides that a junior college participating in the pilot project may not offer more than five baccalaureate degree programs at any time, and that each of the degree programs are subject to continuing approval of the coordinating board. The bill provides that a public junior college that participates in the pilot project must meet all applicable accreditation requirements of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The bill authorizes the coordinating board to require a general academic teaching institution that offers a comparable degree program to enter into an articulation agreement with the public junior college. The bill requires the coordinating board to prescribe procedures to ensure that each public junior college participating in the pilot program informs each student of the nature of the pilot project, including the limited duration of the project and the articulation agreement entered into for the student's degree.

CSHB 1544 provides that in determining what baccalaureate degrees are to be offered, the public junior college and the coordinating board shall consider the need for the degree programs in the region served by the junior college, how those degree programs would unnecessarily duplicate the degree programs offered by other institutions of higher education, the ability of the junior college to support the program and the adequacy of the junior college's facilities, faculty, administration, libraries, and other resources.

The bill provides that in its recommendations to the legislature relating to state funding for public junior colleges, the coordinating board shall recommend that a public junior college receive substantially the same state support for junior-level and senior-level courses offered under the pilot project as that provided to general academic teaching institution for substantially similar courses. The bill provides that in determining contact hours attributable to students enrolled in a junior-level or senior-level course offered under the pilot project used to determine a public junior college's proportionate share of state appropriations under Section 130.003, the coordinating board shall weigh those contact hours as necessary to provide the junior college the appropriate level of state support to the extent that state funds for those courses are included in the appropriation.

The bill provides that each public junior college participating in the pilot project shall prepare a biennial report of the operation and effectiveness of the junior college's baccalaureate degree programs, and shall deliver a copy of the report to the coordinating board. The bill provides that not later than January 1, 2009, the coordinating board shall prepare a progress report on the pilot project. The bill provides that not later than January 1, 2011, a report on the effectiveness of the pilot project, with recommendations for legislative action, shall be prepared by the coordinating board, and delivered to selected legislative officials.

CSHB 1544 provides that unless the authority to continue offering baccalaureate degree programs is continued by the legislature, a public junior college may not enroll a student in a baccalaureate degree program under the pilot project after the 2011 fall semester, offer junior-level or senior-level courses for those degree programs after the 2015 fall semester, or award a baccalaureate degree under the pilot project after the 2015 fall semester. The bill provides that this section expires January 1, 2016.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2003.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL TO SUBSTITUTE

The changes in the committee substitute include, a requirement that a public junior college that participates in the pilot project must meet all applicable accreditation requirements of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and that it must enter into an articulation agreement with one or more general academic teaching institutions to ensure that students enrolled in the degree program have an opportunity to complete the degree if the public junior college ceases to offer the degree program.

The substitute authorizes the coordinating board to require a general academic teaching institution that offers a comparable degree program to enter into an articulation agreement with the public junior college. The substitute requires the coordinating board to prescribe procedures to ensure that each public junior college participating in the pilot program informs each student of the nature of the pilot project, including the limited duration of the project and the articulation agreement entered into for the students degree.