

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 1325
By: Rios Ybarra
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Texas State Technical College (TSTC) — Harlingen wishes to offer an associate of science (AS) degree to complement its statutorily designated mission of offering advanced and emerging associate degrees for areas of need in Texas and to maximize upward articulation of TSTC Harlingen graduates to bachelor of science degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines at Texas universities. The AS degree increases the pool of potential STEM graduates pursuing designated high-growth, high-demand job disciplines.

Current law restricts TSTC Harlingen to awarding associate of applied science (AAS) degrees and certificate offerings. Although TSTC Harlingen satisfies the academic requirements for an AS degree and does so without any additional cost, it is unable to offer the AS degree because of restrictions under state law. Texas' accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), has confirmed that TSTC Harlingen possesses the academic course inventory and the credentialed faculty necessary to offer AS degrees effectively and economically. According to SACS, under the standards applied to all higher education institutions in Texas, TSTC Harlingen is able to offer all levels of associate degrees, but it needs to obtain approval from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The THECB does not dispute SACS's position on TSTC Harlingen's qualifications, but it interprets state law as restrictive on the AS offering.

The addition of an AS degree to TSTC Harlingen would support the state's STEM and Tech Prep initiatives and provide technical capacity that supports the career clusters identified by Texas leadership. Implementation of this program would provide complete transfer of courses to four-year engineering programs and complete the vertical alignment of postsecondary education that begins with enrollment in TSTC Harlingen's dual credit program.

H.B. 1325 authorizes the Texas State Technical College System board of regents to offer and award an associate of science degree in a field of study at Texas State Technical College — Harlingen if the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board determines that the degree is appropriate to the system's role and mission and meets certain regional needs.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

ANALYSIS

H.B. 1325 amends the Education Code to authorize the Texas State Technical College System board of regents to offer and award an associate of science degree in a field of study at Texas State Technical College — Harlingen if the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board determines that the degree in that field of study is appropriate to the role and mission of the system and meets the educational or workforce needs of the region in which the campus is located.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the act does not receive the necessary vote, the act takes effect September 1, 2009.