

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 3795
By: Morrison
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

To reach desired levels of economic competitiveness, Texas must promote the value and availability of higher education, especially among populations participating in higher education at significantly lower rates than others. The college participation rates for students from low-income families in Texas falls significantly below the national average, even though several studies have shown that some low-income minority groups place a higher value on college education than the general public. An additional barrier to acquiring a college education is the lack of meaningful information available to help families understand what is needed for student preparation, the application process, and attending institutions of higher education.

C.S.H.B. 3795 enhances the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's public awareness campaign to promote higher education by narrowing the target audience to 7th to 12th grade students with a special focus on low-income students; by requiring the collaboration of various entities for the campaign, including Texas business, to send a stronger message of the importance of higher education; and by requiring annual meetings to help families better understand the process of preparing and paying for college. The bill also creates a plan for a financial aid program designed by the coordinating board and the Texas Education Agency to provide financial aid for certain students, in addition to current state and federal programs.

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

C.S.H.B. 3795 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to work in conjunction with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in establishing the statewide public awareness campaign to promote the value and availability of higher education. The bill narrows the campaign's target to students in the 7th through 12th grade levels, rather than primary and secondary school students and requires the coordinating board, in giving priority to students from groups or backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in higher education, to give special priority to students who are educationally disadvantaged, defined as students eligible to participate in the national free or reduced-price lunch program.

C.S.H.B. 3795 requires, rather than authorizes, the coordinating board to coordinate with TEA, the P-16 Council, and other appropriate entities, including businesses, to develop and implement the public awareness campaign in order to send a strong message concerning the importance of higher education. The bill requires the coordinating board, in conjunction with these entities, to:

- annually hold meetings of targeted students and their parents, at locations likely to be easily accessible to them, to explain financial aid opportunities that may make attending an institution of higher education affordable, the reasons that higher education is important, and secondary education courses that may help to prepare students for success

- at institutions of higher education; and
- develop support mechanisms for parents of targeted students to assist the parents with understanding and completing the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and familiarize the parents with the actions necessary for students to be prepared for, apply to, and attend institutions of higher education.

C.S.H.B. 3795 requires the coordinating board, in consultation with TEA, to develop a plan for a student financial aid program designed to provide:

- financial aid in addition to any aid provided under other state and federal financial aid programs and any contributions from parents; and
- financial aid to students who have met the curriculum requirements for the recommended or advanced high school program as determined under state law and have not been convicted of a criminal offense or found in an adjudication hearing to have engaged in delinquent conduct or conduct indicating a need for supervision.

EFFECTIVE DATE

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

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 3795 differs from the original by requiring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to annually hold meetings of targeted students and their parents at locations likely to be easily accessible to them, rather than on campuses of various institutions of higher education as in the original, to explain the benefits and affordability of higher education. The substitute specifies that the coordinating board is required to consult with the Texas Education Agency to develop a plan for a student financial aid program, whereas the original requires the coordinating board, with consultation, to develop a student financial aid program.