

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 441
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Economic & Small Business Development
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Interested parties note that the demand for skilled workers continues to grow as the Texas economy flourishes. These parties contend that most of the fastest growing job sectors will require some postsecondary education, many in the form of skills certification, and that the development of additional fast-track, affordable certification programs in high-demand industries will be beneficial to both employees and employers in Texas. S.B. 441 seeks to provide for the development of such a program by establishing the Texas Fast Start Program, with the intention of promoting rapid delivery of workforce education and development.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 441 amends the Labor Code to require the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), in partnership with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, to establish and administer the Texas Fast Start Program to identify and develop methods to support, and to provide support for, competency-based, rapid-deployment education delivery models for use by public junior colleges, public state colleges, and public technical institutes. The bill requires the models to be designed to assist students in maximizing academic or workforce education program credit from public junior colleges, public state colleges, and public technical institutes to expedite the entry of those students into the workforce. The bill requires TWC to work collaboratively with the coordinating board, public junior colleges, public state colleges, and public technical institutes to accomplish the program's purposes. The bill authorizes those colleges and institutes to use the competency-based, rapid-deployment education delivery models in developing or expanding a fast start program at the college or institute.

S.B. 441 requires a fast start program offered by a public junior college, public state college, or public technical institute to be designed for rapid deployment statewide and to do the following: focus on the current and future needs of employers in Texas; enable students to obtain postsecondary certificates and degrees at an accelerated pace in high-demand fields or occupations, as identified by local employers; incorporate competency-based learning techniques; and feature a variety of access channels that are uniquely designed to maximize job preparedness for identified groups such as veterans, high school graduates, and current workforce members seeking retraining.

S.B. 441 authorizes TWC, through the collaboration with the coordinating board, public junior colleges, public state colleges, and public technical institutes, to award grants to those colleges and institutes for the expansion of existing fast start programs, the development of new fast start programs, and any other activities related to the purposes of the program. The bill limits the use of such a grant to the following: supporting a course or program that prepares students for career

employment in fields or occupations that are identified as high-demand by local employers; financing the initial costs of developing a fast start program, including the costs of constructing or renovating facilities, purchasing equipment, and other associated expenses; financing the development or expansion of a fast start program leading to a postsecondary certificate or degree; or offering a new or expanded dual credit fast start program jointly with a public high school.

S.B. 441 requires TWC and the coordinating board to administer the program using money appropriated to TWC or the coordinating board, money received from federal or other sources, or money from holding accounts that may be used by TWC for the purpose of skills development. The bill authorizes TWC and the coordinating board to adopt rules as necessary for the administration of the bill's provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2013.