

By: Howard

H.B. No. 3768

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to a program to assist students in completing undergraduate certificates and degrees at certain institutions of higher education.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Title 3, Subtitle A, Education Code, is amended by adding Chapter 51B to read as follows:

CHAPTER 51B. TEXAS GUIDED PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Sec. 51B.001. DEFINITIONS. In this chapter:

(1) "Board" means the board of regents of a university system or independent institution.

(2) "Commissioner" means the Texas Higher Education Commissioner.

(3) "Institution of higher education" means any public, state, and technical four-year college or university in the state.

(4) "Lower-division institution" means a public junior college, public state college, or public technical institute.

(5) "Program" means the Texas Guided Pathways Program described by this chapter.

(6) "Public senior college or university" means any college or university designated as a general academic institution as defined in statute or as created and so classified, expressly or

1 impliedly, by law.

2 (7) "Recommended course sequence" means a curricular
3 pathway designed to enable a student to obtain a degree or
4 certificate in a chosen field of study in a timely manner, including
5 completion of specific courses.

6 (8) "Successfully completed" means that a student has
7 met all of the necessary requirements for completing a course
8 offered by an institution and has received a grade for the course of
9 at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, or an equivalent grade or determination
10 of mastery.

11 (9) "Transfer compact" means an agreement between two
12 or more institutions to facilitate the efficient transfer of
13 courses and students.

14 Sec. 51B.002. PROGRAM PURPOSE AND GOALS. (a) The Texas
15 Guided Pathways Program is created for public institutions of
16 higher education to inform, empower, and support students by
17 providing clear and efficient pathways to completion of
18 undergraduate certificates and degrees, including transparent and
19 easily-accessible recommended higher education course sequences
20 and transfer compacts.

21 (b) The goals of the program are to:

22 (1) provide recommended course sequences for all
23 undergraduate degrees and certificates offered by public
24 institutions of higher education;

25 (2) increase efficiencies in credit transferability
26 between lower-division institutions of higher education and public
27 senior colleges and universities;

1 (3) make useful electronic course planning
2 information available to students, empowering students to make
3 well-informed choices;

4 (4) decrease student costs by minimizing the risks of
5 pursuing courses that fail to count towards degree and certificate
6 requirements; and

7 (5) streamline student pathways to completion of
8 certificates and degrees, in line with state goals, to increase
9 educational attainment across the state.

10 Sec. 51B.003. RECOMMENDED COURSE SEQUENCES. (a) Not later
11 than March 15 of each year, each institution of higher education
12 shall:

13 (1) develop recommended course sequences for each
14 undergraduate degree and certificate program offered by the
15 institution that would enable full-time students to complete 60
16 hour programs within four semesters, and 120 hour programs within
17 eight semesters;

18 (2) submit to the commissioner the recommended course
19 sequences for each undergraduate degree and certificate program, in
20 an electronic format specified by the commissioner;

21 (3) for institutions that do not use the Texas Common
22 Course Numbering System (TCCN), provide data, in an electronic
23 format specified by the commissioner, indicating transfer
24 equivalencies for institutions' compatible courses with TCCN
25 courses, where compatible courses are offered by the institution
26 and are included in recommended course sequences; and

27 (4) publish the recommended course sequences and

1 transfer equivalencies on the institution's website, accessible
2 within three clicks from the institution's home page.

3 (b) Not later than March 15 of each year, each
4 lower-division institution shall:

5 (1) inform students about recommended course
6 sequences as a tool to aid in course selection;

7 (2) incorporate recommended course sequences into
8 advising;

9 (3) inform all students during orientation of the the
10 importance of selecting an intended major or field of study before,
11 or as soon as possible after, enrollment in an institution of higher
12 education, and potential consequences and costs of delaying that
13 decision, particularly if the student intends to transfer between
14 postsecondary educational institutions;

15 (4) provide links to a searchable, web-based platform
16 identified by the commissioner that enables students to compare
17 institutions' recommended course sequences; and

18 (5) ensure that the institution's own recommended
19 course sequences, or their institutional equivalents if the
20 institution's course offerings have been updated, and transfer
21 equivalencies will be honored by the institution for not less than
22 four years from the beginning of the academic year following
23 initial publication date of the recommended course sequence or
24 transfer equivalencies, subject to applicable institutional
25 policies, accreditation requirements, and state and federal law.

26 (c) Not later than March 15 of each year, each public senior
27 college or university shall:

1 (1) inform students about recommended course
2 sequences as a tool to aid in course selection;

3 (2) incorporate recommended course sequences into
4 advising;

5 (3) inform all students during orientation of the
6 importance of selecting an intended major or field of study before,
7 or as soon as possible after enrollment in an institution of higher
8 education, and potential consequences and costs of delaying that
9 decision, particularly if the student intends to transfer between
10 postsecondary educational institutions;

11 (4) provide links to a searchable, web-based platform
12 identified by the commissioner that enables students to compare
13 institutions' recommended course sequences; and

14 (5) ensure that the institution's own recommended
15 course sequences, or their institutional equivalents if the
16 institution's course offerings have been updated, and transfer
17 equivalencies will be honored by the institution for not less than
18 four years from the beginning of the academic year following
19 initial publication date of the recommended course sequence or
20 transfer equivalencies, subject to applicable institutional
21 policies, accreditation requirements, and state and federal law.

22 (d) An institution of higher education may update or amend
23 recommended course sequences for certificates or degree programs,
24 with prior notification to the commissioner, subject to applicable
25 institutional policies, accreditation requirements, and state and
26 federal law.

27 Sec. 51B.004. POWERS AND DUTIES RELATED TO COURSE

1 SEQUENCES. (a) The commissioner shall:

2 (1) work in consultation with institutions of higher
3 education to develop rules for the electronic submission of data by
4 institutions about recommended course sequences and transfer
5 equivalencies for institutions' course numbers with corresponding
6 Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCN) courses;

7 (2) work with the Texas OnCourse initiative of The
8 University of Texas at Austin and its partner institutions to
9 establish a singular, searchable, web-based platform that enables
10 students to compare institutions' recommended course sequences and
11 that enables students to query whether specific lower-division TCCN
12 courses offered by an institution of higher education would be
13 accepted by another institution to meet state core curriculum
14 requirements and would apply to institutions' recommended course
15 sequences for specific undergraduate certificates or degree
16 programs;

17 (3) link to the web-based platform from the ApplyTexas
18 webpage or similar webpage; and

19 (4) not later than November 1 of each even-numbered
20 year, provide a written report on the program to the members of the
21 Texas Legislature that includes an analysis of the alignment of
22 courses that have been taken and successfully completed by students
23 with institutions' recommended course sequences.

24 (b) The commissioner may:

25 (1) adopt rules for implementation of the program, in
26 consultation with institutions of higher education;

27 (2) accept grants or gifts for the purpose of

1 supporting the program; and

2 (3) utilize technology platforms provided by the
3 National Student Clearinghouse, or other approved electronic data
4 sharing and exchange platforms that meet nationally accepted
5 standards, conventions, and practices, to collect and store data
6 regarding institutions' recommended course sequences or to provide
7 a web-based application that enables students to compare
8 institutions' recommended course sequences.

9 Sec. 51B.005. TRANSFER COMPACTS. (a) The commissioner
10 shall:

11 (1) encourage institutions of higher education, other
12 than research universities, to develop and participate in regional
13 transfer compacts, in order to coordinate regional transfers of
14 courses and students among institutions, increase clarity of
15 program requirements, reduce costs for students and for the state,
16 and reduce excess courses that do not contribute to completion of
17 degrees or certificates;

18 (2) work with the Texas OnCourse initiative of The
19 University of Texas at Austin and its partner institutions to
20 develop a singular, searchable, web-based platform that provides
21 information to students about regional transfer compacts across the
22 state, including links to regional transfer agreements that each
23 institution participates in; and

24 (3) not later than November 1 of each even-numbered
25 year, provide a written report to the members of the Texas
26 Legislature that includes an analysis of the impact of regional
27 transfer compacts and research university transfer compacts on

1 students' efficient progress towards completion of certificates
2 and degree programs.

3 (b) All institutions other than research universities shall
4 participate in the development of regional transfer compacts that
5 facilitate efficient transfers of course credits and students among
6 regional institutions, including agreements regarding processes
7 for faculty to develop cross-walks between courses and recommended
8 course sequences from participating institutions, and processes
9 for updating cross-walks and institutions' recommended course
10 sequences as program requirements change.

11 (c) Research universities shall develop and participate in
12 an agreement with at least one lower-division institution to
13 establish research university transfer compacts that provide a
14 guaranteed transfer into the research university for Texas resident
15 students upon successful completion of at least 15 semester credit
16 hours at the lower-division institution and other requirements
17 specified by the research university, which may include grade point
18 averages and successful completion of specific courses or course
19 sequences. Research university transfer compacts must enable
20 eligible full-time students to complete at least one 120 hour
21 undergraduate degree program at the research university within
22 eight semesters, including students' full-time enrollment at the
23 lower-division institution prior to the students' transfer,
24 provided that students follow the university's recommended course
25 sequence for the program.

26 (d) Not later than March 15 of each year, each institution
27 of higher education shall submit to the commissioner a list of all

1 transfer compacts in which the institution participates, and a
2 website hyperlink to or copy of applicable inter-institutional
3 agreements, in an electronic form to be specified by the
4 commissioner.

5 Sec. 51B.006. The commissioner may, in consultation with
6 institutions of higher education, adopt rules for implementation of
7 the program.

8 SECTION 2. Not later than 30 days of the effective date of
9 this Act, the Commissioner of Higher Education shall notify boards
10 and presidents of each Texas institution of higher education of the
11 requirement to develop recommended course sequences for each
12 undergraduate degree and certificate program offered at their
13 institutions.

14 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
15 a vote of two-thirds of all members elected to each house, as
16 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
17 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
18 Act takes effect September 1, 2017.