

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2766
By: Rogers
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In the 1990s, the Texas Legislature enacted a law guaranteeing Texas students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school classes automatic admission to all state-funded universities. The law historically had the effect of increasing diversity and improving access to the state's top-tier universities for students in rural areas. However, many high schools now weight dual credit courses for purposes of determining class rank, putting students who do not take such courses at a disadvantage with regard to university admissions. This practice does not materially impact students in urban areas who are served by community colleges with large tax bases, since those institutions are better able to offer dual credit courses free of tuition charges. Students served by small and medium rural community colleges with limited tax bases are not afforded this luxury and, in many cases, must pay tuition and fees for dual credit courses. For families struggling to make ends meet, this may be prohibitively expensive and may discourage economically disadvantaged students from participating in such courses. H.B. 2766 seeks to address this issue by creating a dual credit pilot program for small and medium enrollment public junior colleges to assist economically disadvantaged students in paying applicable tuition and fees.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

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. 2766 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish a pilot program for awarding grants to public junior colleges to provide financial assistance to educationally disadvantaged high school students for all or part of the cost of enrolling in dual credit courses. The bill requires the THECB to select a maximum of 10 junior colleges in the small and medium public junior college peer groups, as identified by the THECB, to participate in the program. In selecting participating institutions, the THECB must, to the extent practicable, ensure that at least one junior college from each region of the state is included. The bill sets out requirements for a participating junior college with respect to the following:

- the use of grant funds for the program's purposes;
- working with partner high schools that elect to participate in the program to provide relevant information and enrollment assistance to students; and
- the collection and reporting to the THECB of specified data.

H.B. 2766 makes a student eligible to receive financial assistance under the pilot program if the student meets the following criteria:

- is educationally disadvantaged;
- is enrolled in a participating public or private high school, including a home school, in the service area of a participating junior college; and
- has completed less than 60 semester credit hours at a public institution of higher education.

The bill requires an applicable high school that partners with a participating junior college to provide dual credit courses to provide to students in grade nine or the equivalent information regarding dual credit opportunities and the funding available for dual credit courses under the program. Program funds provided to an eligible student must be used for the cost of tuition or required fees for dual credit courses at the participating junior college.

H.B. 2766 requires the THECB, not later than December 1, 2022, to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot program and report the results of the evaluation to the legislature. The bill requires the THECB to make certain determinations in evaluating the program, including whether the program should be expanded to all junior colleges in the small and medium peer groups. The bill's provisions expire September 1, 2023.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2021.