

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R24464 MM-D

C.S.S.B. 54
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Higher Education
5/19/2021
Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental condition that involves persistent challenges in social interaction, speech and nonverbal communication, and restricted/repetitive behaviors. The effects of ASD and the severity of symptoms are different in each person. Persons with ASD often face greater challenges in academic settings for reasons that have nothing to do with coursework. These challenges can be exacerbated in postsecondary settings, and young adults with ASD reportedly face poorer academic and social outcomes (e.g., loneliness, anxiety, depression, unemployment).

Our understanding of the techniques and services required to assist students with ASD in all educational settings continues to grow, but we have little information regarding the relative success of students with ASD at Texas colleges and universities. The state's students would benefit greatly not only from a clearer understanding of the current state of affairs, but also drawing upon the knowledge of other institutions' techniques to provide greater support and improve outcomes.

S.B. 54 would direct the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to conduct a study that would identify and track the number of students with ASD who complete high school and the number of said students who enroll and are graduated from college, as well as identify and examine best practices from other states regarding how to support students with autism spectrum disorder. These data would provide a clearer picture on the successes and failures of Texas institutions of higher education in serving this population, and the best practices could inform new programs, services, or specialized curricula that could greatly improve the academic—and post-graduation—prospects of students with ASD.

The substitute adds language to ensure that no identifiable data will be used in the study: "In conducting the study, the board may not request, require, or use personally identifiable student information."

C.S.S.B. 54 amends current law relating to a study and report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board regarding best practices for assisting students with autism spectrum disorder.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter C, Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Section 61.06694, as follows:

Sec. 61.06694. STUDY AND REPORT ON ASSISTING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER. (a) Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to conduct a study to determine best practices for assisting students with autism spectrum disorder who are enrolled at institutions of higher education.

(b) Requires that the study:

(1) identify and track:

(A) the number of students with autism spectrum disorder who graduate from secondary schools in this state;

(B) the number of students with autism spectrum disorder who are enrolled at institutions of higher education;

(C) the student financial assistance available to students with autism spectrum disorder who enroll at institutions of higher education; and

(D) the graduation rates of students with autism spectrum disorder who enroll at institutions of higher education; and

(2) identify and examine best practices and program modules from public and private institutions of higher education outside of Texas that have achieved successful results in working with students with autism spectrum disorder.

(c) Provides that THECB, in conducting the study:

(1) is required to collaborate with the Texas Education Agency regarding specialized programs offered by elementary or secondary schools for students with autism spectrum disorder to determine how those programs could be replicated at or extended to postsecondary institutions; and

(2) is prohibited from requesting, requiring, or using personally identifiable student information.

(d) Requires THECB to submit a written report that includes the study's findings and any recommendations for legislative or other action to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and commissioner of education, not later than December 1, 2023.

(e) Provides that this section expires January 1, 2024.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2021.