

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1888
By: Creighton
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Nearly 7,000 students who are eligible for automatic admission to Texas public institutions of higher education either attend an out-of-state university or do not enroll at an institution of higher education. It has been suggested that Texas' economy and workforce may benefit from encouraging the state's highest performing students to remain in Texas for postsecondary education. S.B. 1888 seeks to address this issue by establishing the Texas First Early High School Completion Program and the Texas First Scholarship Program to allow Texas resident students who attend a public high school and demonstrate early readiness for college to graduate early and receive a scholarship at an eligible Texas institution during the first full academic year following the student's early high school graduation.

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 rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTIONS 1 and 3 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 1888 amends the Education Code to remove provisions relating to a pilot program for the award of high school diplomas to students who demonstrate early readiness for college and repeals the Early High School Graduation Scholarship Program. To replace those programs, the bill establishes the Texas First Scholarship Program and requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA), in coordination with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), to establish the Texas First Early High School Completion Program to allow public high school students who demonstrate early readiness for college to graduate early from high school. The purpose of the early high school completion program, in conjunction with the scholarship program, is to promote efficiency in the state public education system and incentivize the enrollment of high performing students at eligible institutions, defined by the bill as public institutions of higher education that are designated as research universities or emerging research universities under the THECB accountability system. The bill requires the THECB, by rule and in consultation with TEA and eligible institutions, to establish standards for use in the early high school completion program regarding the following:

- the specific competencies that demonstrate a student's mastery of each subject area for which the THECB and the commissioner of education have adopted college readiness standards;
- the specific competencies that demonstrate a student's mastery of a language other than English; and

- acceptable assessments or other means by which a student may demonstrate the student's early readiness for college with respect to each of those competencies.

The bill requires the assessments or other means established by the THECB to be equivalent to the assessments or other means eligible institutions commonly use to place students at the institutions in courses that may be credited toward a degree requirement.

S.B. 1888 authorizes a public school district or open-enrollment charter school to issue a high school diploma to a student under the early high school completion program if, using the standards established by the THECB, the student demonstrates mastery of and early readiness for college in each applicable subject area and in a language other than English. The bill establishes that a student who earns a diploma through the program is considered to have earned a distinguished level of achievement under the foundation high school program. The bill authorizes a student to apply for admission to an institution of higher education for the first academic term after the term in which the student earns a diploma through the early high school completion program but establishes that the student is not guaranteed admission to any institution of higher education or academic program solely on the basis of having received the diploma through the program.

S.B. 1888 establishes the following student eligibility requirements for a Texas First Scholarship Program award:

- Texas residency, as determined by THECB rules;
- early high school graduation under the Texas First Early High School Completion Program; and
- compliance with the financial aid application requirement for high school graduation.

S.B. 1888 requires the THECB, beginning with the 2021-2022 academic year, to award to each student eligible for the scholarship program state credit in the following amounts:

- for a student who graduated from high school two or more semesters or the equivalent earlier than the student's high school cohort, the maximum annual TEXAS grant award determined by the THECB for the applicable academic year; or
- for a student who graduated from high school less than two semesters or the equivalent earlier than the student's high school cohort, half of that amount.

The amount of state credit awarded to a student under the scholarship program may not be considered in the calculation of any state or institutional need-based aid awards or the calculation of the student's overall financial need, unless the combination of the credit and other federal, state, and institutional financial aid for which the student would otherwise be eligible exceeds the estimated total cost of attendance at the eligible institution at which the student is enrolled. The bill requires the THECB to issue to the student a certificate indicating the amount of the award. State credit awarded to a student under the scholarship program expires at the end of the first academic year following the student's graduation from high school.

S.B. 1888 requires an eligible institution, on enrollment of a student eligible for the scholarship program, to apply to the student's charges for tuition, mandatory fees, and other costs of attendance for the enrollment period an amount equal to the lesser of the amount of state credit awarded to the student under the scholarship program or the student's actual tuition, mandatory fees, and other costs of attendance at the institution.

S.B. 1888 requires the THECB, at least once each year, to submit to the commissioner a report on state credit awarded under the scholarship program during the preceding academic year and sets out the required contents of the report. The bill requires the commissioner to take the following actions as soon as practicable after receipt of the report:

- reduce the amount of a district's or charter school's entitlement under the foundation school program for the school year by an amount equal to the total amount of state credit issued during the preceding school year to the district's or school's graduates under the scholarship program; and

- transfer to the THECB an amount of funds equal to the total amount by which district and charter school entitlements are reduced.

The bill requires the THECB, as soon as practicable after receipt of the transferred funds, to distribute to each eligible institution an amount of funds equal to the amount of state credit applied by the institution during the preceding academic year.

S.B. 1888 requires the commissioner to count toward a district's or charter school's average daily attendance each student who graduates early from high school in the district or school under the early high school completion program for the period in which the student is enrolled at an eligible institution using state credit awarded under the scholarship program based on a 100 percent attendance rate.

S.B. 1888 requires a district or charter school, on a student's initial enrollment in high school in a grade level below grade 12, to provide to the student and the student's parent or guardian information regarding the scholarship program and the requirements to earn a diploma under the early high school completion program. The bill requires TEA and the THECB jointly to prepare and post on their respective websites a publication that includes the information in a form that enables a district or charter school to reproduce the publication for distribution.

S.B. 1888 authorizes the THECB to adopt rules necessary to implement the scholarship program. Implementation of a provision of S.B. 1888 by TEA and the THECB is mandatory only if a specific appropriation is made for that purpose.

S.B. 1888 repeals Subchapter K, Chapter 56, Education Code.

EFFECTIVE DATE

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