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By:  Raney H.B. No. 3931

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the establishment of the Texas Competency-Based Education Grant Program for certain students enrolled in competency-based baccalaureate degree programs and to formula funding and dropped and repeated course restrictions for students enrolled in those degree programs at public institutions of higher education.

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

SECTION 1.  Chapter 56, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter T to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER T. TEXAS COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM

Sec. 56.521.  DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1)  "Competency-based baccalaureate degree program" means a baccalaureate degree program under which academic credit is awarded based solely on a student's attainment of competencies. The term may include a program that is organized around traditional course-based units, including for online or other distance education, that a student must earn for degree completion.

(2)  "Coordinating board" means the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

(3)  "Eligible institution" means:

(A)  a general academic teaching institution;

(B)  a private or independent institution of higher education;

(C)  a public junior college authorized to offer baccalaureate degree programs under Subchapter L, Chapter 130; or

(D)  a nonprofit, tax-exempt, regionally accredited college or university operating in accordance with a memorandum of understanding with this state under an executive order issued by the governor and offering competency-based, exclusively online baccalaureate degree programs.

(4)  "Expected family contribution" means the amount of discretionary income that should be available to a student from the resources of the student and of the student's family, as determined by the coordinating board following the methodology prescribed by the United States Department of Education for the purpose of determining a student's eligibility for need-based student financial assistance.

(5)  "General academic teaching institution," "private or independent institution of higher education," and "public junior college" have the meanings assigned by Section 61.003.

(6)  "Program" means the Texas Competency-Based Education Grant Program established under this subchapter.

Sec. 56.522.  PURPOSE. The purpose of the Texas Competency-Based Education Grant Program is to provide financial assistance to enable eligible students to enroll in competency-based baccalaureate degree programs at eligible institutions.

Sec. 56.523.  ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAM; PRIORITY FOR FINANCIAL NEED. (a) The coordinating board shall:

(1)  administer the program;

(2)  using the negotiated rulemaking procedures under Chapter 2008, Government Code, adopt rules for determining the allocation of funds under the program among eligible institutions; and

(3)  adopt any other rules necessary to implement the program or this subchapter.

(b)  The coordinating board shall consult with the student financial aid officers of eligible institutions in developing the rules adopted under Subsection (a).

(c)  The total amount of grants awarded under the program may not exceed the amount available for the program from appropriations, gifts, grants, or other funds.

(d)  In determining who should receive a grant under the program, the coordinating board and the eligible institutions shall give highest priority to awarding grants to students who demonstrate the greatest unmet financial need.

Sec. 56.524.  INITIAL ELIGIBILITY FOR GRANT. (a) To be eligible initially for a grant under the program, a person must:

(1)  be a resident of this state as determined by coordinating board rules;

(2)  meet financial need requirements as defined by coordinating board rules, including a requirement that the person's expected family contribution for the academic year does not exceed the maximum expected family contribution established for this purpose by the coordinating board;

(3)  be enrolled in a competency-based baccalaureate degree program at an eligible institution;

(4)  not be receiving a TEXAS grant under Subchapter M, a tuition equalization grant under Subchapter F, Chapter 61, or any other state-funded student financial assistance for the same academic period; and

(5)  comply with any additional nonacademic requirement adopted by the coordinating board under this subchapter.

(b)  A person is not eligible to receive a grant under the program if the person has been granted a baccalaureate degree.

(c)  A person's eligibility for a grant under the program ends on the earliest of the following dates:

(1)  the fourth anniversary of the initial award of a grant under the program to the person, if at the time of the initial award the person had earned less than 60 semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits toward the person's degree;

(2)  the second anniversary of the initial award of a grant under the program to the person, if at the time of the initial award the person had earned 60 or more semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits toward the person's degree; or

(3)  the date the person receives a baccalaureate degree.

Sec. 56.525.  CONTINUING ELIGIBILITY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS. (a) After initially qualifying for a grant under the program, a person may continue to receive a grant under the program during each semester or term in which the person is enrolled at an eligible institution only if the person:

(1)  meets the criteria for initial eligibility under Section 56.524(a);

(2)  makes satisfactory academic progress toward a baccalaureate degree; and

(3)  complies with any additional nonacademic requirement adopted by the coordinating board.

(b)  If a person fails to meet any of the requirements of Subsection (a) after the completion of any semester or term, the person may not receive a grant under the program during the next semester or term in which the person enrolls. Unless the person's eligibility for a grant expires under Section 56.524(c), a person may become eligible to receive a grant under the program in a subsequent semester or term if the person:

(1)  completes at least 12 semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits in a semester or term during which the student is not eligible for a grant; and

(2)  meets all the requirements of Subsection (a).

(c)  For the purpose of this section, a person makes satisfactory academic progress toward a baccalaureate degree only if the person completes at least 12 semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits in each semester or term in which the person is enrolled.

(d)  The coordinating board shall adopt rules to allow a person who is otherwise eligible to receive a grant under the program to receive a grant if the student's completion rate falls below the satisfactory academic progress requirements of this section in the event of a hardship or for other good cause shown, including:

(1)  a showing of a severe illness or other debilitating condition that may affect the person's academic performance; or

(2)  a showing that the person is responsible for the care of a sick, injured, or needy person and that the person's provision of care may affect the person's academic performance.

Sec. 56.526.  GRANT USE. A person receiving a grant under the program may use the money to pay any usual and customary cost of attendance at an eligible institution incurred by the student.  The institution may disburse all or part of the proceeds of a grant under the program to an eligible person only if the tuition and required fees incurred by the person at the institution have been paid.

Sec. 56.527.  GRANT AMOUNT. (a) The maximum annual amount of a grant under the program for a full-time undergraduate student equivalent enrolled at an eligible institution is an amount equal to 75 percent of the average state appropriation for the state fiscal biennium preceding the biennium in which the grant is awarded for a full-time undergraduate student equivalent enrolled at a general academic teaching institution, as determined by the coordinating board.

(b)  The coordinating board may adopt rules that allow the coordinating board to increase or decrease, in proportion to the number of semester credit hours or competency units or credits in which a student is enrolled, the amount of a grant award to a student who is enrolled in a number of semester credit hours or competency units or credits in excess of or below 12 semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits.

Sec. 56.528.  GRANT NOT TO AFFECT ADMISSION. An eligible institution may not deny admission to or enrollment in the institution based on a person's eligibility to receive a grant under the program or a person's receipt of a grant under the program.

SECTION 2.  Section 51.907, Education Code, is amended by adding Subsection (b-1) to read as follows:

(b-1)  This section does not apply to a student enrolled in a competency-based baccalaureate degree program, as defined by Section 56.521.

SECTION 3.  Section 61.059, Education Code, is amended by adding Subsection (s) to read as follows:

(s)  Notwithstanding any other law, the board may not exclude from being counted in the hours reported to the Legislative Budget Board for formula funding contact hours or semester credit hours for a student's enrollment in a course for which the student has previously generated formula funding if the student is enrolled in a competency-based baccalaureate degree program, as defined by Section 56.521.

SECTION 4.  Section 61.0595, Education Code, is amended by adding Subsection (f-1) to read as follows:

(f-1)  In the formulas established under Section 61.059, the board shall include without consideration of Subsection (a) or (e) of this section funding for semester credit hours earned by a student who is enrolled in a competency-based baccalaureate degree program, as defined by Section 56.521.

SECTION 5.  Subchapter C, Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 61.088 to read as follows:

Sec. 61.088.  DROPPED OR REPEATED COURSES UNDER COMPETENCY-BASED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAM. The board by rule shall develop standards for and limitations on dropping or repeating courses by students enrolled in a competency-based baccalaureate degree program, as defined by Section 56.521.

SECTION 6.  Section 51.907(b-1), Education Code, as added by this Act, applies beginning with the fall 2021 semester.

SECTION 7.  (a) The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt rules to administer Subchapter T, Chapter 56, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act.

(b)  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall begin allocating funds to eligible institutions under Subchapter T, Chapter 56, Education Code, as added by this Act, for the first academic year for which money is appropriated for that purpose, except that the coordinating board may not allocate funds under that subchapter for an academic year before the 2022-2023 academic year.

SECTION 8.  The changes in law made by this Act to Sections 61.059 and 61.0595, Education Code, apply beginning with funding recommendations made under Section 61.059, Education Code, for the state fiscal biennium beginning September 1, 2023.

SECTION 9.  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt rules under Section 61.088, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after this Act takes effect.

SECTION 10.  This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2021.