

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 4363
By: Kuempel
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The State of Texas is currently experiencing a dramatic decline in teacher retention and retainment, with diminishing numbers of students entering into the teaching profession. A recent report from the Learning Policy Institute found that Texas has outpaced national teacher attrition averages by approximately 25 percent over the past decade; in 2021 alone, more than one in nine teachers left the workforce. School debt, financial instability, and insufficient preparation programs are stressors that lead educators to leave the profession. Research conducted by the University of Houston found that educators who received their preparation from a four-year university were 11 percent more likely to remain in the teaching profession than those prepared at a for-profit preparation program and 15 percent more likely to remain than those prepared in a nonprofit preparation program. A scholarship program that focuses on high quality educator preparation and university-based programming may help better prepare our educators for the classroom and relieve the financial hardships of acquiring a college degree. C.S.H.B. 4363 seeks to establish a scholarship program to recruit, prepare, and retain a talented and diverse workforce of career teachers to be leaders in their field and to provide assistance for costs of attendance at eligible institutions.

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 SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 4363 amends the Education Code to create the Future Texas Teachers Scholarship Program to recruit, prepare, and retain a talented and diverse workforce of career teachers to be leaders in their field and to provide assistance for tuition, mandatory fees, and other usual and customary costs of attendance at a general academic teaching institution or a private or independent institution of higher education that operates an eligible educator preparation program. The bill requires an educator preparation program to meet the eligibility criteria established by the bill to participate in the scholarship program. That eligibility criteria requires an educator preparation program to, as follows:

- be operated by an eligible institution;
- provide a structured system of support to assist scholarship recipients to successfully complete the educator preparation program;
- require additional hours of field-based experience for students above the minimum hours required by State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) rule;

- require additional hours of clinical teaching experience for students above the minimum hours required by SBEC rule;
- provide or facilitate opportunities for scholarship recipients to participate in learning opportunities beyond the university classroom setting; and
- comply with other eligibility criteria established by Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) rule.

C.S.H.B. 4363 requires a person to meet the eligibility criteria established by the bill for the initial eligibility for a scholarship. That eligibility criteria requires a person to, as follows:

- be a Texas resident;
- either be enrolled full-time, as defined by the bill, in an eligible institution or have applied for admission to an eligible institution and enroll full-time in that institution in the academic year immediately following the person's application;
- once enrolled full-time in an eligible institution, be working toward a baccalaureate or master's degree and on track to be admitted to an eligible educator preparation program, as verified by the applicable eligible institution;
- demonstrate a commitment to pursuing a career as a public school classroom teacher in Texas in a teaching field identified by the commissioner of education as experiencing a critical shortage of teachers or in a school in which a majority of students enrolled are educationally disadvantaged; and
- comply with applicable financial aid application requirements and with any other academic or nonacademic requirements adopted by the THECB.

The bill requires a person to meet the criteria established by the bill to continue to receive a scholarship under the program during each semester or term in which the person is enrolled at an eligible institution. That criteria for continued eligibility requires the person to do the following:

- demonstrate a continued commitment to pursuing a career as a classroom teacher in a specified teaching field or public school;
- remain enrolled full-time in an eligible institution;
- remain enrolled in or be on track to be admitted to an eligible educator preparation program, as verified by the applicable institution;
- make satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an applicable degree, as specified by the bill, and approval to take a teacher certification exam, as verified by the eligible institution; and
- comply with any other academic or nonacademic requirements adopted by the THECB.

The bill excludes a person from initial and continuing eligibility to receive a scholarship under the program if the person has been convicted of certain felonies or misdemeanor offenses relating to the duties and responsibilities of the education profession. The bill establishes that a person's eligibility for a scholarship ends on the earlier of the fourth anniversary of the initial award of a scholarship to the person and the person's enrollment in an eligible institution or the person's completion of an applicable baccalaureate or master's degree program.

C.S.H.B. 4363 prohibits a person who fails to meet the continuing eligibility requirements after the completion of any semester or term from receiving a program scholarship during the next semester or term in which the person enrolls. The bill authorizes a person to restore the person's eligibility to receive a scholarship in a subsequent semester or term if the person completes a semester or term during which the person is not eligible for a scholarship and meets all the applicable continuing eligibility requirements. A person continues to be eligible to receive a scholarship if the person enrolls in or transfers to an eligible educator preparation program at another eligible institution. The bill requires the THECB to adopt rules to allow a person, in the event of a hardship or for other good cause shown, who is otherwise eligible to receive a program scholarship to receive a scholarship while enrolled in fewer semester credit hours than required or if the person's grade point average falls below the satisfactory academic progress requirements.

C.S.H.B. 4363 sets the amount of a scholarship as follows:

- \$12,000, for the 2023-2024 academic year, in provisions set to expire September 1, 2024; and
- beginning with the 2024-2025 academic year, equal to the amount of the scholarship for the preceding academic year, adjusted for inflation using the college tuition and fees index component of the consumer price index produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The bill prohibits a scholarship amount from being reduced by any other scholarship, grant, or financial aid received by the scholarship recipient. The bill requires the THECB, not later than January 31 of each year, to publish the amounts of each scholarship established by the THECB for the academic year beginning the next fall semester. The bill caps the total amount of scholarships awarded at the amount available for the program from appropriations, gifts, grants, or other funds.

C.S.H.B. 4363 authorizes a scholarship recipient to use the money to pay any usual and customary costs of attendance at an eligible institution incurred by the student and authorizes the institution to disburse all or part of the proceeds of a scholarship to an eligible student only if the tuition and required fees incurred by the person at the institution have been paid. The bill requires the THECB annually to determine the allocation of money available for scholarships among eligible institutions and to distribute the money accordingly.

C.S.H.B. 4363 requires the THECB to adopt any rules necessary to do the following:

- establish eligibility criteria for educator preparation programs and scholarship recipients;
- establish procedures for the application process and for selecting scholarship recipients from among eligible applicants; and
- administer the scholarship program.

The bill requires the THECB to consider SBEC standards for identifying effective, high-quality educator preparation programs grounded in evidence-based best practices, align eligibility criteria for such a program to those standards to the maximum extent possible, and consult with the SBEC in establishing the criteria. The THECB must consult with representatives of the educator preparation programs from eligible institutions in establishing criteria for initial and continuing student eligibility and with financial aid coordinators of eligible institutions in developing rules related to distributing a scholarship.

C.S.H.B. 4363 requires the THECB to give priority to awarding scholarships to:

- persons who demonstrate the greatest financial need and whose expected family contribution does not exceed 60 percent of the average statewide amount of tuition and required fees;
- first-generation college students, as defined by THECB rule; and
- persons who demonstrate a commitment both to entering a teaching field identified by the commissioner as experiencing a critical shortage of teachers and to teaching in a public school in Texas in which a majority of students enrolled are educationally disadvantaged.

C.S.H.B. 4363 requires each public school district to notify specified students, counselors, and parents of the Future Texas Teachers Scholarship program and specified information relating to the program. The bill requires the THECB to adopt rules to administer the scholarship program as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date and to begin awarding program scholarships beginning with the 2023-2024 school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2023.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 4363 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute includes a specification that requires the THECB to adopt the rules required under the bill's provisions to administer the scholarship program as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, but the introduced did not include such a specification. In addition, the substitute specifically requires the THECB to begin awarding scholarships beginning with the 2023-2024 school year but the introduced provided that its provisions apply beginning with the 2023-2024 school year without the specification of when the THECB must begin awarding the scholarships.