

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 902
By: West
Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

This bill seeks to enshrine in statute the existing Texas Leadership Scholars program operated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

This legislation sets forth specific qualifications for becoming a Texas Leadership Scholar including being eligible for automatic admission to a general academic teaching institution pursuant to Section 51.803 of the Texas Education Code, being nominated by their school district and having achieved another academic distinction recognized by the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and maintaining a minimum overall grade point average at an academic teaching institutions as determined by board rule.

The bill also allows the Higher Education Coordinating Board to enter into agreements with general academic teaching institutions or other agencies of higher education for cohort learning opportunities, mentoring, research, internship opportunities, and more.

The bill also allows the Higher Education Coordinating Board to solicit, accept, and spend gifts, grants, and donations made to support the program. The legislation gives the board rulemaking authority for the Texas Leadership Scholars Program.

The Texas Leadership Scholars program was founded in 2022 by eighteen public universities as a statewide, premier leadership program designed to guide Texas high school graduates to develop their leadership skills and continue their education at a Texas university.

Cohorts of students are connected with peer and professional networks and mentors, participate in unique leadership development opportunities, and receive opportunities for undergraduate research and study abroad options through the program.

Participating institutions have welcomed the elite, high-potential scholars to their campuses, facilitating programming and ensuring through state, federal, and institutional aid that 100 percent of tuition and fees and room and board for these students is covered.

The eighteen participating universities include The University of Texas campuses at Arlington, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Tyler, and more, as well as A&M campuses at Prairie View, College Station, Commerce, Corpus Christi, and more. Sam Houston State University, Tarleton State University, Texas Women's University, and the University of North Texas are also participating institutions. For the 2022-2023 cohort, 1,332 students applied to the program, with 251 scholars selected by the institutions.

As proposed, S.B. 902 amends current law relating to the establishment of the Texas Leadership Scholars Program to serve as a merit-based scholarship and leadership opportunity for high-achieving, emerging leaders with financial need.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Sections 61.752 and 61.754, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Subchapter N, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER N. TEXAS LEADERSHIP SCHOLARS PROGRAM.

Sec. 61.751. DEFINITION. Defines "program."

Sec. 61.752. INITIATIVE: ESTABLISHMENT; ADMINISTRATION; PURPOSE. (a) Establishes the Texas Leadership Scholars Program (program).

(b) Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish and administer, using funds appropriated or otherwise available for the purpose, scholarships for high-achieving, low-income students, and academic achievement support and leadership development for student awarded program scholarships.

(c) Requires a student, to qualify for a scholarship under this section, to:

(1) be eligible for automatic admission in a general academic teaching institution pursuant to Section 51.803 (Automatic Admission: All Institutions) or be nominated by their school district and have achieved another academic distinction recognized by THECB; and

(2) be considered economically disadvantaged as determined by THECB rule; and

(3) maintain a minimum overall grade point average at a general academic teaching institution as determined by THECB rule.

(d) Authorizes THECB to enter into agreements with general academic teaching institutions or other agencies of higher education to provide students in the program with research-based support to make satisfactory academic progress, graduate on-time and engage in leadership development opportunities, including but not limited to program cohort learning communities, mentoring, research and internship opportunities, networking with state government, business, and civic leaders, and statewide cohort learning institutes or seminars.

Sec. 61.753. GRANTS, GIFTS, AND DONATIONS. Authorizes THECB to solicit, accept, and spend grants, gifts, and donations from any public or private source for the purposes of this subchapter.

Sec. 61.754. RULES. Requires THECB to adopt rules for the administration of this subchapter, including rules providing for the determination of scholarship amount, student scholarship eligibility, satisfactory academic progress criteria, and program administration.

SECTION 2. (a) Requires THECB to adopt rules to administer Subchapter N, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2023.