

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 2139
By: Parker
Education
5/31/2023
Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The consequences of Texas adults lacking a high school diploma are far-reaching and significant. Without a diploma, individuals often encounter limited job prospects and reduced earning potential. The lack of a secondary education may also restrict access to higher education and training programs, making it more challenging for people to gain new skills and advance their careers. The repercussions of not having a high school diploma can even affect future generations, as children of parents without diplomas are more likely to face academic struggles and similar obstacles.

As Texas confronts a workforce dilemma, a solution is needed to bridge the gap between adults who left secondary education without completing it but desire to obtain their diplomas and the highly sought-after positions available in the job market.

S.B. 2139 establishes a pilot program to be administered through five selected public junior colleges, which will be chosen based on an application process managed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The chosen colleges can partner with other colleges, districts, and organizations to provide a diverse range of high-quality workforce programs for students.

S.B. 2139 would enable the legislature to examine alternative methods of high school diploma attainment through public junior colleges. This bill would permit adult students aged 18 and above, who previously left secondary education, to earn a high school diploma at a public junior college while concurrently enrolled in a workforce program. This necessitates that colleges develop a competency-based educational program, and students must demonstrate knowledge equivalent to a Foundation High School Diploma, which has been the standard program since the 2014–2015 academic year. THECB will collaborate with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission in designing and implementing this program.

(Original Author's/Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

S.B. 2139 amends current law relating to the establishment of the Opportunity High School Diploma program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Section 130.458, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 130, Education Code, by adding Subchapter O, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER O. OPPORTUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM

Sec. 130.451. DEFINITIONS. Defines "coordinating board," "general academic teaching institution," and "program."

Sec. 130.452. PURPOSE. Provides that the purpose of the program is to provide an alternative means by which adult students enrolled in a workforce education program at a public junior college are authorized to earn a high school diploma at the college through concurrent enrollment in a competency-based education program that enables students to demonstrate knowledge substantially equivalent to the knowledge required to earn a high school diploma in this state.

Sec. 130.453. ADMINISTRATION. Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to administer the program in consultation with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

Sec. 130.454. APPROVAL OF ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM. (a) Authorizes a public junior college to submit to THECB an application to participate in the program. Requires that the application propose an alternative competency-based high school diploma program to be offered for concurrent enrollment to adult students without a high school diploma who are enrolled in a workforce education program at the college. Authorizes the proposed program to include any combination of instruction, curriculum, achievement, internships, or other means by which a student may attain knowledge sufficient to adequately prepare the student for postsecondary education or additional workforce education.

(b) Authorizes a public junior college to submit an application under Subsection (a) together with one or more public junior colleges, general academic teaching institutions, public school districts, or nonprofit organizations with whom the proposed program described by that subsection will be offered as provided by Subsection (e).

(c) Authorizes THECB to approve not more than five public junior colleges to participate in the program.

(d) Requires THECB, subject to Subsection (c), to review and approve a public junior college's application to participate in the program if THECB determines that the college's proposed program described by Subsection (a) will provide instruction and assessments appropriate to ensure that a student who successfully completes the proposed program demonstrates levels of knowledge sufficient to adequately prepare the student for postsecondary education or additional workforce education. Authorizes THECB to coordinate with TEA as necessary to make a determination under this subsection.

(e) Authorizes a public junior college approved to participate in the program to:

(1) enter into an agreement with one or more public junior colleges, general academic teaching institutions, public school districts, or nonprofit organizations to offer the program described by Subsection (a); and

(2) offer the program described by Subsection (a) at any campus of the college or an entity with which the college has entered into an agreement under Subdivision (1).

Sec. 130.455. AWARD OF HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA. (a) Authorizes a public junior college participating in the program to award a high school diploma to a student enrolled in the alternative competency-based high school diploma program offered by the college under the program if the student performs satisfactorily on assessment instruments prescribed by THECB rule.

(b) Provides that a high school diploma awarded under the program is equivalent to a high school diploma awarded under Section 28.025 (High School Diploma and Certificate; Academic Achievement Record).

Sec. 130.456. FUNDING. (a) Requires THECB and TWC to coordinate to jointly identify funding mechanisms, including grants, interagency contracts, financial aid, or subsidies, available to public junior colleges and students to encourage and facilitate participation in the program.

(b) Entitles a public junior college participating in the program to receive funding under Section 130.003 (State Appropriation for Public Junior Colleges) for the program in the manner provided by THECB rule.

Sec. 130.457. REPORT. Requires THECB, not later than December 1, 2026, to submit to the legislature a progress report on the effectiveness of the program and any recommendations for legislative or other action. Provides that this section expires September 1, 2027.

Sec. 130.458. RULES. Authorizes THECB to adopt rules as necessary to implement this subchapter.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2023.