

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 2139
By: Parker
Subcommittee on Higher Education
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As Filed

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.

As proposed, S.B. 2139 amends current law relating to the creation of the Opportunity High School Diploma pilot program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Section 29.410, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 29, Education Code, by adding Subchapter K-1, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER K-1. OPPORTUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PILOT PROGRAM

Sec. 29.405. PURPOSE. Provides that it is the intent of the legislature to study alternative means by which an adult student who enrolls in a workforce education program at a public junior college and who has previously dropped out of secondary education is authorized to earn a high school diploma from a public junior college through a competency-based educational program that enables the student to demonstrate knowledge substantially equivalent to what is required for a Foundation High School

Diploma. Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to consult with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) during the development and implementation of this pilot program.

Sec. 29.406. DEFINITIONS. Defines "Opportunity High School Diploma," "board," "eligible student," "participating institution," and "substantially equivalent."

Sec. 29.407. OPPORTUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA. (a) Authorizes THECB to approve not more than five public junior colleges to participate as lead institutions for a pilot program to offer an alternative competency-based high school diploma program for adult learners.

(b) Requires THECB to review and approve a proposed program requested by a public junior college, if THECB determines that the public junior college's proposed program will provide instruction and assessments appropriate to certify that a student can demonstrate levels of knowledge sufficient to adequately prepare a student for postsecondary education or additional workforce education.

(c) Requires each approved public junior college program to concurrently enroll an eligible student in a workforce education program and the Opportunity High School Diploma program to allow the student to earn a high school diploma while completing a postsecondary certificate or degree.

(d) Requires each approved public junior college program to administer assessments as prescribed by THECB rule prior to award of an Opportunity High School Diploma.

(e) Requires that a diploma under this section be considered equivalent to a Foundation High School Diploma.

Sec. 29.408. APPROVAL. (a) Authorizes THECB to approve not more than five public junior college programs to offer the Opportunity High School Diploma under this subchapter.

(b) Authorizes a public junior college that submits a proposed program under this subchapter to enter into an agreement with one or more public junior colleges, general academic teaching institutions, public school districts, or nonprofit organizations to offer a program.

(c) Authorizes a public junior college or colleges, upon THECB approval, to offer an approved program at any campus of the applicant or partnering institution.

Sec. 29.409. FUNDING. (a) Requires TWC and THECB to work jointly to identify funding mechanisms, including grants, interagency contracts, financial aid, or subsidies available to public junior colleges and students to encourage and facilitate adult dropouts in earning the Opportunity High School Diploma.

(b) Requires a public junior college that offers an Opportunity High School Diploma under this subchapter to be entitled to funding in the community college finance system, as determined by THECB.

Sec. 29.410. RULE MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION. (a) Requires THECB to adopt rules to implement this subchapter as necessary.

(b) Authorizes THECB to coordinate with TEA as necessary to determine whether a proposed program offering an Opportunity High School Diploma is sufficient to adequately prepare a student for postsecondary education or additional workforce education.

SECTION 2. Amends Chapter 130, Education Code, by adding Section 130.0082, as follows:

Sec. 130.0082. PILOT PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS FOR RECOVERED DROPOUTS IN PUBLIC JUNIOR COLLEGES. Authorizes a public junior college to apply to THECB to offer an Opportunity High School Diploma program in accordance with Subchapter K-1, Chapter 29, Education Code.

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