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By:  Stucky H.B. No. 2177

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to establishing a digital textbook and learning materials subscription pilot program.

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

SECTION 1.  Subchapter C, Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 61.0667 to read as follows:

Sec. 61.0667.  DIGITAL TEXTBOOK AND LEARNING MATERIALS SUBSCRIPTION PILOT PROGRAM. (a) In this section:

(1)  "Digital textbook and learning materials subscription program" means a subscription program to a platform that includes unrestricted access to digital textbooks, study tools, online homework platforms, and other educational resources used to improve student outcomes.

(2)  "Lower-division institution of higher education" means a public junior college, public state college, or public technical institute.

(b)  The board shall establish a pilot program under which the board awards grants to participating lower-division institutions of higher education to provide financial assistance to eligible students for the cost of subscribing to the digital textbook and learning materials subscription program selected by the board under Subsection (e).

(c)  The board shall select lower-division institutions of higher education to participate in the pilot program. In selecting institutions, the board shall, to the extent possible:

(1)  select institutions in both rural and urban areas of this state; and

(2)  prioritize institutions with large socially and economically disadvantaged and historically underrepresented student populations.

(d)  A participating lower-division institution of higher education must use grant funds awarded under this section to provide financial assistance to eligible students for all or part of the cost of subscribing to the digital textbook and learning materials subscription program selected by the board under Subsection (e). The participating institution shall determine the eligibility criteria for a student to receive financial assistance under the pilot program and must prioritize providing financial assistance to economically disadvantaged students.

(e)  The board shall engage in a competitive bidding process to select the digital textbook and learning materials subscription to be used in the pilot program. The subscription selected by the board must provide 24-hour technical support services to subscribers.

(f)  Not later than September 1, 2026, the board shall prepare and deliver to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and the presiding officer of each legislative standing committee with primary jurisdiction over higher education a report that evaluates the effectiveness of the pilot program in improving student outcomes. The report must include a recommendation regarding whether the pilot program should be continued, expanded, or terminated.

(g)  This section expires September 1, 2027.

SECTION 2.  (a) The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt rules to administer the pilot program established under Section 61.0667, 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 and participating lower-division institutions of higher education shall award initial grants under Section 61.0667, Education Code, as added by this Act, beginning with the 2024 spring semester.

SECTION 3.  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, 2023.