By:  Kolkhorst, et al. S.B. No. 25

(In the Senate - Filed March 10, 2023; March 13, 2023, read first time and referred to Committee on Health & Human Services; March 27, 2023, reported favorably by the following vote: Yeas 9, Nays 0; March 27, 2023, sent to printer.)

COMMITTEE VOTE

                 Yea Nay Absent  PNV

Kolkhorst         X

Perry             X

Blanco            X

Hall              X

Hancock           X

Hughes            X

LaMantia          X

Miles             X

Sparks            X

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to support for nursing-related postsecondary education, including scholarships to nursing students, loan repayment assistance to nurses and nursing faculty, and grants to nursing education programs.

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

SECTION 1.  Section 61.655, Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 61.655.  PURPOSE; ELIGIBILITY. (a) A scholarship program[~~, matching fund program,~~] or loan repayment program established under this subchapter shall be established and administered in a manner that the board determines best promotes the health care and educational needs of this state.

(b)  The board may establish multiple categories of persons to receive scholarships[~~, matching funds,~~] and loan repayments. The board may include faculty from professional nursing programs with master's degrees or doctorates among the categories of persons authorized to receive loan repayments.

(c)  Each year funds are available, the board shall establish the categories of persons eligible to receive scholarships[~~, matching funds,~~] and loan repayments and the criteria for selecting persons to be assisted under each category. The criteria may include:

(1)  scholastic ability and performance;

(2)  financial need;

(3)  the geographical area in which the person is likely to practice;

(4)  whether the person receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [~~Aid to Families with Dependent Children~~] or participates in another public welfare program;

(5)  employment by a state agency;

(6)  employment on a nursing school faculty or a person's intention to seek employment on a nursing school faculty;

(7)  whether the person is practicing in a geographical area, a practice setting, or an area of practice with an acute nursing shortage or is likely to practice in such an area;

(8)  the type of certificate or academic degree held or pursued; or

(9)  any additional factors the board considers relevant to promoting the health care and educational needs of the state.

SECTION 2.  Section 61.656(d), Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

(d)  The board shall distribute information about the scholarship program[~~, matching fund program,~~] and loan repayment program established under this subchapter to:

(1)  employers of registered nurses or licensed vocational nurses;

(2)  associations of employers;

(3)  schools and educational programs for registered nurses or licensed vocational nurses; and

(4)  professional associations of registered nurses or licensed vocational nurses.

SECTION 3.  Section 61.658(b), Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

(b)  The board may structure the scholarship program[~~, the matching fund program,~~] and the loan repayment program established under this subchapter to secure funds available under federal matching programs.

SECTION 4.  Section 61.9822, Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 61.9822.  ELIGIBILITY. To be eligible to receive loan repayment assistance under this subchapter, a nurse must:

(1)  apply to the board;

(2)  at the time of application for repayment assistance have been employed part-time or full-time for at least one year as, and be currently employed part-time or full-time as, a faculty member of a nursing degree program at an institution of higher education or a private or independent institution of higher education; and

(3)  comply with any additional requirements adopted by board rule.

SECTION 5.  Sections 61.9823(a) and (b), Education Code, are amended to read as follows:

(a)  On qualifying for loan repayment assistance under this subchapter, a nurse may receive repayment assistance for each year of part-time or full-time employment as a faculty member of a nursing degree program at an institution of higher education or private or independent institution of higher education, not to exceed five years.

(b)  The board by rule shall determine the maximum amount of loan repayment assistance received by a nurse under this subchapter [~~may not exceed $7,000~~] in any one year. The board shall base the amount of loan repayment assistance received by a nurse for part-time employment on the proportion of the number of hours worked by the nurse to the number of hours worked by a full-time nurse.

SECTION 6.  Sections 63.202(f) and (g), Education Code, are amended to read as follows:

(f)  Notwithstanding the limitation provided by Subsection (b), grants awarded under Subsection (c) for the state fiscal biennium ending on August 31, 2025 [~~2021~~], and the fiscal biennium ending on August 31, 2027 [~~2023~~], by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall be awarded to programs preparing students for initial licensure as registered nurses or programs preparing qualified faculty members with a master's or doctoral degree for the program, including programs at two-year institutions of higher education, four-year general academic teaching institutions, health science centers, and independent or private institutions of higher education, or to the nursing resource section established under Section 105.002(b), Health and Safety Code.  In awarding grants under this subsection, the coordinating board may:

(1)  give priority to institutions proposing to address the shortage of registered nurses by promoting innovation in education, recruitment, and retention of nursing students and qualified faculty;

(2)  award grants on a competitive basis;

(3)  consider the availability of matching funds; and

(4)  fund a study by the nursing resource section to evaluate the competencies of clinical judgment and behaviors that professional nursing students should possess at the time of graduation.

(g)  Subsection (f) and this subsection expire September 1, 2027 [~~2023~~].

SECTION 7.  The following provisions of the Education Code are repealed:

(1)  Sections 61.653 and 61.657; and

(2)  Section 61.656(c).

SECTION 8.  (a) As soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt rules necessary to administer the changes in law made by this Act.

(b)  The changes in law made by this Act apply beginning with loan repayment assistance awarded under Subchapter JJ, Chapter 61, Education Code, for the 2024-2025 academic year. Loan repayment assistance awarded under Subchapter JJ, Chapter 61, Education Code, for an academic year before the 2024-2025 academic year is governed by the law in effect immediately before the effective date of this Act, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

SECTION 9.  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.

\* \* \* \* \*