By:  Parker S.B. No. 2139

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the establishment of the Opportunity High School Diploma pilot program.

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

SECTION 1.  Chapter 130, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter O to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER O. OPPORTUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PILOT PROGRAM

Sec. 130.451.  DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1)  "Coordinating board" means the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

(2)  "General academic teaching institution" has the meaning assigned by Section 61.003.

(3)  "Pilot program" means the Opportunity High School Diploma pilot program established under this subchapter.

Sec. 130.452.  PURPOSE. The purpose of the pilot program is to provide an alternative means by which adult students enrolled in a workforce education program at a public junior college may 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. The coordinating board shall administer the pilot program in consultation with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission.

Sec. 130.454.  APPROVAL OF ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM. (a) A public junior college may submit to the coordinating board an application to participate in the pilot program. The application must 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. The proposed program may 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)  The coordinating board may approve not more than five public junior colleges to participate in the pilot program.

(c)  Subject to Subsection (b), the coordinating board shall review and approve a public junior college's application to participate in the pilot program if the board 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 program demonstrates levels of knowledge sufficient to adequately prepare the student for postsecondary education or additional workforce education. The coordinating board may coordinate with the Texas Education Agency as necessary to make a determination under this subsection.

(d)  A public junior college approved to participate in the pilot program may:

(1)  enter into an agreement with one or more public junior colleges, general academic teaching institutions, 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) A public junior college participating in the pilot program may award a high school diploma to a student enrolled in the alternative competency-based high school diploma program offered by the college under the pilot program if the student performs satisfactorily on assessment instruments prescribed by coordinating board rule.

(b)  A high school diploma awarded under the pilot program is equivalent to a high school diploma awarded under Section 28.025.

Sec. 130.456.  FUNDING. (a) The coordinating board and the Texas Workforce Commission shall 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 pilot program.

(b)  A public junior college participating in the pilot program is entitled to receive funding under Section 130.003 for the pilot program in the manner provided by coordinating board rule.

Sec. 130.457.  REPORT. Not later than December 1, 2026, the coordinating board shall submit to the legislature a report on the effectiveness of the pilot program. The report must include a recommendation regarding whether the pilot program should be continued, expanded, or terminated.

Sec. 130.458.  RULES. The coordinating board may adopt rules as necessary to implement this subchapter.

Sec. 130.459.  EXPIRATION. This subchapter expires September 1, 2027.

SECTION 2.  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.