

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 735
By: Menéndez
Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Now, more than ever, the legislature is aware of the importance of supporting our Jewish communities through understanding and education. In addition to conflict overseas, the nation has an alarming Holocaust denial and distortion rate. In Texas, reports have shown that an estimated 63 percent of respondents did not know that six million Jews died in the Holocaust. Holocaust Remembrance Week (HRW) was established in 2019 for students enrolled in Texas public schools to educate them about the history and lessons learned from the Holocaust and to combat such a decrease in knowledge regarding the Holocaust. In 2021, the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission was established and instructed to provide educational advice for public institutions regarding HRW. Last session, the legislature passed a bill to conduct a study in which an estimated 50 percent of public school districts responded to outline the extent of their understanding of the mandatory HRW policy, as well as the utilization and source of resources available for that purpose. The findings of the HRW survey revealed much-needed reform in a few areas to support better Holocaust education. Awareness of HRW from school personnel was split into thirds: Very Aware, Somewhat Aware, and Not Aware, with suburban areas being the most aware. Awareness of materials and resources to support teachers dropped to 4 in 10 respondents being unaware, especially across campuses in towns and rural areas. Most respondents indicated wanting more lesson plans, materials, and professional development opportunities. These findings inform the work ahead, as the legislature continues to refine and support Holocaust education in Texas. C.S.S.B. 735 codifies the recommendations from the 2024 HRW survey. Silos are eliminated by requiring regional education service centers and Holocaust museums to collaborate. Moreover, regular school district reporting of HRW participation is required. As proposed, C.S.S.B. 735 amends current law relating to Holocaust education and training provided to students enrolled at public schools.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Historical Commission in SECTION 3 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 735 amends the Education Code to require each regional education service center to, on a regular basis, collaborate with one or more of the Holocaust museums in Texas to expand educator training and classroom education opportunities regarding Holocaust education.

C.S.S.B. 735 requires each public school district and open-enrollment charter school, not later than June 1 of each school year, to submit to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) a report

regarding the Holocaust Remembrance Week instruction offered by the district or charter school for that school year, including the activities, lessons, and instructional materials used for the instruction. The bill requires TEA to do the following:

- as soon as practicable after June 1 of each school year, compile all reports submitted for those purposes for the school year and submit the compiled information to each regional education service center and the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC); and
- not later than 60 days before the first day of the week designated by the governor as Holocaust Remembrance Week, provide notice to each district and charter school of the week to be known as Holocaust Remembrance Week in public schools, including the instruction and reporting requirements under these provisions.

The bill updates the definition for the term "Holocaust" to reference Government Code provisions governing the THGAAC for purposes of statutory provisions relating to Holocaust Remembrance Week. These requirements relating to Holocaust Remembrance Week apply beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.

C.S.S.B. 735 requires the Texas Historical Commission, in coordination with the THGAAC and as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, to establish and administer a grant program to provide grants to districts and museums, centers, and other relevant organizations in Texas to assist in the implementation of Holocaust Remembrance Week instruction required under provisions governing that week from money appropriated, received from gifts, grants, or donations, or otherwise available for that purpose. The bill authorizes the commission to award such a grant for the following purposes:

- developing optional, age-appropriate lesson plans for classroom teachers who lack relevant subject matter expertise regarding the Holocaust;
- sponsoring student field trips to the Holocaust museums in Texas, with priority given to campuses in urban and rural districts;
- providing training approved by the THGAAC for educators and for administrators who manage professional development and teacher training in each district;
- cataloging and expanding relevant audiovisual and digital classroom resources, including resources maintained by Holocaust museums in Texas; and
- developing, in collaboration with museums, bilingual curricula to meet the needs of more students in Texas and making the curricula available on the THGAAC website.

The bill requires the commission, in coordination with the THGAAC, to adopt rules as necessary to establish and administer the grant program.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2025.

COMPARISON OF SENATE ENGROSSED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.S.B. 735 may differ from the engrossed in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the engrossed and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute omits provisions in the engrossed requiring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish a pilot program at certain public institutions of higher education to train students enrolled in an educator preparation program to provide more effective instruction related to the history and remembrance of the Holocaust. The engrossed did the following regarding the pilot program, which is not present in the substitute:

- authorized the THECB to adopt rules to administer the engrossed version's provisions relating to the pilot program;
- set out requirements for an institution of higher education to be selected to participate in the pilot program;

- required the THECB to collaborate with the THGAAC to establish minimum curriculum requirements, guidelines, and procedures necessary for the implementation of the pilot program;
- provided for the THECB to use any funds appropriated or otherwise made available for purposes of the pilot program and to accept gifts, grants, and donations to fund the pilot program;
- required the pilot program to operate for four full academic years;
- required an institution of higher education participating in the program to annually report to the THECB, and specified requirements for such a report;
- required the THECB to compile a biennial report based on the annual reports and deliver a copy of the report to legislative recipients not later than September 1 of each odd-numbered year;
- required the biennial report produced by the THECB before September 1, 2029, to include a recommendation regarding whether the pilot program should be continued, expanded, or terminated;
- required the THECB, before September 1, 2031, to conduct a final survey of students and faculty who participated in the program and required the THECB to publish those results; and
- established that the pilot program concludes and related provisions expire December 1, 2031.

The substitute omits a corresponding procedural provision present in the engrossed.