

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 4487
By: Rosenthal
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Concerns have been raised that the number of adult learners successfully completing degree or certificate programs in Texas is too low, which is of particular concern amid recent job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and reports that most jobs created in the last decade have been filled by college-educated workers. H.B. 4487 seeks to help adult learners build up their skills so they can reenter the workforce in high-wage jobs by providing for, among other things, tuition assistance grants for certain adult learners, incentive funding to public institutions of higher education based on the number of adult learners enrolled in the institution, and final semester internships for adult learners.

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 Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

H.B. 4487 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years, to provide to each adult learner enrolled in a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program at a public institution of higher education a grant for each semester or term in the amount equal to 25 percent of the average statewide amount of tuition and required fees that a full-time resident student in the applicable type of program would be charged for that semester or term at the type of institution at which the adult learner is enrolled. The bill limits the authorized use of the grant money to paying the recipient's cost of tuition or required fees and defines "adult learner" as a person who is at least 25 years of age but not older than 34 years of age and who has achieved at least 75 percent completion of a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program within the preceding 48 months.

H.B. 4487 requires the THECB, for the state fiscal biennium beginning September 1, 2023, to distribute incentive funding to each public institution of higher education based on the number of enrolled adult learners who, during the preceding state fiscal biennium, received a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate in a target field, as established by THECB rule, or timely completed one of the following programs:

- a baccalaureate or associate degree program in accordance with the adult learner's degree plan; or
- a certificate program, as established by THECB rule.

The bill prohibits the amount of incentive funding distributed per qualifying adult learner to an institution for a state fiscal biennium from being less than the amount of funding provided per student for that biennium for achievement of an equivalent student success measure, subject to the availability of funds.

H.B. 4487 requires the THECB, for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years, to collaborate with employers who participate in the Texas WORKS internship program to ensure the following:

- employers give priority in employment under that program to adult learners in the final semester of a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program at a public institution of higher education; and
- each adult learner employed through that program during the adult learner's final semester of a baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program at a public institution of higher education receives an additional \$2,500 stipend as part of the adult learner's wages under that program.

The bill requires the THECB to certify internships provided through the Texas WORKS internship program through which an adult learner may earn course credit toward the adult learner's baccalaureate or associate degree or certificate program, as applicable.

H.B. 4487 requires the THECB to establish the Grad TX program in collaboration with public institutions of higher education to support the reskilling, upskilling, and high-value degree or certificate program completion of adult learners. The bill authorizes the program to include academic and career advising, assistance with available student financial aid options, and flexible degree or certificate programs designed for adult learners.

H.B. 4487 caps the total amount spent under the bill's provisions at \$50 million and authorizes the THECB to accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source for the bill's purposes. The bill requires the THECB, if the total cost of providing grants, incentive funding, or stipends to all eligible adult learners or public institutions of higher education would exceed that cap, to reduce the amount of each grant, incentive funding award, and stipend as necessary to comply with the cap. Implementation of a provision of this bill by the THECB is mandatory only if a specific appropriation is made for that purpose.

H.B. 4487 requires the THECB, not later than December 1 of each year, to submit to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the house of representatives a report on the status and effectiveness of the measures established by the bill and requires the initial report to be submitted not later than December 1, 2022. The bill authorizes the THECB to adopt rules as necessary to implement the bill and requires the THECB to consult with public institutions of higher education, the Texas Workforce Commission, members of the business community, and other relevant stakeholders in adopting rules. The bill's provisions expire September 1, 2025.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2021.