

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1102
By: Creighton
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In response to the rising unemployment rate during the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been calls to reskill and upskill the workforce, put Texans back to work in high-demand occupations, and accelerate the Texas economic recovery. Support enabling public junior colleges and public technical institutes to provide workforce credentials, in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission and employers, may help ensure that workers are equipped with the skills and credentials needed to fill high-demand industry needs. S.B. 1102 seeks to address this issue by establishing the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) grant program to assist eligible institutions in expanding and maintaining activities that promote workforce learning in the targeted industries and occupations.

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

S.B. 1102 amends the Education Code to establish the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) program for the stated purpose of strengthening the Texas workforce and building a stronger Texas economy. The bill requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to administer the program in accordance with the bill's provisions and associated rules. The bill requires the THECB to award program grants to eligible entities, beginning with the 2021 fall semester and using funds appropriated or otherwise available for that purpose, for the purposes of creating, redesigning, or expanding workforce training programs and delivering education and workforce training that meet the following criteria:

- lead to postsecondary industry certifications or other workforce credentials required for high-demand occupations;
- are developed and provided in consultation with employers who are hiring in high-demand occupations; and
- create pathways to employment for students and learners.

The bill defines "eligible entity" as the following:

- a public junior college or public technical institute;
- a consortium of public junior colleges or public technical institutes; and
- a local chamber of commerce, trade association, or economic development corporation that partners with a public junior college, public technical institute, or consortium of public junior colleges or public technical institutes.

S.B. 1102 requires the THECB to do the following to the greatest extent possible in awarding the grants:

- award grants to at least one eligible entity in each Texas region; and
- ensure that each training program matches regional workforce needs, is supported by a certain labor market analysis, and does not duplicate existing program offerings within the region.

The bill authorizes the THECB to give preference to applicant entities that do any of the following:

- represent a consortium of public junior colleges and public technical institutes;
- prioritize training to displaced workers;
- offer affordable training programs to students; or
- partner with specified local entities to provide certain labor market analysis.

S.B. 1102 limits the uses of a program grant to the support and maintenance of educational and general activities that promote workforce learning, including the following:

- providing training in accelerated programs that teach high-demand skills and lead to certifications or credentials valued in growing occupations;
- developing new industry-aligned, high-demand certifications or credentials and courses of instruction leading to those certifications or credentials that can be completed in six months or less;
- redesigning existing certifications or credentials and courses of instruction leading to those certifications or credentials;
- expanding institutional capacity to provide high-demand certifications or credentials that are stackable in high-demand career pathways and address the needs of high-demand occupations identified by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) or applicable local workforce development boards;
- providing student aid awards to incentivize enrollment in and completion of qualifying industry certifications or other workforce credentials and courses of instruction leading to those certifications or credentials; and
- tracking and reporting enrollment and certain outcomes data.

The bill authorizes a grant recipient to hold unused program grant money for use in the subsequent fiscal year under certain conditions.

S.B. 1102 requires the THECB, in collaboration with eligible entities, the TWC, and private employers, to identify existing and develop new postsecondary industry certifications or other workforce credentials valued in high-demand occupations. The bill requires the THECB, in consultation with eligible entities, to identify the certifications or credentials developed or redesigned using program grant funds and to establish methods for collecting and reporting related data.

S.B. 1102 authorizes a grant recipient to recommend outcomes related to the achievement or development of the identified postsecondary industry certifications or other workforce credentials to be considered by the THECB for inclusion in the state's long-range master plan for higher education. The bill requires the THECB to incorporate consideration of the achievement or development of those certifications or credentials in devising funding formulas and making recommendations relating to institutional appropriations for applicable institutions.

S.B. 1102 authorizes the THECB to solicit, accept, and spend grants, gifts, and donations from any public or private source for the purposes of the program. The bill requires the THECB to adopt rules for the administration of the program, including rules imposing reporting requirements for grant recipients. Implementation of the grant program by the THECB is mandatory only if a specific appropriation is made for that purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE

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