

SUBJECT: In-state tuition for Mexican students at Texas State Technical College

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel
2 nays — Rabuck, E. Reyna
1 absent — Rodriguez

WITNESSES: For — Gilbert Leal
Against — None

BACKGROUND : Chapter 54 of the Education Code allows certain exemptions from higher nonresident tuition rates. Mexican students enrolled in four-year universities in counties adjacent to the Mexican border or in Texas A&M at Kingsville may pay resident tuition rates if they demonstrate financial need. These students may transfer to a general academic teaching institution to complete a degree or attend graduate school.

DIGEST: HB 1820 would exempt financially needy Mexican students in the Texas State Technical College System from out-of-of state tuition rates and allow them to pay the same tuition rates as Texas residents. The bill would allow Mexican students paying resident tuition rates also to transfer from or to the Texas State Technical College System, and would add completing a certificate or diploma to the list of allowable reasons for a transfer.

HB 1820 would take effect September 1, 1997, and would apply to tuition beginning with the 1997 fall semester.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1820 would address the need for educational partnerships between Texas and Mexico as a foundation for the economic partnerships that have greatly increased since approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Invigorated trade and industry in South Texas have intensified the demand for high-tech industrial professionals in the region, and granting the tuition exemption proposed by HB 1820 would increase the available pool of such individuals.

Every effort should be made to encourage the exchange of ideas and talent between the state and its southern neighbor. Texas State Technical College in Harlingen has been diligent in pursuing this goal, signing cooperative agreements for exchange activities with the two principal Mexican technical high school systems. The agreements will encourage the transition from high school to college for Mexican students talented in technical fields, benefitting the region as a whole. HB 1820 would be an important next step in allowing these students to enroll and remain enrolled in technical higher education.

Although granting tuition exemptions means a temporary loss of revenue for the state, the benefits of encouraging students to undertake higher education will repay the state many times over. In many cases, these students remain in the communities where they study, contributing their expertise and becoming valuable members of their communities. HB 1820 would help address the educational and professional needs of the Rio Grande Valley, and as such is a prudent investment in the future of Texas. Mexico is already our biggest trading partner, and anything that increases the prosperity of the Mexican economy benefits Texas, particularly our border communities.

State law already allows Mexican and other students to pay instate tuition at certain institutions of higher education. HB 1820 would merely extend that provision to another institution that does not fit the definition in current law. It would not provide free tuition nor cover any other living costs, but would only allow needy neighbors an opportunity to help make this part of the world a little better.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Mexican students may indeed deserve assistance with and access to higher education, but Texas taxpayers should not be asked to subsidize their tuition, especially when tuition aid is being curtailed to Texas residents. The bill contains no provision for prioritizing requests. It would be difficult to select among many worthy claims without treating some students unfairly.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

This session has seen a proliferation of proposals to exempt certain groups — from teachers aides to military reservists — either wholly or in part from tuition requirements. This piecemeal approach could endanger the stability of our tuition system. The Legislature needs to exercise both prudence and consistency in granting exemptions rather than rushing headlong into granting feel-good exemptions. Such caution is necessary to hold down the financial pressure on our already strapped institutions of higher education and maintain the quality of the education provided to students in Texas.