

SUBJECT: Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities at Lamar University

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Cuellar, Dunnam, Rabuck, E. Reyna

0 nays

2 absent — Bailey, Kamel

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — William G. Cale; Carolyn Crawford; Fernando C. Gomez, Texas State University System; Bonnie Northcutt, University Interscholastic League; Joe Wisnoski, Texas Education Agency

BACKGROUND : The 72nd Legislature created the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities at Lamar University-Beaumont. The two-year program serves gifted and talented secondary school students who have completed the tenth grade. The program is funded by the university.

DIGEST: CSHB 1940 would delete statutory provisions setting out specific requirements and procedures for admitting students to the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities and provide general guidelines on admissions.

The bill would specify the mission and goals of the academy and stipulate that it would operate on the same schedule as Lamar University-Beaumont. The academy could offer any extracurricular activity a public high school could offer, as well as short courses, workshops, seminars, weekend instructional programs, and summer programs.

The academy's director would serve at the pleasure of the university's executive vice president for academic affairs. The board of regents of the Texas State University System could enter into contracts and accept grants for the establishment of the academy. The academy would not be subject to

provisions governing public schools, except for those governing the limited liability of employees. The liability of the state with toward the academy would be the same as that toward public schools.

CSHB 1940 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a record two-thirds vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1940 would provide the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities with the flexibility it needs to provide enhanced education to a larger number of students. As higher education becomes increasingly essential to future success, Texas needs to encourage and support programs that bridge the gap between high school and college, and prepare students to be successful in pursuing higher education. The humanities academy is just such a program, and its demonstrated success over the last two years shows its potential to succeed on an even wider scale with accelerated academic experiences that enhance students' academic abilities and develop leadership potential and ethical decision-making abilities.

The academy's progress has been hampered, however, by statutory regulations that are too specific and strict to allow the academy to meet its changing needs and those of its students. While such oversight might have been warranted in the academy's infancy, it will need additional authority to manage its affairs as it matures as an institution. Providing the academy with this authority would prevent repeated trips to the Legislature to gain approval for minor program changes. Such trips are burdensome both for the academy and for legislators, who are then faced with legislating details of the academy's operation best left to the discretion of its administrators.

The provisions of CSHB 1940 would parallel those applied to the Academy of Mathematics and Sciences at the University of North Texas, a similar academy created in 1987 by the 70th Legislature. This mathematics academy has been exceedingly successful under its current provisions and authority, and the humanities academy would benefit from similar treatment.

By committing itself to excellence in the education of Texas students, the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities provides a great service to the entire state. CSHB 1940 would allow the academy to build upon its

already solid record of achievement and ensure that its educational opportunities were available for future gifted and talented students.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1940 does not address the most critical need faced by the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities. The bill would not provide the academy with the state financial assistance provided other public schools, and that is received by the academy's North Texas counterpart. Most students attending the academy would otherwise be attending Texas public schools, and the state should contribute to the academy the money it would have spent on their education. State contributions per student would allow more students to attend the academy, especially financially needy students who could not otherwise afford its tuition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute deleted a provision that would have provided the academy allotments from the Foundation School Program as if it were a school district.