

**SUBJECT:** Minimum academic standards for student athletes

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 5 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Rabuck  
0 nays  
3 absent — Dunnam, Kamel, E. Reyna

**SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 10 — 32-8 (Carona, Duncan, Fraser, Haywood, Nelson, Nixon, Ogden, Shapiro)

**WITNESSES:** None

**BACKGROUND :** The National Collegiate Athletic Association establishes minimum standards for the admission of student athletes at schools participating in NCAA college athletics. Students meeting those criteria may be awarded athletic scholarships or similar financial assistance.

**DIGEST:** CSSB 1419 would establish statewide standards for institutions of higher education to use in awarding to student athletes scholarships, grants, or other financial assistance funded by state revenues. The high school grade point average of an entering freshman student athlete would have to be equal to or greater than the average GPA of all entering freshman students for the preceding academic year. For other student athletes, the student's cumulative college GPA would have to be equal to or greater than the average cumulative GPA of all undergraduate students enrolled at the institution in the preceding academic year. These standards would apply for each year that a student received the scholarship or financial assistance.

CSSB 1419 would define a student athlete as one who competed or participated in a sport, game, or other competition involving substantial physical activity or skill for, or on a team organized or sponsored by, the institution of higher education the student attended.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1997. It would apply only to scholarships or other financial assistance promised or awarded to a person after that date.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSSB 1419 would reinforce the essential principle that student athletes are students first and athletes second. Awarding athletic scholarships should not entail lowering academic standards. Furthermore, luring unqualified students to universities with large financial incentives is harmful to the students themselves, many of whom wind up dropping out of college without ever receiving a degree. This bill would ensure that only students with appropriate academic qualifications are awarded athletic scholarships.

The standards that would be established by CSSB 1419 would not preclude the state from recruiting talented student athletes. Such private universities as Duke, Rice, and Northwestern maintain the highest standards of both scholarship and athletics. Texas universities would do well to emulate these great institutions rather than settle for less than the best our student athletes can achieve.

The framework for uniform, statewide standards for higher education has already been established this session by HB 588, which has been signed into law by the governor. CSSB 1419 would extend the logic of this bill to awarding athletic scholarships, further ensuring that all students in Texas were fairly and equally allowed access to funding for higher education.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

In the past, the Legislature has wisely left decisions on awarding athletic scholarships up to the individual schools. Universities should retain the authority to make such decisions and implement policies that will best suit their individual needs and best help them meet their goals and educate their student bodies.

The bill would unfairly penalize schools that are already doing right by their student athletes, providing students with an excellent education as they pursue their athletic careers. The University of Texas at Austin, for example, employs several full time counselors to assist athletes with course work, and a variety of mentoring and tutoring programs ensure that students have all the academic assistance they need. The results of these efforts are

positive; of students who complete their athletic eligibility with UT athletics, 80 percent eventually receive degrees from the university.

CSSB 1419 could hinder the ability of Texas schools to recruit the most outstanding athletes. If schools from other states are able to offer scholarships to students with GPAs below standards in Texas, the state could lose its best athletes to other states. Such losses could be extremely harmful to state universities, ultimately diminishing the success of athletic programs and jeopardizing the fame and fundraising potential that success brings. Successful athletic programs help pull in money to a school, thereby enhancing the facilities and the programs for all students, not just the athletes.

**NOTES:**

The committee substitute eliminated the provisions of SB 1419 as it passed the Senate. The Senate-passed version of the bill dealt with admissions policies; many of its provisions are included in HB 588 by Rangel et al., which was signed by the governor on May 20. The committee substitute for SB 1419 is identical to HB 2010 by Wilson, et al., which passed the House on April 30 and was left pending in the Senate Education Committee.